

# Guidelines for Civil Discourse

The primary purpose of the Bay Creek Neighborhood Association is to sustain and improve our neighborhood through citizen participation. This process will be enjoyable and enriching – and civil discourse will result – if we have positive interactions, online and in person. Here are some ways to encourage this.

## **Listen well; be curious.**

Be open-minded when listening. Ask questions that encourage more conversation and take the conversation deeper. Respond to what people are saying, rather than just trying to get your own ideas heard (but do bring them up later!). Don't interrupt.

## **Build consensus.**

Summarize some of the main points you are hearing. Look for points of agreement. When you join a conversation, include a short summary of what you have heard so far and ask if you have it right. Stay on topic.

## **Be kind.**

Even if you have a good point to make, or feel you need to correct a point someone else has made, don't talk down to or label people; they'll have a harder time hearing your point.

## **Give feedback?**

Public debate about ideas is welcome. But if you have personal feedback for someone, express this to them privately in a constructive manner – even if their message was public – or let it go.

## **Speak calmly.**

Many people have a hard time listening well when someone is angry with them. If you find yourself becoming angry, ask yourself how you will be best understood – be really *heard* – before responding.

In addition, speaking calmly in response to someone who seems to be angry is a good way to diffuse what could otherwise escalate into a confrontation. Not every situation calls for calm speech, but it can often keep the conversation focused on the topic at hand.