



# Candlelight Oaks

## **FAQ re Proposed Assessment Increase for Candlelight Oaks, March 13, 2025**

What follows is a summary of the discussion regarding the assessment increase proposed by the Candlelight Oaks HOA Board. The meeting on Thursday, March 13 was attended by 15 residents and 7 board members and was the first of three meetings to gather resident input prior to a vote.

### **General Resident Feedback and Input:**

- The need to increase the assessment after 25 years is reasonable, but an increase from \$360 currently to \$545 in Year 1 (a 50% increase) followed by an increase to \$650 in Year 2 (an additional 20% increase) is higher than some residents are comfortable with. There is particular concern for those on fixed incomes.
- Residents are uncomfortable giving the Board the ability to increase rates by 2% annually following the Year 1 and Year 2 increases noted above without resident vote and approval.
- While it's understood that the pool fee cannot be increased enough to make the pool self-sustaining, it was recommended that fees might be increased to better cover costs associated with maintaining the pool and playground.

### **The following are questions and answers from the discussion:**

#### **Could you provide the number of residents in Candlelight Oaks who pay their annual assessment?**

The Board works to ensure that the 280 residents in Candlelight Oaks pay HOA assessments. In 2024, 95 percent of Candlelight Oaks residents paid their assessment. A total of 12 residents did not pay their assessment in 2024. Candlelight Oaks collection rate is (~95%), considerably higher than the Texas benchmark (~75%) for HOA fee payments.

As of 2/28/2025, 233 residents (83 percent) have paid their 2025 assessment; 45 residents have outstanding balances. The Board has mailed 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> invoices to these residents. The Board continues to work to collect assessments from residents who are in arrears with follow-up letters and legal intervention if necessary.

The board works with title companies to ensure that transfer fees and assessments are paid when home ownership changes.

#### **Is the reason for the assessment primarily to increase the reserves?**

There is a need to increase reserves in the event of an unexpected repair, but there are multiple projects that have been deferred and should be addressed to maintain and improve the quality of

the neighborhood. These are within the categories of security, landscaping, pool, and playground upkeep.

**When was the last time there was an unexpected MAJOR repair and what was it?**

- 2020 - pool was resurfaced for the first time in 15-18 years; the cost was approximately \$30,000.
- 2021 - A new secure maintenance and supply shed (required by city pool ordinances). The new shed replaced a structure that was about 20 years old and had been repaired multiple times. The cost was approximately \$15,000.

**Which specific community assets do the Board believe need to be addressed?**

Below is a list of expenditures that we expect will be needed in the next 3 to 4 years and anticipated new annual expenses. While there is a figure projected for inflation, unexpected expenses cannot be predicted.

It is worth noting that several of our current significant expenses (landscaping, security, insurance) have not increased in the last two years. It is unlikely that these expenses will remain flat and so a general inflation increase of 4 annually is included in the list below.

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| • *Additional landscaping (annual cost)  | \$7,000  |
| ○ 5 Cul de sacs – tree trimming and basic landscaping  |          |
| • Professional pool management to supplement volunteers (annual cost)                              | \$15,000 |
| ○ Anticipated within 2 to 3 years  |          |
| • *Signage on Tidwell (one time)   | \$15,000 |
| • *Security upgrades at playground (one time)  | \$10,000 |
| ○ Enhanced lighting at pool and playground, power gate in parking area, barbed wire fence, cameras |          |
| • *Replacement of Security fencing surrounding the Pool (one time)<br>(HPD Recommendation) -       | \$10,000 |
| • *Remove/replace pool pavilion and upgrade electrical (one time)                                  | \$6,000  |
| • *Replacement of two failing playground pavilions (one time)                                      | \$6,000  |
| • Replace kiddie mulch (every 2-3 years)   | \$5,000  |
| • General inflation costs for budget (estimate 4% annually)  | \$4,400  |

\*Items that have been deferred due to limited funds.

### **How much is Candlelight Oaks investing in security?**

Candlelight Oaks is required by deed restrictions to invest \$50,000 annually in security. This includes the Homeland Protective Services contract which was \$41,000 in 2024 for 150 hours monthly/1,800 hours annually. Homeland has been receptive to floating hours (so they are not here the same times every day) and shifting hours during times of potential concern (New Years Eve, July 4th, Halloween, etc.) Some capital improvement projects that impact neighborhood security may also be included in the \$50,000 per deed restrictions.

In the opinion of Board members, Homeland Protective has provided good service to our small neighborhood. SEAL was the prior security provider and there were significant issues with their performance. Because Candlelight Oaks is comprised of only 280 homes, we have little leverage to get a contract with a larger company at a reasonable rate. We would likely sacrifice the number of hours of coverage annually and the flexibility of hours. When the Homeland contract was negotiated, the Board attempted to identify another nearby neighborhood with whom we could partner to negotiate a contract, but other neighborhood associations were not interested in making a change, unable to commit, or did not have paid security coverage. The cost of hiring Harris County constables is far beyond our financial capacity.

The most significant security issue in Candlelight Oaks in 2024 was juvenile trespassers at the pool. While some neighbors suggested that they might be gang members, HPD did not confirm that. Steps recommended by HPD officers to harden the pool and playground include enhanced fencing, repairs to barbed wire fencing in areas, additional lighting, cameras, and restroom locks.

Other security issues in Candlelight Oaks are primarily trespassers wandering through the neighborhood and rifling through automobiles. The best deterrent for these situations is patrols by Homeland, vigilance by neighbors, and calls to HPD and Homeland - when we “see something, say something.” This is particularly true when neighbors hear gunshots in the area.

### **Is the pool the largest expense in Candlelight Oaks?**

Security is the largest expense for Candlelight Oaks. The pool and playground together are the second largest expense. The cost of the pool annually is approximately \$25,000 (not including insurance which has broader coverage including protection of a self-managing volunteer board.)

Currently, the pool upkeep is primarily handled by a volunteer with minimal paid support. This is not a sustainable long-term solution for a project that requires a considerable investment of time. Within the next two to three years, we expect we will need to hire a pool maintenance company and supplement their work with resident support.

### **How many pool memberships are there annually and how much income does the pool generate?**

There are approximately 70 memberships annually. Pool memberships and pavilion rental generate approximately \$10,000 annually.

**Would it be possible to change the due date for assessment payments to better accommodate residents?**

The Board already offers flexibility for payment schedules if needed. Upon request, residents are able to establish payment plans at no additional charge. Late payments are charged \$2 monthly.

**What are the professional fees and administrative expenses that the board incurs?**

The Candlelight Oaks Board is self-managing, which is a significant cost savings. However, it is important for the peace of mind of residents and to support the fiduciary responsibility of the board to utilize professionals in key instances.

The board has an attorney on retainer; they assist with issues regarding ongoing deed restrictions and extended nonpayment of assessments.

A bookkeeping firm handles reconciling accounts monthly, tracks payments and non-paid accounts, assists with invoices, and sends statements to title companies. It is important to have a professional assisting with bookkeeping to ensure that recordkeeping is accurate and efficient.

**What are the Next Steps?**

An increase in the assessment will require approval of over 50% of each of the four sections of the Candlelight Oaks subdivision.

Additional meetings will be held on Thursday, April 10, 7:30 pm by Zoom and Thursday, May 8, 7:30 pm in person at Advent Lutheran. Residents are encouraged to attend at least one of these meetings and to review materials posted online so they can make an informed decision.

Please address questions to [board@candlelightoaks.com](mailto:board@candlelightoaks.com)