

Civility and Common Sense on the Shepherd Park Email Group

By Alexandra Kincannon, Shepherd Park Email Group Moderator

From time to time, questions come up about the “rules” of the Shepherd Park email group. This email group was started in 1997 by Beth Allaben as an outgrowth of an informal group of Shepherd Park parents with young children. The group expanded to include all interested Shepherd Park neighbors in 1999 and in 2000 the group was formalized on egroups.com (now Yahoo! Groups) with 70 members. 28,000 messages later, we have over 1300 members.

Over the years, the following guidelines have been adopted based on discussions and consensus among the group members:

- Post only information should of a direct interest to the Shepherd Park neighborhood
- No commercial postings
- No campaigning
- Identify yourself in your posts (e.g., a first name and your street)
- Think before you send

Below are some further tips on using the email group:

- Is your message useful, pertinent or interesting specifically to residents of Shepherd Park? Is it something that should be addressed to the 1300+ members of the email group or is it really intended for one or two recipients?
- Is the purpose of the message relevant to the community in a non-commercial and non-political way? Our agreed-upon exception to this guideline is if the message concerns a special event at a local business or other places in our immediate area (no general advertising or blanket campaign messages).
- Is the tone and demeanor of your message appropriate for a broad audience? Would you say the same things to your neighbor face-to-face? To your grandmother? Over the microphone at the SPCA Potluck?
- What is the purpose of your message? Is it to communicate information or relate an experience that is relevant to our community or is it solely argumentative? Expressing an opinion (good or bad) about businesses or government services can be informative and appropriate, but *ad hominem* attacks on neighbors or public officials, particularly repeated ones, are not.
- Have you included a descriptive subject line, included all important information in the body of your email, and identified yourself? Have you deleted extraneous material (e.g., the digest list of messages that have nothing to do with the message you are sending)? Many email group members do not receive attachments and will not click on forwarded web links without knowing who is sending them and why.

Finally, a note on moderation. This email group is a lightly moderated one. New members' messages are automatically moderated, but most members' messages are not. It would be very time-consuming to moderate all messages, plus restricting message posting in that way would inhibit the openness of this group. However, members who are chronic flouters of the usage guidelines will have their messages moderated or, in extreme cases, they will be removed from the group. If you have questions or concerns about these guidelines, please contact Alex Kincannon at alexk@alumni.virginia.edu.