

Genesee Foundation Board Review of  
Architectural Review Committee (“ARC”) Focus Group Summary & Strategic Insights Report  
Prepared by Consultant Katie D’Andrea  
September 2021

Generally, residents understand the need for architectural review of improvements and value the function of the ARC and the people who carry out the work. However, there is frustration with the process. The Report highlights resident opinion that the Foundation should encourage improvement of property and maintain a system that encourages people to follow the process as outlined. Review of the report by the Foundation Board with counsel led to the conclusion that some concerns cannot be addressed unless and until the community decides to amend the governing documents of the Foundation (i.e., the Declaration of Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions as Supplemented and Amended), but there are some changes that can, and should be, considered and implemented under the current Governing Documents.

Proposed modifications to the process that can be made without modification of the Governing Documents include:

- Update the ARC Standards to address changes architectural and design trends.
- Continue to utilize the Genescene to provide education and information and other community information resources to publish project checklists, provide answers to frequently asked questions, and to share real life examples.
- Review the list of pre-approved projects and materials that do not require ARC approval as per section 1.12 of the Standards.
- Simplify the application process, including providing a roadmap for original submission and amendments to the application.
- Implement a process for the ARC to receive resident feedback following completion of the project.
- Create a team to mediate disputes between homeowners and ARC to seek a negotiated solution to disagreements.
- Schedule joint meetings between the ARC and the Board on a quarterly or semi-annual basis to discuss expectations, issues and solutions

Proposed Modifications that can be considered as part of the process to review and update the Governing Documents include:

- Structure and size of ARC will be reviewed.
- Review of licensed professional requirement.
- Review a requirement that the Chair of the ARC be the member elected by the residents.
- Review and explore changes in staffing, delegation, and job-sharing on the ARC.



## ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (ARC)

### Focus Group Summary & Strategic Insights Report

#### Executive Summary

October 1, 2021

In April 2021, the Genesee ARC sought outside consultancy support to inform how the committee could create a more positive relationship with the Genesee community. At that time, the ARC was being heavily criticized by multiple Genesee residents who had negative experiences with the ARC submission process and its members. Those residents shared those interactions widely, including NextDoor, ARC community meetings and through neighbor-to-neighbor conversations. Although there have been many positive interactions between the ARC and Genesee residents over the years, they have been eclipsed by more negative ones. The ARC believes this conflict is grounded in a misunderstanding of the ARC role and scope as well as communication shortfalls on behalf of both parties. The ARC is ultimately committed to increasing trust and alignment with community members, hence the genesis of this project and summary report.

The ARC hired an outside consultant to conduct four community listening sessions, or focus groups, with Genessee residents representing a broad range of experiences (both large and small projects as well as overall positive and negative experiences) based on historical records and personal experience to achieve three main goals:

- Solicit/identify authentic input from community members on ARC experiences
- Identify suggestions for changes to standards and the submission process
- Increase trust and alignment between community members and the ARC

Of the 70 out of the 885 households invited to participate, 24 individuals from those households contributed their feedback. The questions were designed to be direct yet elicit authentic open-ended feedback from residents, a main

objective of the project. The consultant also spoke with four of the five ARC members to complete the picture of “the current state” by learning what was working well, areas of resistance and ideas for improvement. The findings and recommendations were synthesized in the attached summary and strategic insights report, including key insights, challenges, issues and strategic recommendations for aligned action.

This report is designed to help the ARC understand how it's perceived in the community and move forward in a more positive and collaborative manner through community-driven solutions. This report elicits four core strategic recommendations, including:

- Update standards every three to five years with a focus on increasing property values in the modern era through a co-created community effort
- Digitize and streamline submittal process to provide additional context for design decisions and require further clarification of goals and intended outcomes of the project at the beginning of each process
- The importance of increasing education of residents to better understand the ARC's role, the standards and submission process and for the ARC to learn how it can better serve the community through surveys at the end of each engagement
- Enhance transparency and communication on behalf of the ARC in acknowledging the turbulent past, be more inclusive to working Genesee residents to participate in community meetings and shifting to an attitude of trust and collaboration moving forward

The report provides explicit examples of how to achieve each of these recommendations grounded in focus group output.

Where we live matters. The people have chosen Genesee for its preservation of the natural landscape, open space, amenities, location and love of their neighbors. There is a deep appreciation of the purpose, structure and mission of the ARC and while there has been turbulence in the past, all residents interviewed believe it has the potential to be a community asset. This project is an investment intended to heal those frustrations and conflicts and ultimately, create a community that people take pride in and love. In the spirit of transparency and communication, the final report will be shared online. For questions and opportunities to be part of the solution, please contact the ARC Chair.



**ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (ARC)  
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY &  
STRATEGIC INSIGHTS REPORT**

September 2021

By Consultant Katie D'Andrea

# Contents

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- ❖ Project goals & outcomes
- ❖ Focus group selection & process
- ❖ Key themes & observations
- ❖ Common ground
- ❖ What's going well
- ❖ Challenges
- ❖ Issues
- ❖ Strategic recommendations



# Project Goals & Outcomes

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- Goals:
  - Solicit/identify authentic input from community members
  - Identify suggestions for changes to standards
  - Increase trust and alignment between community members and the ARC
- Outcomes:
  - Change perception of the ARC among community members
  - Inspire residents to be more proactive and prepared in ARC submission process
  - Update and digitize standards as well as submission process
  - Increase trust and collaboration between community members and the ARC
  - Produce a report with key insights, learnings and strategic recommendations

# Focus Group Selection Process

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- ARC Chair and Board Liaison to the ARC identified community members representing a broad range of experiences based on historical records and personal experience:
  - Large, complex projects
  - Small projects
  - Overall positive experience
  - Overall negative experience
- The consultant invited over 70 community members to participate in one of four focus groups
- An article was published in *The Genescene* about this project with an open invitation to participate in a focus group

# Key Themes & Observations

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- There is alignment within the community that the ARC serves to:
  - Help protect and enhance property values
  - Be a trusted advisor in that process
- There is an education gap between the ARC's legal charter and some community members' perception of it
- Community members are frustrated with the inconsistency over time:
  - Of architectural standards
  - Among the different ARCs
  - From what one person gets approved to another
  - From one conversation/meeting to another
  - Between one ARC member's opinion to that of another
  - Of how standards are applied based on location

# Key Themes & Observations (Continued)

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- Genesee residents and the current ARC have a strong desire to have more transparency, objectivity and trust in the understanding and application of ARC standards
- Overall experience with the ARC varied dramatically from one resident to another - from very positive to very negative
- Focus Group participants (24 individuals) were self selected from a larger group of invited residents (70 households) and may not accurately represent the broader Genesee community's perspective (885 houses)

# Strategic Recommendations for the Future

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- Update Standards
- Digitize and streamline submittal process
- Increase education
- Enhance transparency and communication

What was heard



# Where We Have Common Ground

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## Residents...

- Come to Genesee for the **natural landscape, open space, amenities and location**
- Appreciate the **purpose, structure and mission of the ARC** and believe it has the **potential to be a community asset**
- Desire to **update aesthetic of community from the 1970s to modern day**
- Are committed to **increasing property values**
- Believe the **current ARC is more helpful and open** than prior committees
- Want **more transparency, communication and collaboration** throughout the process
- Are frustrated at the **inconsistency over time** (see key themes slide)
- Love the **community and their neighbors**

# What's going well

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- The ARC is open and willing to improve its relationship with unsatisfied members of the community
- Overall, the ARC members have had a very positive experience supporting residents with their projects of varying scope and size
- When engaged from the beginning, the ARC has been very successful in:
  - Establishing personal contact and a working relationship with residents
  - Conducting a site visit and initial scoping conversation
  - Serving as a sounding board for ideas, co-creating plans and reviewing issues
- The ARC provides architectural, landscaping and property improvement process guidance resources to the community

# Challenges

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- Lack of community understanding and knowledge:
  - Of the role, responsibility and scope of the ARC
  - Of where to look for lists of plants, rocks, paint, etc
  - That forms are currently online
  - The difference between covenants and standards
  - That the standards have been updated numerous times
- Perception of poor customer service:
  - Egocentric, combative, controlling, power-hungry, overreaching, nit-picky, micromanaging and stuck in the past
  - Inconsistent & subjective - conflate personal opinions with following the established standards
  - Tone is aggressive, insulting and threatening
  - Look for reasons to say no, not reasons to say yes
  - Make recommendations without budgetary considerations
- Some frustration regarding paid ARC staff:
  - Anger and frustration about paying professionals
  - Perception that paid ARC members have to prove value by seeking reasons to reject plans - “power trip”
  - Some stated its a poor allocation of resources

# Issues

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- Inconsistent enforcement of standards
  - “Standards are a moving target”
  - Subjective and inconsistent application of standards
- Bureaucracy is a deterrent:
  - General attitude: “Better to ask for forgiveness than permission”
  - Hope changes go unnoticed until statute of limitations runs out after a year
  - Time consuming, frustrating, expensive
  - No repercussions to not submitting to the ARC
  - Application process is tedious - no ability to amend past applications
- Community looks and feels outdated:
  - Too tedious, frustrating and time consuming to go through ARC process to renovate exterior
  - Location of house impacts ARC expectations and application of standards
  - The ARC cannot enforce residents to update their property

# Strategic Recommendations



# Update Standards

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- Revisit standards every three to five years with a focus on increasing property values in the modern era
- Develop a community steering committee and/or host community focus groups to review and revise the standards in partnership with the ARC, including:
  - Firewise plantings and landscape design
  - Water/irrigation guidelines and water reduction solutions
  - Health safety welfare for structural health to prevent architectural/structural damage from landscape design elements
- Make standards more explicit and clearly defined in 2007 Revised Standards document
  - Revise design to enhance readability
  - List out elements instead of paragraph form
  - Ensure various checklists are up to date
- Offer cost effective solutions for modern structural and aesthetic updates

# Digitize and Streamline Submittal Process

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- Digitize standards with links to resources and a rationale for why
  - Create interactive online form/checklist and online submittal process
  - Create a pre-approved list of projects residents which do not need ARC approval
  - Create list of approved plants, rocks, bark, colors, door styles, etc. which residents do not need ARC approval
  - Update and digitize color palettes using QR codes
- Connect an updated application/submittal process to the guidelines section with a preliminary checklist
- Send monthly/quarterly communications via email and *The Genescene* with links to updated submission process including screenshots of process, tips and examples of best practice
- Mandate pre-meeting before submittal process to co-create goals and advise design options
  - Collaborate to identify cost-effective, appealing solutions
- Require more information from resident in initial submission to help clarify goals, outcomes and nuances to their project
- Allow for residents to make changes to their submission rather than create a new form

# Increase Education

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- Develop an online platform/forum to:
  - Explain the differences between:
    - Covenants and Standards
    - The Board and the ARC
  - Stand up a moderated online community forum where community members can ask constructive questions and have an ARC member respond within 72 hours
  - Repost and categorize digitized Genescene articles
- Host quarterly/semi-yearly open community sessions on the Standards and frequently asked questions, share what is being done around the community and what is required by the ARC per Genesee's Standards
  - Encourage new residents and residents planning exterior changes to attend
- Provide a resident feedback form/aftercare survey at the completion of each project for continued learning and growth
- Visually capture the ARC process and available resources to help residents see how the ARC can support them in their process via short videos (saved on YouTube/Vimeo) and one pager
- Community members need to take responsibility for educating themselves on the Standards and role of the ARC

# Enhance Transparency & Communication

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- Share findings and outcomes from this project
- Publicly acknowledge turbulent past and state commitment for the future via *The Genescene*
- Publish monthly article in *The Genescene* with “case studies”, tips for an easy submission process, projects approved vs. submitted and why, what the ARC is doing in the community and a link to the digital Standards
- Offer online Q&A forum
- Host open houses and community walks to visually demonstrate desired outcomes
- Shift times of community meetings to outside of work hours
- Embrace a solution-forward approach - Instead of rejecting an idea/plan, ask, “How can we work together to achieve your goals?”
- Conduct yearly community surveys to learn more about what’s going well and areas for improvement

# Appendix

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# Questions

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- What does the Genesee ARC (Architectural Review Committee) do in this community? Explain.
- What are your general feelings about the ARC? What words or phrases come to mind when you think of the ARC?
- If you have interacted with the ARC, what are specific issues, concerns or problems you've faced?
- If you have interacted with the ARC, what are positive experiences or outcomes you've had?
- How might the ARC build greater trust with members of the community? What steps might ARC take to build trust with members?
- Are there specific regulations or covenants you think should be revised? (Sent website in advance).

# Artifact Examples

HOW MIGHT THE ARC BUILD GREATER TRUST w/ COMMUNITY MEMBERS? WHAT STEPS MIGHT THE ARC TAKE TO BUILD TRUST?

ARC hasn't been clear to the ARC historical track, but they still understand what they're doing. A lot of confusion being. How and they are doing it. And someone that will have to build trust.

ARC has been clear to the ARC historical track, but they still understand what they're doing. A lot of confusion being. How and they are doing it. And someone that will have to build trust.

Even had some to show from their community feedback about what they were doing.

ARC has been clear to the ARC historical track, but they still understand what they're doing. A lot of confusion being. How and they are doing it. And someone that will have to build trust.

Be in service to others

Flexibility  
- MAKE IT A CONVERSATION  
- NO BARGAINING  
- DON'T BRING UP OTHERS/ISSUES?  
- BE OPEN TO  
- TALK WITH  
- REPORT / HAVE SOMEONE ELSE

ARC has been clear to the ARC historical track, but they still understand what they're doing. A lot of confusion being. How and they are doing it. And someone that will have to build trust.

YOU'VE INTERACTED WITH THE ARC, WHAT ARE SPECIFIC ISSUES, CONCERNS OR PROBLEMS YOU'VE FACED?

We submitted plans in accordance with the guidelines which ARC agreed to be the case. But we were required to change our plans because ARC didn't personally like it - even though it was in accordance to guidelines!

PERSONAL OPINIONS FROM ARC RE: OUTSIDE ARC STANDARDS. BEEN LECTURED THAT NONE OF US SHOULD BE LIVING IN THE WILDERNESS "HOLE"

We were told our house will have extra scrutiny because of its location. If there are additional rules applicable, we need to be clear. But this is the time of sale. But this is likely to be inconsistent with our concerns.

Opinions not enforcement of standards. Told I cannot do what other neighbors have done. A lot of back and forth.

- they are subjective -  
- require us to follow ethics  
- Personal opinions vs. nothing to do with what we like within the parameters of the rules.  
- Building, please don't listen to us, instead force their own agenda.

ARC NOT CONSULTED with us re: "what are the rules?" of ARC.

ARC has been clear to the ARC historical track, but they still understand what they're doing. A lot of confusion being. How and they are doing it. And someone that will have to build trust.

Denied no clear reason asked to change color or be denied. Asked to build specific brand/model or be denied. Sounded demand/other to submit other vents - unclear.

Abandoned home on our street > 10 yrs. No observable action by ARC or NHA after communications - affects to her property value!

When submitting a concept front step people they were only concerned about the color of the concrete. It was not clear that they would be "needed" around steps.

They didn't come to my home until after the concrete steps (heated) were completed. And then they asked about the air conditioning that had been installed after.

WHAT ARE YOUR GENERAL FEELINGS ABOUT THE ARC? WHAT WORDS/PHRASES COME TO MIND?

Red tape  
Jokes  
Sarcasm  
Stuck in the past  
Poor communication

The ARC regulates the interests of the neighborhood. They help keep standards. NOT really not consistent since in the past.

I feel ARC has potential to be a community asset - however, it has not been used that way. They really need to be clear - control, power, being out of control, unclear.

I don't compare our others because of lack of standard. We're not sure if that's the property value. It's not clear. The difference between the difference in clarity. Inconsistency of rules.

- UNHELPFUL;  
- HARD HEARDED;  
- TAKEN DISRESPECT.

# Artifact Examples

## How might the ARC build greater trust w/ community members? What steps might the ARC take to build trust?

- Clear rules - uniformly applied - Goal should be for homes to be well maintained + structurally sound.
- Offer nearby times often than just during work hours.
- They need a "can do" attitude!
- Compare ARC guidelines with other ARC area guidelines that have been most successful.
- Update the color palette.
- Consistent enforcement of reasonable standards so and provide all back to homeowners.
- Members pay for their knowledge of support.
- Decide the ARC write new standards and work with the standards only and a meeting to discuss the standards.
- Create an interactive website for the program most common to support home improvements.
- Consistent guidelines that are applied consistently. These guidelines are not to be changed at the whim or personal opinion of ARC.
- Build trust:
  - transparent
  - responsive
  - supports changes to home that serve to maintain home
- Share the procedures of the program at meetings. We will be covered by statute people will know what rules we are doing.
- Have Tom O'Brien to create the ARC standards. He is an expert on ARC laws and regulations!

## IF YOU'VE INTERACTED WITH THE ARC, WHAT ARE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OR OUTCOMES YOU'VE HAD?

- In the beginning they <sup>wanted</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>have</sup> <sup>more</sup> <sup>supportive</sup> <sup>steps</sup> <sup>ago</sup> but when I actually submitted requests - they were fast.
- This year (2023) we had a meeting a budget to address parking. It would have a signpost so it had to be more visible.
- LANDSCAPING PLAN APPROVED DESPITE ARC OBSERVATIONS THAT IT WAS "PUSHY" AND RESULT WASN'T A GOOD FIT.
- Last meeting they actually helped with a sign.
- Our window replacements were approved. They were forwarded so there were no delays as designed for ARC to approve.
- When asked to change the color of the exterior steps, and I didn't like the colors they proposed, they did approve my end color submission (Oct 2023).
- No really positive experiences but we have successfully made changes to the exterior of our home. Garage door vent chg.
- In the past I have had submits approved in a timely manner, or only had to make minor changes to my plans.

## WHAT ARE YOUR GENERAL FEELINGS ABOUT THE ARC? WHAT WORDS/PHRASES COME TO MIND?

- Frustrated, untrusting
- unfair... completely unfair
- SUBJECTIVE
- 2. CAPRICIOUS ARBITRARY INCONSISTENT INTERPRETABLE EXTREME
- The ARC is capricious standards are enforced by opinion not science. They have no interest in helping homeowners. Have spread up over people's money.
- RUDE ARROGANT
- SELF SERVING
- INCONSISTENT
- PETTY
- General feelings: a method of using a base for requirements that need to be used when perceived opinions on what changes to support a home. They don't support the home better, instead look for ways to say no to home owners requests.
- LACK OF TRANSPARENT GUIDELINES
- Inconsistent Confusing Involving
- self serving - subjective
- The approach to supporting members has been dictatorial & arbitrary.
- My feeling is that the decisions made by ARC are subjective and have been inconsistent (and illegal). Subjective enforcement.
- ARC lacks fair reasons to say "no", instead of reasons to say "yes".

# Artifact Examples

## YOU'VE INTERACTED WITH THE ARC, WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC ISSUES, CONCERNS OR PROBLEMS YOU'VE FACED?

We submitted plans in Chesapeake within this positive notice. ARC agreed to be the case. But we were required to change our plans because ARC didn't personally like it - even though it was in adherence to guidelines!!

PERSONAL OPINIONS FROM ARC. REP OUTSIDE ARC STANDARDS.  
BEING LECTURED THAT NONE OF US SHOULD BE LIVING IN THE WILDLIFE "HOLE"

We were told our house will have extra scrutiny because of its location. If this one of its location, it has some additional rules applicable. These needs to be clear as the time of sale. But this is likely to be inconsistent with our comments.

Opinions not enforcement of standards. Told I cannot do what other neighbors have done. A lot of back and forth.

They are subjective - Require us to allow other Personal opinions as authority us to do what we like within the parameters of the rules - building some debt taken to us. (Should force their own agreement)

ARC NOT CONSISTENT - One may feel in violation but in most cases they are not.

ARC has a history of changing rules and standards. They have a history of changing rules and standards. They have a history of changing rules and standards.

Denied no clear reason - Asked to change color or be denied - Asked to buy a specific brand/made of be denied - Denied demand letter to submit more photos. Under submission.

Abandoned home on our street > 10 yrs. No identifiable action by HOA or HOA after complaints - affects by property value!

When submitting a concrete front step people they were only concerned about the color of the concrete. A lot of the time that they would be "heated" over the steps.

They didn't come to my home until after the concrete steps (heated) were completed. And then they asked about the air conditioning that had been installed. It's.

## What aren't we talking about?

Home insurance - we are paying for they insurance and didn't find a company who would insure us. Stuck w/ Current. I believe this is outdated fire hazard of common.

We are paying people for ARC with HOA dues, when we can have ARC members volunteer from our own neighborhoods for free. Perhaps for 2 paid positions.

ARC standards are somewhat dated. The only way to enforce standards is to have a checklist up to date. Standards and action items for next point forward.

A respectful interaction between home-owners and the ARC. Cease the hot politics. Buy in from homeowners on ARC process.

Some homes in Chesapeake are so dated, it's embarrassing. Do some people not update their homes because of dealing with ARC?

Why the larger houses on Montross & in other "historic" areas are allowed things such as spikes, permanent signs on driveway, shuttles, etc. when we have to submit plans on anything more than a lawn?

Make up of ARC - Right members vs volunteers - Members of Arc who don't know and are sending volunteers about to leaving the community.

ARC standard communication more effectively. There have to be communication (written and oral) needs to be made.

How will our input really change the chances of how the ARC functions? Will our voices be heard? If changes occur, when will they be implemented?

Will the entire community have an opportunity to voice their opinion or vote on the possible changes?

Some Real Estate agents in the area are aware of the ARC's reputation and have steered people away from Chesapeake.

New Homeowners need to have a heads up about the HOA/ARC regulations prior to and after buying a home in Chesapeake.

## ARE THERE SPECIFIC STANDARDS THAT SHOULD BE REVISED?

Standards are somewhat dated. The only way to enforce standards is to have a checklist up to date. Standards and action items for next point forward.

ARC standards are somewhat dated. The only way to enforce standards is to have a checklist up to date. Standards and action items for next point forward.

I would cut out a "stake" out of guidelines as a basket point for dimensions. Make it a collection.

create guidelines that state if anyone within these things you do not need to go to the ARC. update to 2021!

"Interpretation" needs to be defined better - Are setbacks 2' or 3' - all improvements - In many cases - residents or improvement - these changes - other policies about lots, etc. - needed update!

Accountability - MAKE SOMEONE RESPONSIBLE! MAKE THE OTHERS - Simplify Code/Guides - Help us How you Manage in Annual.

You have different standards so hard to know. I was told no bronze railings, another person was told no black railings. So what is your standard? It's VERY unclear.