

## PECAN PLANTATION FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Club Mark Corporation (CMC) was commissioned at the request of the Long Range Planning Committee and approved by the Board of Directors to perform a series of five focus group sessions with the residents of Pecan Plantation. On behalf of Pecan Plantation, CMC conducted these sessions On October 17<sup>TH</sup> & 18<sup>TH</sup> of 2006.

**Methodology** - While it was CMC's recommendation that the Club call for volunteers, then assist CMC in ensuring that the mix of attendees was representative of the community in terms of gender, age, utilization of facilities and supporters versus concerned members, the LRP and Board insisted that the selection process must rest solely on the decision of CMC. As a result, CMC, through the Club, sent invitation letters to the entire membership with instructions to contact CMC directly to participate in one of the five listed sessions. In all, one hundred fifty volunteers responded. CMC then sent the volunteer lists, by session and requested that the Club provide an approximation of the age of the volunteer and their general utilization of the facilities. CMC then selected the invitees and notified the Club of who had been selected. Both the Club and CMC then attempted to reach each individual to notify them of the selection. Those not selected were sent a letter indicating that they had not been selected. Throughout the process, while CMC kept management completely informed of the selections but had no input from any source within the Club relative to whom CMC should or should not choose.

As should be expected, there were varying levels of participation and discussion within each respective group. Each group was presented the same information at the beginning of each focus group including a background and introduction of Club Mark and the moderator, a general narrative of how each session was anticipated to be conducted, and the areas that would be discussed.

The following questions were asked at each session.

1. How Would You Describe Pecan Plantation Today? As a Family Community or a Retirement Community? Which Would You Prefer it to Be and Why?
2. If There Was One Thing About the Club or Association That You Could Change What Would That Be? With Regard to Community Services?
3. If There Was One Thing About the Club or Association That You Could Change What Would That Be? With Regard to Food & Beverage?
4. If There Was One Thing About the Club or Association That You Could Change What Would That Be? With Regard to Physical Facilities?

5. If There Was One Thing About the Club or Association That You Could Change What Would That Be? With Regard to Activities and Events?
6. If There Was One Thing About the Club or Association That You Could Change What Would That Be? With Regard to Governance?
7. Assuming That Any or All of These Changes Were Made, How Would it Affect Your Usage of the Club and Facilities?
8. How Do You Feel About the Current Level of Communications Concerning Major Issues? What About Communications in General?
9. What Are Some of the Things That First Attracted You to Pecan Plantation? What in Your Opinion Has Changed Since You Purchased Your Property, For Better or Worse?
10. Would the Same Characteristics That Attracted You Still Be the Primary Reason That Someone Might Consider a Purchase Today?
11. Is There Currently Any Barrier to You Referring Someone to Purchase in Pecan Plantation?
12. As a Part of a Long Range Strategy, and as the Community Grows, Leadership Must Consider Ways to Provide the Community the Best Possible Facilities and Services, Including the Ongoing Renovations of Existing Facilities. Are There Any Things That the Board and Management Should Consider in This Process?

Based upon the overall responses of the five focus groups several things became apparent to the moderator. While the sampling of members is not broad enough to suggest tacit agreement of the entire membership regarding the issues presented, their response allowed a glimpse of what could be underlying attitudes and currents of concern.

First, there are clearly factions that do not trust nor believe in the current Board or Management. While this manifested in some of the commentary within the focus groups, it was clearly evident in the near paranoia that surrounded the selection of the attendees and the responses of some that were not selected in the process as well as post session questions to the facilitator that even suggested impropriety on behalf of the facilitator. Often, this viewpoint is a manifestation of a perceived lack of transparency and/or communications, and nearly always on the basis that the normal member does not have the same information at their disposal as does the typical Board or Committee member.

***How Members View Their Community*** –While there was diversity as to the evolution of the community, nearly every attendee believes that Pecan Plantation is and should be a family community but catering to the diverse cultural needs of what they considered to be a broad range of ages and interests.

The general consensus was that younger families have a greater demand on their time and therefore found little time to use the facilities to socialize. Many pointed to the community center as being an opportunity to provide a focal point for all age groups, but specifically the younger family and the teenagers within the community.

***What Members of the Community Want*** – This was a three part questions that dealt with the attendees ability to change anything relative to service(s), facilities and events.

*Community Services* – In general, the members appeared fairly satisfied with community services with particular pride in the EMS and Fire departments. The recent addition of retail shops also received general approval. Security appeared to be an issue with many of the participants, particularly related to teenagers, and security in the evening hours.

*Food and Beverage* – Overall food and beverage took some serious criticism based upon quality of food, level of service and hours of operation. Lack of consistency was cited as an issue in nearly all of the sessions, both in the quality of food and in the service staff. Hours of operations i.e. closing early on Sunday afternoons and not having daytime service except in the downstairs area also received criticism.

Some members of various internal clubs indicated that they would no longer come to the club for their meetings citing lack of consistency.

*Physical Facilities* – There was an underlying concern in most of the groups that the community was not maintaining the facilities that they had. This included the beach areas, marina, food and beverage areas and parks/common areas. This concern also manifested in not wanting to continue adding things when the things they have are not maintained.

Lighting at the beach and park areas were discussed as a means of preventing vandalism and loitering.

The two most common issues of implied need were another golf course and a fitness facility. An indoor pool also was mentioned in several of the sessions.

*Activities and Events* – This question evoked a mixed response, but most agreed that the level of events was good and that the Committee did a good job. However, there was concern that the Entertainment Committee, as with many other Committees, meet during the daytime precluding younger, working members from participating. Likewise, there were several comments relative to most of the events not being geared toward younger families or couples.

The popular, holiday oriented events, appeared to many of the attendees to fill too quickly making reservations impossible.

*Governance* – This question, like food and beverage, set off a myriad of emotional responses. Spending, building too large an administrative staff, not having a voice, and timing of meetings all evoked an emotional release. Serious discussions ensued in most sessions relative to becoming a city or municipality, with varying degrees of agreement. In general, there seemed to be a very distinct “us” versus “they” mentality with the Board and management taking a verbal beating.

*General Overview* – In general, it is evident that there are some real concerns among the various member groups based both on age and on participation in various specific activities available within the community. Non-golfers tend to believe that “golfers” are running the community and for their own purposes, the older members think a lot of what happens is geared toward young people and the younger members see it in reverse.

Price/cost is a real issue for all members attending by more important to those on fixed incomes. The older members generally demonstrate the most distrust of decisions and reasons to spend money, often citing “layers and layers” of managers and a reduction in availability of services.

Pecan Plantation is clearly a very diverse cultural setting with a significant number of retirees and pre-retirees as well as a growing contingent of younger families. This brings with it a need for the community to focus on providing a well balanced menu of services and activities to meet the needs of the residents.

Perhaps the most major issue revealed in the focus groups was the perception of heavy handed governance and the lack of communications. As previously mentioned, there is an almost paranoid concern on behalf of the Board and LRP that everything be transparent, yet at least some factions of members continue to insist that there is some kind of conspiracy in everything that occurs on a Board or Committee level. Obviously, while the focus groups did not reveal where this kind of rhetoric comes from, in the perceived absence of “facts”, members will often fall victim of the “rumor mill” creating

*Transparency and Communications* – Real or perceived some members often feel that they are given “little or no information” on the major issues, hence “little or no choice” in what happens.

While the very nature of the focus groups should have created some sense of confidence in the attendees that the Board and management was interested in member feedback and being forthright in its attempts to communicate, the facilitator noted that the Board and management were almost never referred to except as “they” by the attendees, with the obvious connotations and implications.

While it would appear to CMC that the current Board and LRP has taken great strides in ensuring more open and transparent communications, there is still a fairly widespread perception that the Club is run by a few “golf” enthusiasts and that decisions are made in the “back” room.

Again, whether perceived or real, several of the attendees see the communications process as flawed both from the Club and from the Club's leadership relative to major issues. In the perceived absence of appropriate information, members often become mistrustful of the governance process, the nomination process and the validity of information coming from the Board and Committees. Many members perceive the Board as a "closed" fraternity of golfing members that makes decisions based upon their own respective needs and not those of the entire community.

*Educating the Membership* – There are clearly a myriad of issues that affect Pecan Plantation, as well as clubs/communities all across the country today that have a profoundly different affect on planning and ongoing viability. Unless a member reads the industry magazines or attends the workshops and seminars of the professional staff, or serves on a Board where this information is disseminated by staff, they have no frame of reference except what "used to be" or pure perception and emotion. The reality is that the usage of club facilities has changed through the cultural differentiation of the community, an aging population, increased pressures on leisure time, varieties of ways to spend disposable income and diverse interests.

*Conclusions* – While some of the comments made by the attendees may be difficult to understand or to place in context, what they have provided is an understanding of the incredibly diverse level of wants and needs.