

737 Comstock Avenue Inc. (a.k.a. House Corp.)

Meeting Minutes

February 4, 2017

Syracuse, NY

Alumni Brothers in Attendance

Hank Suominen (Board President and Treasurer), Phil Oldham (Board Vice President, by phone), Bill Gerbig (Board Secretary), Bill Beach (Board Member, by phone), Chris Dowd (Board Member, by phone), Brad Short (Board Member)

Undergraduate Brothers in Attendance

Dante Sesti (Consul), Hunter Acone (Pro Consul), Cobie Beach (Quaestor), Donato Fraioli

Others in Attendance

Jim Whitbread, Lisa Leonard (Premier Cleaning Service)

Hank opened the meeting at 9 a.m.

Hank motioned to approve the minutes from September 17th. Brad seconded, all were in favor.

Property Management

For the spring semester, we originally had a commitment of 29 brothers living in the house. One had to withdraw from SU and another had to live in a dorm due to health reasons. We don't expect to collect those funds, so we have a head count of 27 for the Spring Semester. Our budget target is 30. Max occupancy is 32. We fell six short of capacity for the year. With almost 80 undergrads as active members, we need to focus on getting 30 in the house every semester. It's important to the long term fiscal health of the fraternity. In another month, we'll have a better idea what the fall semester looks like, but Dante expressed that they expect 8 to live in the house from the new pledge class. Board club cost is now based on number of members rather than a fixed cost, so there is now less financial impact when house occupancy is below budget.

Last summer we installed new electric service and sub panels including the kitchen sub panel, as well as new sprinkler risers. This summer, we'll be rewiring the 2nd and 3rd floors, with new lights and plugs throughout, as well as extending sprinkler coverage to all bedrooms. We'll have to be strict about the move out date. Suspended ceilings will have to be removed to get the work done. Therefore, the house needs to be clear of all items other than official house supplied furniture. All other items will have to be moved to somewhere other than the 2nd or 3rd floors. Couches, refrigerators, TV's, etc., all have to be

cleared out of the house. All suspended ceilings will also be replaced. We currently incur damage in the bedrooms through use of rooms for ceiling props during ritual events. We will install secure hooks, connected to the ceiling structure, which should be an improvement. When we're done, the knob and tube wiring will be gone, with all new subpanels, and issues with inadequate electrical power and safety will all be resolved.

To finance these improvements, M&T Bank advanced a term loan on the full faith and credit of the House Corp, with no personal guarantees required. Underwriting fees were about \$600. We spent about \$65,000 on summer '16 work, \$15,000 out of pocket and \$50,000 on a 5-year term loan at about 2 points over prime. M&T will re-evaluate that loan when we're ready for summer '17, and will probably advance us another \$50,000 with the same terms. It will also help our insurance, with about a 5% discount, and the work will last for the next 50 years.

House Manager update

We replaced master keys that were missing last semester. There are no leakage issues with laundry facilities. Rooms are much drier with the dehumidifiers, although we still have some water coming down the back stairs under heavy rain conditions.

Dante addressed the ritual closet. Last semester, Nish catalogued and organized everything - props and tarps are hanging. An Excel document was prepared and sent to Mark Howard for replacement needs. Mark promised to place the order. The room has stayed dry with the dehumidifiers. Hank asked Dante to let us know if the ritual closet needs further dehumidification.

Scholarship

Bill Beach has promised to get this revitalized. Hank will provide his most recent correspondence to Bill. As soon as we have a scholarship program that people can apply for, we'll get it posted on the website. The application will be completed online. We need to sort out how much is available and where it's coming from. Hunter has received 10 or so requests to apply for the scholarship program. Hank asked that he accumulate them and send an e-mail to Bill Beach and Hank, and they will make sure the applicants are kept notified. Bill Beach promised to "attack this ferociously" over the next few weeks.

Alumni Report

Hank noted that Phil Oldham has done a great job with the Saltine Sig and thanked him for his efforts. The latest version was one of the best in a long time. The chapter contributions were excellent, lots of good news, informative insight into rush, philanthropy, etc. The "Are we Sigma Chis By Accident" article was a highlight.

We overlooked getting the clambake date set for the last issue, so a postcard and e-mail blast will be necessary to broadcast the date. April 22nd works well for the Chapter. SU plays Binghamton in lacrosse that day. A brochure will be mailed by Elevate. There is a simple form that allows online payment through the website. Cost is \$30 online and \$50 at the door. The date has been posted on the website and on the Facebook site. Dante asked if John Trop would be willing to provide alumni support. Hank

noted that John is no longer on the board, and suggested that a House Corp representative volunteer to help the undergrad representative, Nate Segal. Bill Gerbig suggested that we use Alumni Chapter funds to make it free for alums to encourage attendance. Hank explained that the bill we get from Gill Grilling is about \$30 per person, so if there are 100 people, the bill from Gill Grilling will be \$1500. Undergrads on board club already paid for. The live outs that don't pay have been an issue, but the common area access fee helps. We get a bill for the total attendance less the live in guys on board. Brad Short noted that it would be nice if there was no cost for anyone to attend.

Hank reminded everyone that the Alumni Association has agreed to reimburse the Chapter for ritual gear, BLTW attendance shortfall (between stipend from HQ, about \$100, and the actual costs, about \$300), and scholarships. He wasn't sure if we've ever received a request for funding. No one was aware of the current Alumni Chapter funds balance, but Brad and Bill agreed to hold an E-board meeting of the Alumni Chapter to work on a budget.

Elections coming up at the fall meeting at Homecoming are Keegan Slattery, Doug Sedgwick, Bill Beach, and Hunter Viscarello. Those board members need to decide by then if they would like to continue their participation.

Phil Oldham suggested we try to do a better job of engaging alumni by breaking them down by decade and having an alumni team leader appointed for each decade. Where there have been volunteers, this has worked well, but there haven't been many. We have a database with names by year that's pretty good.

Chapter Report

Dante expressed that WiFi reliability and strength is the #1 complaint he gets. There are about 300 devices connected to the network. Hank explained that the Property Managers Service Request is the mechanism for communicating issues like this. He has done some graphic updating to the site, and it should be easy to use. Hank gave out the password (pcscny), and reminded everyone that a copy goes to Hank, Jim, and the sender. The only way to resolve issues with Time Warner is to hound them continuously. Jim reiterated that any issues should be communicated through the service request form. Hank recalled that a major upgrade was done 3-4 years ago, and someone from the chapter was supposed to conduct routine speed tests to make sure we're getting the service we're paying for. Hank has had 30 requests over the past 2 years through the service request form. Dante promised that they will be more proactive. Hank commented officer hand off of their duties and responsibilities to the next holder of their office are sometimes not communicated well, and Hank he has had to retrain the new officers regularly. This may be a contributing factor to the internet issue. Dante agreed that this has been an issue, and committed on behalf of the chapter to improve. The internet issue and website are a good place to start to try to improve.

Hank asked for an update on the letter that was received from the House Mother from Kappa Kappa Gamma last spring. There was a commitment at last summer's meeting that someone would meet with KKG and make sure all is well. Dante expressed that Sigma Chi's social relationship with KKG is their best on campus, and their relationship with the House Mother is good. Bad decisions leading to those issues

were made by some who have graduated. Hank asked if he will get a similar report when he reaches out to the House Mother. Dante said that he should get good feedback. Hank asked for additional feedback, if any, by Monday, so there are no surprises when he contacts the House Mother.

The Chapter is doing a good job working through their debt to House Corp. The undergrads are paying \$1700 per month for back charges. They were just billed for Spring Semester common area access fees, about \$12,300. \$14,000 total was billed in the last 30 days – Hank asked Dante to make sure he's in touch with Carolyn Austin. There are some back charges that are expected to be paid immediately when they're billed, such as the recent fire extinguisher charge. It's up to the chapter to settle those charges with the individuals responsible. Dante confirmed that they have this under control.

Cobie Beach asked if there would be another rebate at the end of the semester, as there was last year. Hank explained that the rebate was preliminary and damages were incurred after the rebate was issued last year. This will be discussed at the Spring meeting, and our plan is to wait until all damages have been fully assessed before issuing the rebate this year. Dante expressed that he and Eric Barnes spent a week and a half taking garbage out, but it the task was too much for two people. Hank confirmed that Dante and Eric did a great job, and their efforts saved Jim and his crew significant time and expense. Dante expressed that there are always a couple lingerers that stay longer than the rest, and asked if there can be a way to accommodate them and get them to participate in the cleanup. Hank agreed to accommodate those needs, but the effort needs to be coordinated.

Hank outlined the plan for closing the house at the end of the semester. It will be closed on May 13th for all but seniors, the graduation banquet will be held on the 14th, and the house officially closes for everyone on the 18th, with summer turnaround projects starting on the 19th. This information is also posted on the website.

The Chapter's current debt to House Corp. is \$19,904. \$14,000 is the current billing for common area access fee and some winter back charges, there are a couple of bills for property damage, and there's another \$5400 outstanding being paid off at \$1700 per month.

Website Registration

We have a page on the website that every member of the chapter is expected to complete. Although this may seem burdensome, having the common area access and maintenance agreement is something that is recommended by the National Board of Grand Trustees of Sigma Chi, so that every member of the active chapter signs a document that commits them to following the house rules and regulations. It's considered best practice on a national fraternity level. Out of 80 active undergrads, 6 have not signed up. This is where we begin the building of the database. The web master should be handling this. When we need to send out chapter wide notifications about any issue, we don't have a complete database, nor do we have one we can share with Elevate for our newsletter program. We need to get people to complete this information. Dante agreed to figure out who the six are and address this with them, as well as improving the process of getting new members signed up. Dante explained that the current web master has had to withdraw from school, and they will pick a new web master on Monday morning.

Dante reported that he and Hunter have been working with Mark Howard to remove Manrique Lopez and Hinduve Ethridge-Bully from the active roster. Manrique signed his Form 51 yesterday, which Dante will submit to Mark Howard to take to the Grand Praetor. An executive e-mail was sent to Hinduve to inform him of the Chapter's intentions, as he does not wish to maintain his financial commitment or affiliation with Psi Psi.

Hank demonstrated the member profile on the website. The web master should only have to enter an e-mail address and temporary password, and the chapter member can fill out the rest of the profile information, including mailing address and cell phone. If they don't want their contact information to be made public, they can select it to be private. The most important information are ID number and date of birth to help sort the database by age and year of graduation. The "team assignment" is your decade of graduation, "position" is your year of graduation and alumni or undergrad, and then just update contact information when it changes. When you submit your dues as an alumnus, the contact information on this form is accumulated by Elevate, and from time to time, Elevate shares their data with us and we share ours with them, and that makes sure the two are synchronized. Everything that Phil is trying to do with his outreach efforts can be accomplished through this tool. Hank offered to help the new web master get up to speed, and Dante agreed to facilitate that.

Dante agreed to get all chapter officer reports squared away this week for the next Saltine Sig.

SU Master Plan

Hank sent the board an e-mail about this potential issue. The plan is about 100 pages, very ambitious given the capital requirements, and the plans include two new dormitories on Ostrom Ave. with our parking lot as a pathway, which is a liability issue. If SU develops these dorms, there could be thousands of pedestrian trips through our parking lot. Dante said that he thinks the University's plan doesn't include our house being there. This is a fundamental property rights issue. Hank has done the title work and cannot find any evidence of any written easement between owners of 737 that would give third party property rights for pedestrian passage across our property. There are eight properties that could be affected by this, which is similar to what there was on the other side of Comstock until the mid-90's, so it's possible that the University has similar plans for our side of Comstock, even though the master plan doesn't show that. It's important that chapter leadership recognizes that the university may be waiting for us to make a mistake. Our respected position on campus could make us that much more attractive to the university in terms of dealing with Greek issues. Hank has reached out to all property owners potentially affected, asking to form a group to address this issue with the university. The group he contacted included Alpha Epsilon Phi, Sigma Alpha Mu, Beta Tau, Zeta Psi, Theta Chi, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and Alpha Gamma Delta. Dante had agreed to make contact with others at those houses, but hasn't had any success yet. He raised this issue at the Presidents meeting of the IFC. Both Hank and Dante agreed to keep trying. Our house has the highest assessed value on the block. Hank is exploring title insurance to get affirmative coverage over this issue, about \$2500 for defense against the university's claim of Right of Adverse Possession. We may fence the property line and install a gate, giving us the option to close the gate and force pedestrians to walk around.

Capital Plan

Hank called everyone's attention to the plan he has provided. He updates it annually in June, and uses it to guide our capital requirements over the long term. The plan forecasts substantial investment over the next 10 years, with about \$800,000 required to have the house maintained in good working order. He welcomes everyone's input. We're doing a good job keeping the house in good shape, and need to continue to do that.

Board Plan

Dante expressed interest in Good Uncle to manage board club starting in the fall semester. Hank explained how board club has operated historically. Previous to Gill Grilling, the House Corp. would hire a chef and staff. Now Gill gives us a proposal for a fixed fee per semester. They take full responsibility for food ordering, prep, staffing, clean up, etc. Jim and Lisa handle overflow cleanup. We have our ups and downs with quality of food and service offering. Hank was asked to consider a proposal from Good Uncle, and met with the principals of Good Uncle. They have a menu of products that they produce in a central kitchen in Syracuse. They will bring a hot box to the house for each meal, ordered online using the Good Uncle app, on disposable goods with utensils, made out to the individual who ordered the meal. A name will be on each package. They will deliver a meal at noon, dinner time, and brunch on the weekends. That would completely replace having an operating kitchen and kitchen staff. There would be no presence of a third party board club operator. They haven't worked out all the details. They didn't offer self-serve items or self-serve beverages, and didn't include hot breakfast sandwiches in addition to lunch and dinner. Donato explained that they have agreed to modify their proposal by April 1st to present at the Spring House Corp. meeting. Hank expressed that this is a Chapter decision, and the Chapter could handle the billing as well. This will move further away from a family style dinner. Donato spoke to the Good Uncle owner yesterday, and he has agreed to address loose items, soda fountains, and two family style meals per week. He's willing to match anything Gill Grilling does for us, but feels there are some benefits to not having self-serve items sitting out, i.e., boxes of cereal. We can also avoid some of the other issues of operating a kitchen – damage, liability, safety, cleanup, etc. Hank expressed that we need an offering that is equivalent to what we have now so the cost can be evaluated fairly with the current offering from Gill Grilling. Donato asked for House Corp's blessing to continue discussions with Good Uncle. Hank pledged his support if the chapter wants to take responsibility for board club, and asked that they consider all of the pros and cons. We would be the first fraternity or sorority house to use Good Uncle.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meeting Minutes
February 4, 2017

William Gerbig

Secretary