

Proposal: G2 Essay Forum

This proposal describes a motion offered to the G2 HOA Board of Directors: to establish a forum for G2 community participation through written essays.

Overview

- An essay forum open to any resident or person interested in G2.
- Essays can be on any relevant G2 topic or issue.
- Simple and fair guidelines make it easy to contribute and respond to essays. A Forum Committee makes sure that the guidelines are followed.
- Essays will be available on the G2 Yahoo Group web site for easy access by any group member.

Personal message about this proposal

This is somewhat risky proposal, given the nature of prior exchanges and lingering animosities at G2. But I believe that if participants can be mature this forum can help to explore differences of opinion and discover common ground. I offer the Essay Forum as one solution to challenges of “not being heard” and requests for “direct participation” that are sometimes raised. Using this forum, those who feel strongly about an issue can express points of view and readers can appreciate the merits without interruption. The only major condition is that essays do not resort to character assassination. I hope residents will welcome an intelligent, wide-ranging discussion on various issues, topics, and even feelings that affect G2 residents. The information here constitutes this motion, and I encourage the HOA Board to establish this or a similar proposal.

Description

The purpose of the G2 Essay Forum is to provide a simple, easy way to offer perspectives, discussion, and even criticism in a safe, respectful platform. The Forum is designed to be available to any G2 resident, Artsdeco member, or person with an interest in G2.

Here's how this concept works:

- Anyone who wants to offer an essay is encouraged to understand four guidelines:
 - **Brevity.** 1500 words maximum (1-3 pages of normal font and spacing).
 - **Authorship.** Each essay must have an author. No anonymous postings.
 - **Relevance.** The topic must be directly related to G2.
 - **Civility.** No personal attacks. Criticism must be offered constructively.
- Write an essay using Microsoft Word or any text editor. Save as a Word document (.doc), plain text (.txt), or PDF (.pdf).
- Email the essay file as an attachment to the Forum Committee.
- The Forum Committee will read and confirm that the guidelines are followed within 5 days. (In the event that any guideline is not followed the committee will identify the issue, and possibly suggest to the writer how it can be corrected before it can be accepted.) Please note that the committee does not judge any essay for content, style, or factual quality. The only criteria are the four guidelines.
- Upon acceptance, the essay will be posted on the G2 Yahoo Group, and notice sent to the group advertising its availability.
- Anyone can respond to an essay by writing one of their own; that is, by offering support or a rebuttal following the G2 Essay Forum guidelines and process.

Details

Guidelines

The guidelines are provided only for ease of use and fairness; these are not restrictions on freedom of expression, only a way to make sure that expression is responsible.

- **Brevity.** Essays can be up to 1500 words, and must fit on 1-3 pages using normal sized font and spacing. This corresponds to a reading investment of about 10 minutes.
- **Authorship.** Each essay should have at least one author identified; multiple authors are possible. But no submission should be anonymous. This guideline is meant to properly credit author(s) and to encourage accountability for whatever point-of-view, ideas, or criticism is offered.
- **Relevance.** Any topic, including controversial issues about living, working or participating at G2 can be addressed. Sample topics include: exhibiting art, the original Goodman vision, participation, events policy, the HOA, the HOA Board,

elections, the Program Committee, the *CC&Rs*, the *Bylaws*, the Garden Committee, quiet hours policy, Artsdeco, the media center, the theater, alternative forms of organization, emotional experiences of G2, and so forth.

- **Civility.** A good forum will offer opportunities for expression, including controversial topics and strongly held opinions. But such a forum cannot be a true community platform if it permits personal attacks, vendettas, slander, or unsupportable claims. Of the four guidelines, this is perhaps the most crucial.
 - Restrict criticism to actions and evidence, not to people's characters. If individuals or groups must be identified in order to make a point, only activities or actions are appropriate to evaluate.
 - The equivalent of hurling insults or personal animosity will not be considered protected speech. Peaceful confrontation (acceptable) is ethically preferable to aggression (not acceptable).
 - Somewhat more technically, *ad hominem* fallacies ("against the person") will *not* be accepted—nor will sweeping attacks and loaded questions that explicitly or implicitly denigrate character.

Participation

The forum is designed to be easy to use. It is open any resident, owner, or supporter with an interest in G2.

Although anyone can offer essays, Yahoo Group members will have easiest access to download and read the files. Group membership is free. The only significant requirement is an email address. The Yahoo Group currently represents about two-thirds of all units through 28 individual members. All of the members will be notified as essays are uploaded.

Non-members can request that newly accepted essays be sent directly to them for reading, via a request to the Forum Committee.

Forum Committee and Process

This proposal suggests a 3-person committee to make sure that offered essays meet the guidelines. The Board will appoint members based on suggestions from the community. In particular the Board can invite the Program Committee and Artsdeco to each suggest a member. The third member can be any interested resident.

Committee members can also submit essays, but must withdraw from the approval process where their own submissions are considered.

The committee process can make use of email or in-person meetings to check essays:

- Writers email their essay to at the committee members.
- Each member checks for brevity, authorship, relevance, and civility. The committee checks submissions within 5 days.
- If the committee agrees that the guidelines are followed, then one of the members uploads it to the Yahoo Group site (or forwards it to a group moderator for

uploading). A group moderator will follow up by sending out a general announcement.

- If the committee finds that the guidelines are not followed, the writer will be notified about the correction(s) needed.

Disclosure: I am *not* nominating myself to sit on such a committee.

Forum timeline

The forum can continue as long as essays are supplied and committee members are available. This proposal suggests that the committee and forum be established for one year with the March annual elections.