THE ASSOCIATION BEAT

Houston's Association Blotter

A LAWN COUNSEL PUBLICATION — ISSUE ZERO

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Welcome to the pilot. The Association Beat reads the public record on Houston-area homeowners associations so you don't have to — and keeps a database underneath it, so the record can be sorted, compared, and checked. Everything here is public record, published reporting, or documents homeowners were entitled to and chose to share. That is the whole supply chain, and it will stay that way.

One standing rule: we name associations, not neighbors. Filings are reported as filings. Estimates are labeled estimates.

SPOTLIGHT ONE — SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS

The $35,000 Letter

In October 2025, the lakefront homeowners of **Hilshire Lakes**, a single-family subdivision in Spring Branch, received a special assessment of **$35,000 each**, with roughly two months to pay before delinquency notices and liens. The Houston Chronicle reported the story in July; the contractor doing the work counts **36 waterfront homes** around the neighborhood's 10-acre lake. (36 × $35,000 ≈ $1.26 million — that's our arithmetic, not a reported total.)

The money replaces the lake's bulkhead — the retaining wall that keeps the lake from eating the yards. The association's position: the original vinyl sheet piling wasn't installed deeply enough. The residents' position: the wall has failed repeatedly over some 15 years, through earlier repairs they already paid for. As the replacement proceeded, crews cut through back decks for access; one homeowner put her deck rebuild at about $30,000 on top of the assessment. "Retirees, people with families, young people" — that's how one resident, Cheryl Randolph, described who got the letter.

The association has been in litigation since 2023 — a suit by owners challenging earlier repair choices and how they were financed — and the board declined to comment on that basis. Note the order of events: the court fight came first. The $35,000 letter landed in the middle of it.

The three questions this story teaches every owner to ask their own board: Is there a current reserve study? What does our declaration actually authorize the board to assess, and by what vote? And what is the payment-plan policy *before* the letter arrives — not after?

SPOTLIGHT TWO — FINES

The Fines Nobody Knew Were Running

This one is not a fine increase. It's quieter than that.

Residents of **Inwood Forest Village** (Houston, 77088) say they believed their homeowners association was defunct — its president had been criminally charged with stealing association funds in 2019, as Fox 26 Houston reported. The association was revived under Crest Management around 2024, and residents began learning they owed balances of roughly **$10,000** — back dues, fees, and fines combined. "We don't receive that mail letting them know that fines are being accumulated on top of fines," resident Manuel Mazariego told Fox 26. One neighbor, Jonathan Spence, said he paid $5,000 in 2023 "just to keep his home." Foreclosure threats followed; many of the homeowners are seniors.

Crest's response is on the record: notice follows the Property Code (two first-class letters, then certified mail), and only two foreclosures have occurred across Crest's 105,000-home Houston portfolio. The residents' campaign continued anyway — by May 2026 they were circulating a petition to remove the entire board, and State Rep. Charlene Ward Johnson had announced she would file HOA-transparency legislation in the next session, including attorney-fee limits and proof-of-notice requirements.

Why we lead with it: everything in this story turns on notice — what was sent, what was received, what can be proved. Which is precisely what The Fine Print, below, is about.

SPOTLIGHT THREE — DUES

The Most Expensive Dues We Could Find

People ask us what the most expensive HOA in Houston costs. Here is the honest version of that answer.

The highest annual association dues we found publicly documented in the Houston area: **Carlton Woods Creekside, in The Woodlands — $5,100 a year**, a figure repeated across multiple current home listings (October–November 2026). The original Carlton Woods village runs $4,250. Royal Oaks, guard-gated in west Houston, runs about $3,300. Two honest caveats: listing fee fields can bundle more than one association's charges, so treat these as documented listings, not association-published rates; and the private club at Carlton Woods is separate and optional — its initiation and dues are *not* in the $5,100, and we don't fold them in.

Inside our own verified database, the top of the table is **Towne Lake (Cypress) at $2,184** in master-association dues for 2026 — a premium-tier community built around a 300-acre recreational lake, and a master-layer figure; homes there with sub-association layers pay more.

And now the standing challenge: if your association charges more than $5,100 a year, all-in, our database wants the document. Send it — documents@lawncounsel.com — and we will print the correction with pleasure. A sort is only as good as its data, and we'd rather be corrected than wrong.

FEATURE · THE FINE PRINT

The Fine Schedule You're Entitled to See

Since January 1, 2024, Texas law (House Bill 614, Property Code §209.0061) says an association that levies fines must first adopt a written **enforcement policy**: the categories of violations it fines, **a schedule of fines for each category**, and how hearings work. It must give that policy to owners — posted on the association's website or delivered annually.

- **No published schedule, no enforceable fine.** If your association can't produce its adopted fine policy, that's the first question to ask about any fine — politely, in writing.



- **Certified mail or it didn't happen.** Before a fine, the association must send written notice by certified mail describing the violation and the amount (§209.006).
- **Curable violations get a cure period.** Fix it in time, and no fine may be assessed.
- **You can ask for a hearing.** Request one within 30 days; the board must hold it within 30 days of your request (§209.007).
- **Fines alone can't take your house.** Texas bans foreclosing on a lien that consists only of fines (§209.009). Assessment liens are a different story — see The Blotter.

General information, not legal advice. For a live dispute, that's what attorneys — and law-school clinics — are for.

FEATURE · TURNOVER WATCH

One Community Is Already at the Line

Sunterra, the fast-growing community in Katy, was about **74% occupied** in its developer's own filings to its municipal utility districts in March 2026 — roughly five years after first sales, on a buildout plan that has already tripled in size. That number matters because of §209.00591: once **75% of the lots that may be created** have been conveyed to homeowners, at least a third of the board must be owner-elected within 120 days. Whether Sunterra's clock has actually struck depends on its recorded declaration and a deed-level count — we're pulling both, and we'll publish the count as a count when we have it. Until then: *trigger probable, verification in progress.*

This feature will track every large Houston community the same way — who still runs it, how fast it's selling, and when the law says the homeowners get their seats.

FEATURE · THE BLOTTER

December 1 Is Sale Day

Harris County trustee sales run on the first Tuesday of the month, and the December 1, 2026 docket at the Bayou City Event Center includes at least six association foreclosure sales posted in the last two weeks — every one to recover unpaid assessments: **Townhomes on the Park HOA** (8325 Sands Point Dr., 77036) · **2016 Main Owners Association** (2016 Main St., downtown) · **Bridgestone Lakes CIA** (Spring, 77388) · **Arabella Condominium OA** (4521 San Felipe, 77027) · **Terranova West POA** (Spring, 77379) · **Regency Square Improvement Association** (6959 Harwin Dr., 77036).

A 25-year title fight goes back to court. The Fourteenth Court of Appeals has returned a Houston ownership dispute to the trial court (No. 14-25-00470-CV): foreclosed in 2001, reverse-mortgaged in 2011, then foreclosed again — by its association, for unpaid fees — and sold. Lesson buried in the docket: an association foreclosure doesn't just end a debt; it can cloud a title for decades.

Pilot-pull count, not a census. The standing county pull starts with Issue One, and the counts get honest from there.

FEATURE · BOARD WATCH

Meeting Season Is Here

Annual-meeting season is here. November and December are when most Houston associations elect directors and approve next year's budget — which means 2027 dues are being decided right now, in rooms most owners never walk into. **And your association's public address plate changed this year:** under SB 711 (effective September 1, 2025),



management certificates carry expanded disclosures in a free public state database (hoa.texas.gov), and a new manager means an amended certificate within 30 days. We check them so you don't have to.

FEATURE · THE GLOW-UP

Nominations Open

New feature. Every issue, one Houston yard that got it right: what got flagged, what the owner did, what it cost. Not the prettiest yard — the best *comeback*. **This space is reserved for the first nominee.** Send a photo and the short story. Winners get bragging rights and absolutely no plaque, because the association would need a meeting to approve the plaque.

FEATURE · DUES & DON'TS — THE MAILBAG

Can They Fine Me for a Brown Patch in November?

Short answer: it depends on three documents and one drought.

- **The fine schedule.** Since 2024, fines must follow the association's adopted, published enforcement policy (§209.0061). Brown turf has to be a category, with an amount.
- **The notice.** A fine requires certified-mail notice and a chance to cure first (§209.006). A note on the door is not that.
- **The watering rules.** Under HB 517 (2025), an association may not fine you for brown turf **during a mandated watering restriction — or for 60 days after it ends** (§202.008). Dormant Bermuda in a dry November, in a neighborhood under water restrictions, is close to unfineable.

And the lawn truth underneath the legal one: in Houston, most November brown is dormancy or large patch, not neglect — and the fix is a diagnosis, not a check. (That sentence is the publisher's day job showing. We regret nothing.)

THE DATABASE · HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY STACK UP?

The Data Score, and a Standing Invitation

Underneath this newsletter sits a database of Houston-area associations — dues, district taxes, amenities, control status, turnover clocks — so any homeowner can ask: *where do I stack up against communities like mine?*

Every community in it carries a **Data Score from 0 to 10**: not a grade of the association — a measure of how much verified information we hold on it. Most communities start low. The publisher's own, **The Highlands in Porter, currently scores 2.** Nobody's data is good yet. That's the opportunity.

Texas law entitles every owner to their association's books and records (§209.005) — budgets, minutes, financials. If you'd like your community's picture to come into focus, send us what you're entitled to: the latest annual meeting minutes and the current budget move a score the most. Email them to **documents@lawncounsel.com** (or hello@lawncounsel.com) — documents only, never anyone's portal login. We extract the facts, we publish summaries and figures, and we name associations, not neighbors.

THE ASSOCIATION BEAT is a pilot publication from the folks at The Lawn Counsel — Houston homeowners, reading the record. Sources: Houston Chronicle and Fox 26 Houston reporting as attributed; county real property records; court dockets; trustee-sale postings;



the TREC management-certificate database; MUD filings; current listing data as noted — all public, all checkable. Nothing here is legal advice.

Issue One arrives when the first standing county pull is done. Founding readers: forward this to one neighbor. That's the whole growth strategy.

