



WOODS WATCH

The Official Publication of
The Coventry Woods Neighborhood Association

www.coventrywoods.org

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911 or 311? Know Which to Call ... and When

Both are important numbers - but with different purposes. here's what you need to know (and what you can expect)

911

What it is: The phone number to call when an emergency happens, or when you see something that warrants immediate police action. Every month, more than 80,000 calls are made to 911. It is for fire and medical emergencies and immediate police intervention. This hot line is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The person who answers will get important basic information -- what; where; when -- and determine if police, fire or medical assistance is needed... and dispatch it. Calls are ranked by urgency. "If an immediate response is needed, a police car is always dispatched as soon as possible. For other less serious situations, an officer may arrive up to an hour after your call."

What it isn't: It is not the number to call for lost dogs, general questions or for information. Call 311 for that. If you need police assistance that is not an emergency or that requires an officer at the scene, call the CMPD Expeditor Office at (704) 336-3190. If you call 911 by mistake, stay on the line. Let the Telecommunicator know you do not need police assistance.

What's the benefit? Fast police, medical and fire department help when it is truly needed.

What to say: According to CMPD information on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Web site (www.charmeck.org), "When your call is answered, tell the Telecommunicator what type of crime you are calling about. For example, 'I'm calling about a robbery about a car accident about a fight.' Then give the location of the telephone you are calling from. If you do not know the number, give the closest street name or intersection."

When to call 911

Crimes in progress or possibly in progress: Shots fired, disturbances. When reporting suspicious persons or activities, give the sex, race and

311

What it is: The customer service line for seven sectors of Charlotte-Mecklenburg government. It has been up and running since early July, fielding calls from citizens seeking help or answers for a wide range of non-emergency issues. You can get a live operator 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What it isn't: It is not a hot line. Calling 311 is just a shorthand way of calling (704) 336-7600 - the City-County call center. Some cellular phone companies have not yet been set up to accept 311, so you must still use the 10 digit number.

What's the benefit? The blue pages in the telephone book give you only a partial list of numbers; often it is hard to figure out what department handles what. When you call 311, the operator can transfer you to the best department to field your call.

What 311 is all about

Non-emergency police help: "311 reduces the burden of calls going to 911," according to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Web site. "You can request an officer for a non life-threatening emergency such as noise complaints, graffiti, truancy, loitering, or even to report that your driveway is blocked." Road and transportation problems. Anything from potholes in the road to not-working stoplights, or damaged or missing street signs. Sanitation. Everything from garbage collections (including scheduling special pickups of bulky items, getting recycling boxes) to water quality. Government meetings. Schedules for both Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Bills and other red-tape: They can provide personalized information about local taxes and utility bills. You can call 311 to reserve a picnic area at a park.

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age. Describe the suspicious activity. When reporting suspicious vehicles, get the vehicle description; color, make, model, year and anything unusual. Are there people in the vehicle? If so, how many? Age? Race? Sex? Is the vehicle parked or moving?

Life and death situations: This can include violence during domestic disturbances.

To prevent a crime: Officers assigned to the Independence Division -- Coventry Woods is part of this -- have repeatedly told the CWNA board of directors that people should not hesitate to call if they suspect criminal activity. See something that doesn't look on the up-and-up? Call 911. You may be helping to prevent a crime.

Medical emergencies. Someone is injured. Accidents, accidents with injury. For automobile accidents, give the block number or nearest location. Tell whether there are injuries. Tell if there is a fuel spill (a possible fire danger). To report a fire.

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Housing code enforcement: Call to report a violation - anything from front lawns that need mowing to uncollected garbage.

FALL CWNA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING: 7 P.M. WEDNESDAY, OCT. 19

Get updates on Coventry Woods developments. Couldn't make the East Charlotte Forum the week before? We'll tell you all about it Guest speaker: Ron Adams, from Simmons YMCA will tell you why walking and jogging in Coventry Woods are good for you -- and how you can get the most out of them.

Door prizes!

Keep Coventry Woods Looking Good

Call 311 when a residence isn't complying with the Charlotte Housing Code

The Charlotte Housing Code is the group of ordinances the city has enacted with the aim of making neighborhoods more attractive. The City-County Web site, www.charmeck.org, explains the code's mission like this:

"The City of Charlotte's Housing Code requires homeowners and landlords to maintain all housing (homes, apartments, townhouses, etc. regardless of when built), within the city limits and unincorporated areas of Mecklenburg County, in a safe and clean condition. The Housing Code also applies to abandoned commercial structures.

"The City of Charlotte's Health and Sanitation Code requires property owners to maintain their premises in a safe and sanitary condition. Violations include high weeds/grass, accumulation of trash or junk, junk automobiles, etc.

"Across the City, a team of inspectors work with residents making them aware of City Codes and assisting them in resolving existing code violations."

Complicated process

The actual process of getting something taken care of, however, is more involved. The Web site goes on to explain how things are done:

"Violations of the City's Health and Sanitation Ordinance are reported by citizens, City/County agencies and code inspectors. The inspector will notify the property owner (as identified on the Mecklenburg County Tax Records) of any existing violations. The property owner has approximately 7-10 days to bring the property into compliance with the City Code. Failure to correct violations could result in any of the following actions: issuance of citation, appearance in Environmental Court or work being done by a contractor. If contracted, the owner would receive an invoice for the work performed in addition to any administrative or investigative fees. Failure to pay the invoice could result in a lien being placed against the property."

What's the bottom line? When you call 311, your complaint is forwarded to the code enforcement area. There have been more than 50 complaints filed in Zip Code 28212 since Sept. 1; most have been handled by inspector Libbie Johnson. Most involved cars parked in yards, or unmowed grass. Because of the lengthy turn-

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Keep Coventry Woods Looking Good
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around time - sending a formal letter through the mail, then 10 days to comply - some situations resolve themselves briefly: The lawn is mowed; the car is moved. But grass continues to grow and cars can be illegally parked again.

Help on the way?

The Charlotte Observer reported on Sept. 15 that neighborhood complaints - particularly in East Charlotte - have prompted city officials to form a plan to "increase city fines for a variety of code enforcement violations, from overgrown grass to substandard housing." The story, and the officials quoted in the story, said much of the problem concerns rental properties:

"Several rental property owners consistently allow trash to accumulate on their properties and grass to grow more than a foot tall, (code administrator Walter) Abernethy said. In those cases, the city sends a notice, then pays someone to clean up the property. "Though the owners have to pay the cleanup bill as well as a \$50 penalty, it doesn't deter them." 'To them, it's the cost of doing business,' Abernethy said. 'They're allowing the city to maintain their properties for them.'"

The article reported that Abernethy got the go-ahead to hire four new inspectors and a supervisor, giving the city a total of 39 inspectors. He was quoted as saying this additional staffing will allow him to create a new team in East Charlotte. Also, fines may increase.

Here are the current charges:
Grass more than a foot tall: \$50.
Rollout container left at curb: \$50.
Mud in the street: \$100.
Signs within public rights of way: \$25 per sign.
Trash/junk accumulation: \$50.
Parking on the front lawn: \$25.

What you can do

When you see code violations, call 311 and ask for Housing Code's Libbie Johnson. Be sure to give her the address of where the problem is. If it is a repeat problem, call 311 again. Ask for Libbie Johnson or Walter Abernathy.

City Council and mayor elections are a month away. If a pollster or candidate asks what issues you'd like the city government to address, tell them you want more effective Housing Code enforcement in East Charlotte.

CWNA Sponsors East Charlotte Forum for At-Large Candidates

At 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 12, leaders of East Charlotte neighborhood and other civic organizations will ask candidates for at-large City Council seats how they stand on issues and concerns that are important to our area.

It will be held at Johnson Hall, in Amity Presbyterian Church, on Pierson Drive (between Sharon Amity Road and Albemarle Road) -- where CWNA general membership meetings are held.

Your CWNA board is hosting the free event, where voters can learn where candidates stand and where candidates will learn what East Charlotte needs. All concerned voters are invited -- including you.

There are eight at-large candidates seeking four at-large council seats on the November ballot; "at large" means they will be elected by citywide voters. The candidates are Darrell Bonapart, Susan Burgess, David Erdman, Anthony Foxx, John Lasser, Pat Mumford, John Tabor and Lynn Wheeler.

The other seven members of the City Council represent districts. Coventry Woods is in District 5; our representative, Nancy Carter, is running unopposed. She will be in office until 2007.

The City Council elected in November will be making decisions on many issues that will directly affect Coventry Woods and other East Charlotte neighborhoods -- including public safety, zoning, redevelopment, code enforcement and transportation.

We hope to see you there.

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