

Maintenance Association of Whispering Lakes Ranch

Some Q&A on Gates and Guards

Aug 30, 2015

Dear WLR neighbors,

As almost everyone must know by now, a big vote is coming at Whispering Lakes Ranch (WLR) on restricted access – “gates and guards.”

We have heard strongly felt opinions from one extreme to the other, and everywhere in between. Obviously, not all can “have it their way.” WLR homeowners should, and will, have the opportunity to vote amongst well-considered options. The Gate Committee and Board have spent long hours together in the past few weeks debating how to whittle down many possible permutations of restricted access, trying to agree on a couple of viable choices.

Can we just stay with the gates as they are?

We can, and it is an option. The gate system is over 10 years old and some money -- ballpark cost around \$30,000 -- would have to be spent just to keep the gates operating as they are.

The current entrance design and gates have done little to deter unauthorized entry.

In addition, League City Police Department (LCPD) officials have given feedback that they may not respond to trespasser complaints such as reports of solicitors or loiterers unless access to the community is controlled on a 24/7 basis.

Why don't we just close the WLR gates 24/7 and not have a guard?

Our current gate contractor assures us the motors and mechanisms will fail quickly under continuous use.

WLR ENTRY GATE TRAFFIC COUNTS 19-28 AUG 2015

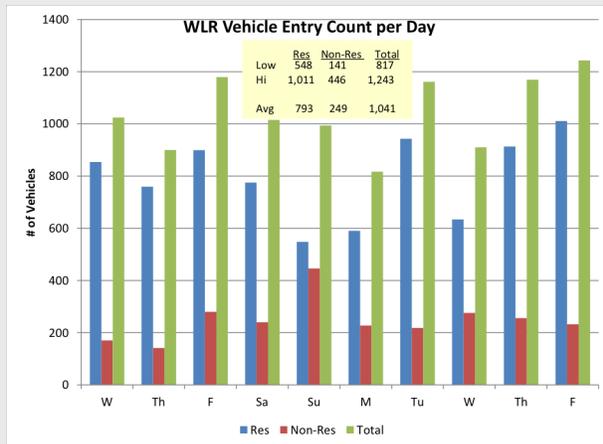


Chart 1

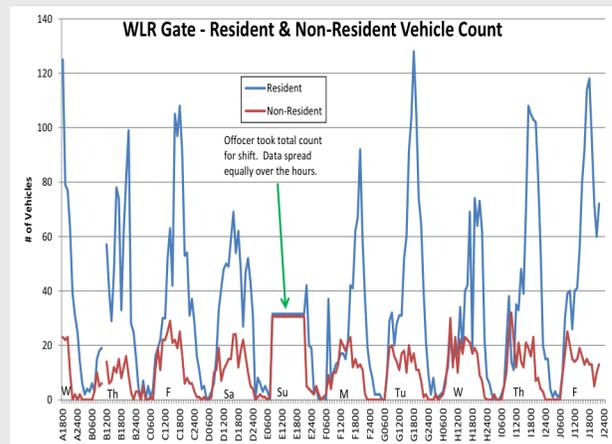


Chart 2

The chain driven gates were never designed to open and close approximately a thousand times a day. The developer put them in to primarily to lessen losses of construction materials when crews weren't present at night, and they looked nice to the residents. The gates were closed 24/7 for a while, but the actuators would fail and the gates would remain open 100% of the time until the hardware was repaired or replaced. Thus, the gates currently remain open from 6 AM and 8 PM and are closed at night.

Gate chain drives are slow. Residents have noted when they open the gates to enter WLR at night, many other vehicles usually follow them in. These could be other residents, but also non-residents.

So let's just replace the gates with new ones.

Yup, the gate system WILL need to be replaced fairly soon.

If we are to spend money on restricted access, it should be done well enough to be reasonably effective. No system can eliminate all crimes and all nuisances, yet there is no denying that reduced opportunity results in reduced crime. By way of example, an anti-tailgating gate system would have likely prevented entry of the criminals who committed armed robbery in WLR last month.

That kind of infrastructure cost will be well above our operating budget and would require at least one of the three:

- A special assessment
- Higher HOA dues in successive years to amortize the cost
- Allocating reserve funds

If the vote of the homeowners is to restrict access with an infrastructure-only option, the Board does not intend to fund that through special assessment.

Why has the WLR Board waited so long to address this?

We haven't. It has been an on-going topic since the inception of an elected WLR Board in 2011 (four years).

In early 2013, the Board presented plans for an infrastructure improvement to allow 24/7 gate closure and potential future use of an entrance guard. With a final tally of 106 in favor and 56 opposed, the vote failed because a majority of ALL lots (156 households out of 310) is needed to pass a special assessment.

The Board discussed at the January 2015 HOA meeting that many residents were expressing concern with our open gates and easy tail-gating at night. The Board asked for WLR resident volunteers to form an ad hoc committee to investigate and recommend to the Board options for improving restricted access.

The Committee worked very hard at it. And next it is your turn. Whatever your opinion on the matter, please vote!

Who is on this Gate Committee?

The Gate Committee is currently staffed with residents recently retired: a manufacturing business owner, a commercial business / marketing manager / strategist from the chemical/energy sector and an information management officer from the public sector. The Committee also draws on advisors: residents with expertise in risk management, gate actuators, etc.

In addition to operating independently of the Board, the Committee did not know any of the personnel from the infrastructure companies or security companies prior to entering the investigation period and search / selection period.

What progress has the Gate Committee made?

The Committee presented their roadmap and progress at the April and July HOA meetings with the goal of bringing several long-term solutions to the WLR Board in August, to be followed by a vote of homeowners in September. Earlier this month, they gave the HOA Board their initial recommendations, as outlined in the August 16th article on our website news page.

After hearing those recommendations, the Board authorized the Committee to interview the three Committee-selected security companies to enter a temporary short-term contract. An order was placed for windshield decals to assist these guards to distinguish between resident and non-resident vehicles. The Gate Committee selected and negotiated a short-term contract with Top Gun Security (TGS) due to their proposal being the lowest cost and providing more features and services to the WLR community than the other two companies. The contract has a 15-day cancellation notification for any reason / at any time. The Board ultimately approved the contract. No consideration was given to the fact that the president of TGS lives in WLR.

So what is the current Gate Guard all about?

Presently, these short-term guards serve a dual purpose:

- They are counting resident (decaled) and non-resident vehicles to
 - o Help dimension the equipment requirements to ensure robustness and reliability of operation
 - o Assess how many different service companies are coming into WLR (e.g. 5 lawn service companies, or 50, etc.?)
- Give homeowners an opportunity to get a feel for 24/7 restricted access, while gaining immediate and significant improvement in our restricted access posture pending a long-term decision by the community.

Where is the money for the gate guard coming from?

We are under-spending in a couple areas of our budget this year, such as enjoying a lower cost electric contract and in the short term are re-allocating those funds to giving WLR homeowners. This is part of the normal operating budget with which the Board of Directors maintains the neighborhood infrastructure on behalf of all homeowners.

Why was there no vote for the gate guard?

The short-term guard is funded within the scope of the 2015 Budget and aforementioned under-spends. As readily available funding is utilized, this short-term service will come to an end in the next few weeks.

The longer-term plan / options require and warrant a community-wide vote due to:

- The cost of proposed options being in excess of the maximum allowable annual increase in HOA dues (20 % per annum).
- The need and desire for community buy-in to majority-preferred solution
- The poor turn-out and failure of a previous ballot (2013) regarding the entrance / gates to pass approximately 2 ½ years ago.

I got by the gate guard without a decal. What's up with that?

The current set up at the entry gate is most obviously temporary and less than ideal. One guard is watching two lanes. Still, the guards do provide a much higher level of control than we otherwise can do at present. And equally importantly, they are taking vehicle counts to help us better understand our needs.

Should WLR vote to have guards, there will be a separate resident-only lane controlled by RFID (EZ Tag) technology. Without an authorized RFID tag, vehicles will not be able to “slip by” and will have to take the visitor lane, at which a guard would be stationed. The infrastructure-only choice, although designed a bit differently, would also have resident and visitor lanes.

The windshield decals and guard caught me by surprise. Why was there such short notice?

The Board didn't want to announce to our neighbors “this is what we are going to do” and then NOT be able to do it.

As soon as a near-final guard contract was drafted and decals were in hand, we put in hard and fast leg-work to reach most homeowners within 3 days. Almost 85 % of homeowners already had decals (now up to 92 % with only 25 households out of 310 are without), and therefore were aware that short-term guards would be showing up before they did.

That said, we on the Board did get out of sync with each other and unfortunately our initial message to the community didn't get out much before decals distribution started. We apologize for that and are working harder to coordinate our efforts.

Still, there was no reason to delay implementation, as this is the BEGINNING of a drive toward a neighborhood vote on how we as a community want to control access, and regardless of the vote outcome, we need traffic data to help guide the infrastructure decisions.

Unlike the gate vote a couple years ago, it seems we do have most peoples' attention this time. An engaged community is good! But again, opinions in the neighborhood are widely varied. There will not be unanimity. Ultimately, of the many possible paths forward, we must choose one.

I didn't get decals. What do I do?

The relatively few who have been out of town, don't follow community news, or whom we just didn't manage to catch will have no trouble showing their ID to the friendly gate guard and then getting their decals. If you need decals, just email contact@wlrhome.com.

Is it true we can only have three decals?

No. Three was the initial default number we hand out, but more recently, you are asked how many vehicles do you have insured at your home address, and generally they have been provided with limited discussion.

What about the camera system that was installed last year?

The camera system is working well and has provided both residents and police with footage when called upon. The camera system itself has required a hardware reset ("reboot") only twice this year. As a fairly new and capable asset, it will continue to be a part of whatever long-term solution our community settles upon for better restricted access to our community.

One episodic problem we have had is computer control of the video display at the entrance gate; the computer needs more frequent software and hardware resets than it should. You will occasionally see the display go blank or have computer error messages -- until one of us manually resets it. This display is NOT an integral part of the camera and recording system. Video continues to be independently recorded from all cameras even if the video feed is not displayed out front.

Finally:

Please vote!