

What's Up, College Station? Transcript

(Season 4, Episode 31)

Grace Hollowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hollowell. Today I'm joined by our neighborhood and community relations coordinator, Taitelyn Morris-Wise. Hi, Taitelyn.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Hi, Grace.

Grace Hollowell: It is so fun to have you back on the show. The last time you were here, we were talking about the Christmas parade with Barbara.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Yes, with Barbara.

Grace Hollowell: That is not what we're here to talk about today, although it is August, and I feel like that is coming up very soon.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: We are about to start planning the Christmas parade, but that's not why we're here.

Grace Hollowell: No, we are here to talk about fun neighborhood-related topics today. Last week we had Tommy Shilling, our code enforcement supervisor, talking about our students moving back to town, how they can follow the rules, and how to be good neighbors. That ties right into what you do.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Yeah, for sure. Living in a college town involves a lot of work because we have a rotating population base that changes every year. You educate students on what is going on in the city, then they graduate, and a whole new crop of students moves in. It's a unique situation, but it's also very rewarding.

Grace Hollowell: Yes, and the one constant is you. You are the person to contact if our residents have questions about their neighborhoods. We were talking earlier about a new student who had a question about local parking regulations.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: They reached out saying they had no clue where to go but wanted to make sure they could tell their guests where to park without violating rules, getting towed, or upsetting neighbors. I made them a little parking graphic and sent it over to traffic. They confirmed it looked good for that neighborhood, so I sent it back to the student.

Grace Hollowell: Put it on your fridge.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Exactly. That way, the student can tell friends who come over where they can and cannot park.

Grace Hallowell: For those who may not know, what else does your position entail? I know it's a unique role in College Station.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: It's a lot. I operate the Citizens University program, which provides access to the City of College Station. This year, we created a high school version called the Future Leaders Program. I also work directly with our HOAs. Engaging with citizens and residents through HOAs is the foundation of this role because they are already active community members.

Grace Hallowell: I never lived anywhere with an HOA until I moved here. They are helpful, especially for students new to the area. Seasoned residents can guide them on how to be good neighbors, explain the rules, and help keep our city clean and beautiful.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Absolutely.

Grace Hallowell: It makes for a happy place to coexist. So, what changes in your job during this time of year compared to the rest of the year?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: It's a lot of boots-on-the-ground effort to solve problems proactively before people move in — like helping that student figure out parking rules ahead of time so nobody gets in trouble.

Grace Hallowell: What is your favorite part about what you do?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Getting to meet and talk to people about their experiences in their neighborhoods. I enjoy helping them understand why certain things happen in the city and showing them the inner workings of municipal government.

Grace Hallowell: You are also the liaison between different departments. If someone reaches out with a question about utilities or parks, you act as the go-between to get them an answer.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Navigating local government can sometimes be confusing. If a trash pickup was missed, or you put your bin out late and don't know who to call, my office is here to figure it out for you. I know a lot about various departments, which helps address resident concerns effectively.

Grace Hallowell: Part of your job includes the Neighborhood Partnership Program, and there is an upcoming workshop. What is it, and why does the city host it each year?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: The Neighborhood Partnership Program is free for all local HOAs and neighborhood associations. We brought the workshop back three years ago following a hiatus during COVID-19. We partner with the Houston Chapter of the Community Associations Institute to help train HOA leaders. Since HOA board members are unpaid

volunteers who hold full-time jobs, this workshop helps them manage and lead their organizations effectively without needing to be legal experts.

Grace Hollowell: That's a great point. They are all volunteers with families, jobs, and other responsibilities who just want to help their neighborhood, so we are providing tools to support them.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Exactly. Even for professional community managers, state regulations change frequently. HOAs are governed by the State of Texas rather than city ordinances, so this workshop helps leaders navigate new state legislative changes.

Grace Hollowell: Who should consider attending this workshop?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Anyone involved with HOAs, anyone interested in serving on a board, professional community managers, and members of neighborhood associations with deed restrictions.

Grace Hollowell: Serving on a board comes with challenges. What are some common issues neighborhood leaders face?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Volunteer leaders live alongside the people they regulate. It creates a difficult dynamic when you have to enforce rules with your own neighbors. Nobody wants to be the bad guy, but board members are responsible for maintaining those community standards.

Grace Hollowell: Why is it so important for neighborhood volunteers to receive training like this?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Because HOA governance involves complex laws and there is no single state agency overseeing day-to-day management. Bringing in experts from the Community Associations Institute allows volunteers to learn best practices and receive guidance from experienced professionals.

Grace Hollowell: It's like that commercial: "They know a thing or two because they've seen a thing or two." One topic this year is deed restriction governance and enforcement. Can you explain what deed restrictions are and how they differ from city ordinances?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Deed restrictions are specific rules tied to a particular development or tract of land. They are often stricter than city ordinances. For example, an HOA might require trash cans to be screened from view at all times. The city does not enforce that level of detail citywide, but an HOA can enforce it through its deed restrictions.

Grace Hollowell: That clear distinction makes sense. The workshop will also cover handling complaints. What are best practices for responding to resident concerns?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Board members are elected as unbiased parties to enforce rules, but it requires balancing objective enforcement with empathy for what neighbors are going through.

Grace Hollowell: What are some common misconceptions about what HOAs can enforce versus what the city can enforce?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: We often receive city complaints about issues governed strictly by deed restrictions, such as rental limits or trash can placement. Another common example is dead trees on private property; the city does not have a dead tree ordinance, but an HOA may require prompt removal. City ordinances apply everywhere, whereas deed restrictions only apply within that specific development.

Grace Hollowell: For residents who are not on a board, how can they stay informed or address questions and concerns?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Start by attending your HOA's board meetings or contacting the board directly. If that isn't an option, our office can help explain the formal complaint process or assist with next steps. Overall, practicing patience and understanding with volunteer leaders goes a long way.

Grace Hollowell: When and where will the workshop take place?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: It will take place on Saturday, August 15, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at College Station City Hall on the first floor. It is free to attend, and lunch will be provided.

Grace Hollowell: How does registration work?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Links are available on our social media, in our weekly neighborhood newsletter, and on the city calendar. The form asks for basic details about your neighborhood and role so we can tailor the presentation to the audience.

Grace Hollowell: Is registration required?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: We request registration in advance, though we try not to turn anyone away if space allows.

Grace Hollowell: What is the best way for people to reach out if they have questions before the event?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: You can email me at tmorris@cstx.gov, reach our team at neighborhoodservices@cstx.gov, or message us on social media.

Grace Hallowell: Where can students find reliable information about city ordinances, neighborhood expectations, and local resources?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Texas A&M students can utilize the Off-Campus Student Services office for help with lease questions, roommate issues, or citations. Students can also contact my office directly or request one of our free new resident welcome bags.

Grace Hallowell: What advice do you have for students living off campus for the first time?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Read reviews, talk to current residents if possible, and never feel pressured to sign a lease immediately on the spot. Take time to read the entire lease agreement so you fully understand your obligations.

Grace Hallowell: If you see red flags, pause and ask questions. Why is it important for students moving into residential neighborhoods to introduce themselves to their neighbors?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Knowing your neighbors creates a support network where people look out for one another. Exchanging contact information makes it easier to communicate about noise, guests, or emergencies like property damage while you are away.

Grace Hallowell: What are some simple ways students can be respectful neighbors throughout the school year?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Learn city ordinances regarding trash, recycling, and bulk pickup days. Introduce yourself, exchange contact information, and remain mindful that you share community space with long-term residents.

Grace Hallowell: Where can people find more information about these topics?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Follow the City of College Station on social media, subscribe to our YouTube channel, check our website at cstx.gov for neighborhood resources, and view our city calendar for upcoming community events.

Grace Hallowell: Before we go, let's do a quick lightning round of fun questions. Ready?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: I'm ready.

Grace Hallowell: Complete the sentence: A good neighbor is someone who...

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: ...knows their neighbors.

Grace Hallowell: What is the most underrated HOA responsibility?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: An emphasis on nature, such as maintaining trees, flowers, and landscaping to keep the neighborhood looking beautiful.

Grace Hallowell: What is one word that describes a successful HOA?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Listens.

Grace Hallowell: What is the easiest neighborhood issue you've encountered?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Addressing faded street signs. It's a quick fix for our traffic department and makes a noticeable improvement right away.

Grace Hallowell: What is one neighborhood trend you would love to see more of?

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Block parties and neighborhood get-togethers that bring residents together to build community.

Grace Hallowell: Thank you so much for joining me today, Taitelyn.

Taitelyn Morris-Wise: Of course!

Grace Hallowell: And that's What's Up!