



February 2015

## Inside this Issue

- 2 Neighborhood Watch
- 3 Governing by Representation
- 3 Manager's Message
- 4 Real Estate Beat
- 4 Board Briefs
- 5 Recycling
- 6 Governing Documents
- 7 Condo Living
- 8 Upcoming Meetings
- 8 Contacts

### Board of Directors

President ~ Willis McCloud  
Vice President ~ Earl Burton  
Treasurer ~ Patrina Kandul  
Secretary ~ Charlotte Jordan  
At Large ~ (vacant)

# Somerset News

## President's Corner

By Willis McCloud



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As we begin a new year, I think it's only appropriate that we take stock of just how far we have come as a community in the 21 years since the Somerset Unit Owners Association (UOA) was formed. The UOA assumed management of the community approximately in 1993. As a then young organization with brand new buildings, freshly paved roads, and little expectation of a major repair expense, the condominium fees were set at a low (by 2015 standards) \$123 a month. Our annual budget was probably less than \$500,000, most families drove two cars so parking wasn't much of a problem, and the Washington Redskins made the playoffs with a 10-6 record.

To put this in perspective, the UOA now has an annual budget approaching \$900,000. Our condo fees have increased to \$309 a month to keep up with the cost of inflation and to fund repairs of our now aging infrastructure. Two car families are now the exception more than the rule, as many households have 3 and sometimes 4 automobiles making parking a challenge. And things with the local football team have

only gotten worse, as the team finished its 82<sup>nd</sup> season with a miserable 4-12 record.

Many conveniences we now take for granted were relatively new when our community started. Cable TV was still in its early stages. Today owners can view their favorite shows not only on cable, but also on satellite or on a mobile device. In 1993, the World Wide Web – initially designed to support the science community – was made available to the public for the first time. It seems incredible now, but the web as we know it didn't exist back then. Now we are connected to an infinite universe of information through our cell phones, computers, and smart TVs. As an example, YouTube users upload over 300 hours of video content to the web every day. Granted, the usefulness of some of this content (i.e. cats playing the piano) is questionable.

What this really shows is that Associations must continually prepare for the future by looking for innovative ways to increase services, while decreasing costs. For example, with the growing use of electric vehicles, many communities are installing electric recharging stations or allowing owners to install rechargers in their garages. Solar panels are showing up on the roofs of Association

*Continued on page 2*

President's Corner from page 1

buildings, leading to a reduction in owner electric bills. Probably the most convenient change is that owners can control their energy costs by monitoring every home appliance on their cell phone or laptop.

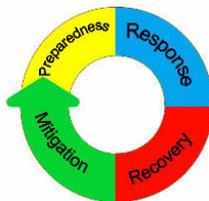
The Board of Directors (BOD), with input from our owners, will continue to position Somerset to take advantage of technology that will improve the quality of life for our residents. Similarly, owners can improve the ability of the BOD to implement improvements by

ensuring our revenues are sufficient to fund new projects. Currently, high delinquency rates by a limited number of owners are having a negative impact on the community's finances. In one instance our delinquency rate caused a home sale to fall through when the lender would not authorize the transaction. Clearly, what one owner or small group of owners does can impact the entire community. To address this issue, the BOD is leveraging technology to enable our owners to monitor their Association account at any time. Effective 1 January 2015, owners can access their account at

[www.somersetatwestridge.org](http://www.somersetatwestridge.org). This increased access can alert owners of any potential problems with their account before it becomes a major problem. Any owner currently in a delinquent status, or who believes they soon will be, should contact our Community Manager, Stacy Panuzio, at 703-707-6404 or [spanuzio@capitolcorp.com](mailto:spanuzio@capitolcorp.com) as soon as possible to develop a financial plan to ensure compliance. One thing is for certain, the future is coming – whether we are ready for it or not! ☀

## Neighborhood Watch

By Willis McCloud



The thirteenth anniversary of the 9-11 attacks and the ninth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina are all the reminders we need that it pays to be prepared for natural and terror-related emergencies.

September was National Preparedness Month, but its passing does not mean that we can't take some basic steps to be prepared. No matter how safe and secure you may feel today, the worst could happen – if not here, then perhaps at some point in the future in another location. That's when you'll wish you had taken the time to plan for the worst.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) continues to urge Americans to make plans and learn about the resources they can use to prepare for

emergencies. DHS is encouraging Americans to obtain emergency supply kits, make family emergency plans and be informed about the different types of emergencies that could affect them.

We encourage our residents to visit the DHS website at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov). In addition to planning guides and an instructional video, the website offers a variety of preparedness tips, as well as specialized information for seniors and people with disabilities and other special needs.

The government's message to Americans is clear: "We must have the tools and plans in place to make it on our own, at least for a period of time, no matter where we are when disaster strikes. Just like having a working smoke detector, preparing for the unexpected makes sense."

Visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) and plan ahead. We should always hope for the best, but we are shortsighted if we don't prepare for the worst. ☀

# Governing by Representation

By Earl Burton



This great nation is solidly based on the principles of a representative democracy. We vote for a person, or persons, who will act on our behalf. It starts with organizations like community associations and progresses through our school boards, city governments, county governments, state governments and most notably the federal government.

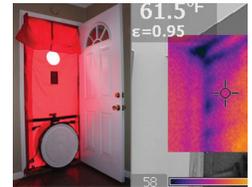
Here in Somerset, some may advocate that the Board of Directors (BOD) should not take action without a vote of ALL the members to find out what the majority of the people want. If association members were to vote on every issue before a decision was made, there would be no need for a BOD – but simply someone to send out ballots and tally results. That would be counter-productive and impractical. Community BOD’s find out what their constituents want in other ways. As all the board members are unit owners and residents, we get direct input from neighbors quite frequently. The BOD also makes the time to hear from residents at each board meeting. But it’s up to YOU to attend those meetings, voice your opinions and participate in the exchange of ideas with the BOD. We sincerely encourage you to get involved and participate. Perhaps you might at least consider joining a committee, as we genuinely want your input, ideas, thoughts and opinions.

Please remember that as our community ages, the care and maintenance of all our units and their common areas will become exponentially more important in the coming years.

This coming October when we hold the Somerset Annual Meeting, please consider carefully which candidates you select — and perhaps even put yourself on the ballot. We encourage you to consider running for the Board to help shape the future of your community. ☀

# Manager’s Message

By Stacy Panuzio, CMCA, AMS, PCAM



Do you have trouble evenly heating and cooling your home? Did you ever wonder what could be done to correct this problem, including possibly adding attic fans to the common area attic? If so, you are not alone!

The Association is now undertaking an attic ventilation study to attack this problem property wide, however help is needed from the community to properly complete this task. Because our buildings vary in size and unit floorplans, we are seeking a sampling of energy audits from two units per building, for all 21 buildings. Ideally, we will have a good sampling with some end units, some middle units, some units with mostly siding, some units with mostly brick, etc. represented in the study.

A comprehensive energy audit includes a thorough examination of your home including energy use, air infiltration, insulation levels, thermal imaging, water heating and usage, duct leakage, heating and cooling equipment efficiency, room pressures, and carbon monoxide levels, just to name a few. Participating homeowners will receive valuable information with regard to unit components that might need updating – like water heaters and windows – and the Association will gain valuable information on the attics and other common elements that may need to be addressed.

To that end, the Association is offering the following discounts to participating homeowners. The regular cost of an energy audit is \$400 per home. Because we need numerous homes to sign up, we have negotiated two bulk price points. If we collectively have up to 20 units sign up, the cost will drop to \$325. If we have more than 20 homes participate, the price drops to \$250. Further, the Association will reimburse the first two participants per building \$75 each, for providing a

*Continued on page 4*

Manager's Message from page 3

copy of their audit to the Association. Interested homeowners should contact Management as soon as possible. We have a target schedule date that currently includes the first two weeks of March. Questions and concerns may also be directed to Management.

Thank you! ☀

### Real Estate Beat

By David Gray



One of the questions we get asked frequently is, "How's the market?" The simple answer is that the market in Metro DC is strong. Prices are going up and sales are steady. And while that's all true, it's also fairly meaningless when you get right down to it. The real question is "How's the market for me?"

Think of it this way: If someone asked how the stock market is doing, it would be accurate to say it's doing very well. The Dow Jones average has hit record highs and it has been on a solid, upward path for several years, after bottoming out in 2007. Doesn't this sound a lot like the real estate market? But someone who has owned Radio Shack stock – currently trading for less than one dollar after being at \$20 five years ago – will have a slightly different perspective on how the market is doing than someone who has owned Apple, Google or Disney shares.

Fortunately, we don't see such wild swings in value in the real estate market and homes rarely become worthless. But there are significant differences in our local marketplace. Let's look at months' supply of inventory as an example. This number tells you how many months it would take for all homes currently available on the market to sell, given the current pace of new contracts.

We are also frequently asked whether prices are going up or down. For all of 2014, the average sales price was up 2.7% for Metro DC compared to 2013. But once again, let's take a look at the differences in all

jurisdictions. While DC was up 5.2%, Loudoun County was up 4%, Northern Virginia rose 2%, and Montgomery County was up just 0.8%. And we want to add a cautionary note. Remember that the "average sales price" is just an arithmetic calculation and isn't indicative of what is happening to individual properties. Let's go back to those examples. One of the challenges in DC is that many first-time buyers are being priced out of the market, so there have been fewer lower-end sales. When there is a reduction in the number of lower-priced sales, by definition, the average sales price will go up. On the flip side, there has been an increase in lower-priced sales in Montgomery County, so that reduces the average sale down. That doesn't mean that prices aren't going up faster in DC – it just means that it may be a bit overstated.

Our point is simply this: Market conditions can be captured by a few key stats, but those numbers do not directly relate to what is going on in a specific neighborhood, a specific type of property or a particular price range. To understand what's going on with an individual property, one cannot rely on broad market indicators. It takes an evaluation by a knowledgeable realtor who can look at the factors unique to that home.

McEneaney Associates Marketwatch  
David Gray  
571-305-1495  
[HomeswithDavid@Gmail.com](mailto:HomeswithDavid@Gmail.com) ☀

### Board Briefs

*The Board voted on the following items at the November and December meetings. No meeting was conducted in January.*

#### November 2014

Approved various requests from owners to replace windows, front doors, storm doors and French doors.

Approved owner's request to allow non-compliant porch light to remain installed. When the time comes to replace the light, a compliant one must be installed.

*Continued on page 5*

*Board Briefs from page 4*

Approved Mohn and Allen proposal to prepare audit and tax return for 2014.

Approved Environmental Enhancement’s proposal for 2015 grounds maintenance.

Approved Capital Construction’s proposal to perform property maintenance in 2015.

Approved George Smith’s snow removal proposal.

Approved Premier’s proposal to install a channel drain.

Approved Gutter King’s proposal for gutter cleaning, clog removal, and minor gutter maintenance.

Approved Brothers Concrete’s proposal for repair of identified trip hazards and stair repair.

Denied owner’s payment plan proposal and approved continued garnishment of bank account. Additionally, the Board moved to proceed with foreclosure of unit.

Approved debt write-offs for two former unit owners.

Approved request to waive violation assessments (2012 dryer vent and poly pipe), minus admin fees, on an account.

Approved request to waive late fees and violation assessments, minus admin fees, on an account.

Disapproved request to waive late and admin fees. Disapproved same owner’s reimbursement request for after-hours plumbing bill.

Approved various deck assessment payment plans submitted by owners.

Approved request to defer total deck assessment payment on a unit until 1/1/2015.

December 2015

Approved the Association’s Strategic Plan.

Approved deck assessment payment plan.

Denied request to allow non-compliant storm door to remain. Approved payment plan of violation assessments regarding same storm door.



*From the website of American Disposal Services*

## **Battery Disposal and Recycling**

We all know one of the best gifts to receive during the holidays is the hot new tech gadget. Whether it's a cellphone, laptop, tablet or remote control car, these and many other devices hold batteries that could contain dangerous and flammable chemicals.

Did you know...improper disposal of batteries is one of the leading causes of truck fires in the waste collection industry? The danger escalates when these volatile batteries join the hundreds of thousands of others like them at the landfill.

As a way to keep our roads, our trucks, our crews, and our landfills free from danger, we have provided you with a best practices list for battery disposal.

### **Rechargeable Batteries:**

The multi-use batteries contained in cellphones, laptops, computers, and other tech gadgets, should NEVER be included in your trash or your single stream recycling bin. They contain dangerous and unstable chemicals that can combust when collected by our crews.

Fortunately, they can be recycled by bringing them to a rechargeable battery drop off location, for example, your local electronics store or a battery recycling-specific storefront.

[Call2Recycle](#) has about 34,000 locations nationwide where consumers can drop off their rechargeable batteries to be recycled. The company also supplies commercial spaces with collection boxes to collect higher volumes of rechargeable batteries over time.

Note: The nearest Woodbridge Call2Recycle collection boxes are at Home Depot, Lowe’s, Best Buy and the PWC County Landfill.

***Disposal Method: Recycle at specified locations.***

*Continue on page 6*

American Disposal from page 5

**Alkaline Batteries:**

Alkaline batteries vary in size, voltage and shape but you will likely recognize them as the same ones you use in household items like flashlights and toys. They are also known as *single use* or *general purpose* batteries. In 1993, alkaline battery manufacturers stopped the production of batteries containing mercury. Because of this, it is now considered acceptable to dispose of your batteries within the household trash container.

Although they no longer contain mercury, it is still recommended that you take precautions with alkaline batteries. We recommend avoiding collecting large numbers of alkaline batteries in the same bag for disposal. Oftentimes, even when a battery *seems* dead there is still power remaining. Grouping used batteries together can bring them into contact with each other, causing safety risks.

And what about recycling alkaline batteries? Though this is an option in some areas, the ease at which it is made to dispose of alkaline batteries with regular household trash has limited the infrastructure for alkaline battery recycling. If you know of an alkaline battery recycler in your area, verify that not only are they collecting your batteries but also are recycling them properly. (In our own undercover research, we have found that despite their claims to recycle, many alkaline battery collection points will simply discard alkaline batteries in the trash.) It is important to note, alkaline batteries cannot be recycled with your single stream recycling, so make sure to keep them out of your recycling bin!

Also, NEVER dispose of alkaline batteries in fire (and always keep them away from heat and flame), as they will explode!

**Disposal Method: TRASH IS OKAY!**

**Automotive Batteries:**

Car batteries are one of the most recycled products in the nation, with a 98%-99% recycling rate. But, like rechargeable batteries, they require their own form of

recycling and cannot be included in your single stream recycling at home. Most times, old car batteries can be returned to the dealership or store where they were purchased. Many automotive and home improvement stores also have convenient drop off locations.

Wherever you choose to recycle these batteries, remember: NEVER include them in your trash or single stream recycling in order to prevent fires and hazardous chemical reactions!

**Disposal Method: Recycle at specified locations.**

Keep these tips in mind any time you find yourself with a worn out battery, or a new device! ☀

**Governing Documents**

By Charlotte Jordan



When you bought your home in Somerset, you should have received copies of all the governing documents for the community – including the rules and regulations. It’s very important to have copies of these documents and, equally important, to read them! The governing documents contain all the information you need to live compliantly in the community. Understanding and following the rules will help maintain the community’s appearance and help increase property values. For instance, to avoid possible penalties for non-compliance, you need to know the following:

- There is a particular way to install the TV/satellite dish for your unit.
- All window coverings must be white on the street side.
- Firewood must be stored in a proper rack, not in contact with the ground or building.
- Holiday decorations need to be taken down a certain number of days after the holiday.
- And more...

We, as your Board of Directors, have worked hard to

*Continued on page 7*

Governing Documents from page 6

do our part to keep Somerset well maintained. Since this is your community, your home, where your children play, and you walk your dogs (oh yes! remember to pick up after your pet), be informed by reading all the association provided materials. It's our responsibility to make these documents — the bylaws and the covenants, conditions, and restrictions — as understandable as possible. We try very hard to fulfill that obligation but if there's anything you don't understand, please let us know. We'll be glad to clarify any confusing language or give you other materials to answer your questions.

We realize that these documents often get lost among all the other papers you received at closing or you have been in your home for many years and are not sure where they are "filed", or haven't kept up with new or updated rules as they are made. If so, you can find the information by visiting your Somerset website at [www.somersetatwestridge.org](http://www.somersetatwestridge.org). Once at the website, follow these steps:

- Click the "Resources" tab.
- Click the "Choose A Category" drop down menu.
- Click "Governing Documents".

Another way we try to keep you informed is through our email blasts. Often, important community news is sent via email so the information can get out right away. Check out the website to learn how to sign up for these tidbits of important information! Of course, to enable us to meet our obligation to provide all owners with updated information from the association, it's your responsibility to provide the association with your current address and phone number (particularly non-resident owners).

Spring will be here soon and we will all be outside more often. Wouldn't it be nice to walk around our well-maintained community that is consistent in appearance? We ask your assistance in making that happen! ☀

# Condo Living

By Greg Hodgson



Do you have what it takes to be a good board or committee member? Chances are you do.

If you have a mix of some of the following traits and skills, please consider serving your community.

*Respect:* If you can give others respect and expect it in return, you can help keep discussions civil, productive and on point. We're looking for people who can lead by consensus, not by command.

*Good listener:* People want to be heard. Can you listen to board/committee members and residents with sincere interest? You may have a few ideas of your own, but everyone benefits by sharing and discussing.

*Thick skin:* Sometimes, residents—even other board/committee members—can be mean and insulting. Are you good at turning a conversation around and finding out what's really bothering people?

*Egos aside:* If you can give others credit, the board/committee will operate better as a team.

*Agenda aside:* Members who come to the board/committee looking to help only themselves are a problem. A board/committee is more productive when members don't have a personal punch list. Are you able to look after the community, not just your own interests? Are you willing to compromise?

*Skill:* An association is a business. Having board/committee members with accounting, organizational, behavior and team building backgrounds can help. Someone with a financial background, for example, might make for a good treasurer.

The ideal board/committee comprises a mix of management styles, professional skills and temperaments. If you know people with some of these traits or relevant skills, ask them if they'd be interested in joining the board or a committee. Some people

Continued on page 8

*Condo Living from page 7*

don't think about serving unless asked. If you're unsure if a board position is right for you at this time, then a committee like the Architectural Landscape Committee (ALC) would be a good way to get your feet wet in the workings of the association.

You don't have to know everything when you join, but

you should be familiar with the governing documents and the responsibilities of the job. Fellow board/committee members and the manager will help you with the transition and train you on your responsibilities, current work, projects and hot issues.

Leaders can come from different places and backgrounds. Share your knowledge and passion with your community! ☀

**Upcoming Meetings**

**ALC**

March 3  
April 7  
May 5  
June 2

**Board**

March 10  
April 14  
May 12  
June 9

Residents are welcomed and encouraged to attend Board and ALC meetings. All meetings are held at the Westridge Clubhouse beginning at 7:00 PM.

**Somerset at Westridge, A Condominium**

Management Company: Capitol Property Management  
3914 Centreville Road, Suite 300, Chantilly, VA 20151  
Manager: Stacy Panuzio; 703-707-6404; [spanuzio@capitolcorp.com](mailto:spanuzio@capitolcorp.com)  
After Hours Emergency: 703-401-1918  
Somerset Website: [www.somersetatwestridge.org](http://www.somersetatwestridge.org)  
Board of Directors: [bod@somersetatwestridge.org](mailto:bod@somersetatwestridge.org)  
Architectural Landscape Committee: [alc@somersetatwestridge.org](mailto:alc@somersetatwestridge.org)

**Westridge Swim & Racquet Club**

Management Company: Legum & Norman  
12764 Quarterhorse Lane, Woodbridge, VA 22192  
General Manager: Debbie Carter; 703-590-1600; [GM@westridgeva.org](mailto:GM@westridgeva.org)  
Westridge Website: [www.westridgeva.org](http://www.westridgeva.org)

**Additional Contacts**

Emergency Police, Fire, Ambulance: 911  
Police Non-Emergency: 703-792-6500  
Washington Gas: Emergency, 703-750-1400; Non-Emergency, 703-750-1000  
Dominion Virginia Power: 1-888-667-3000  
Towing: Dominion Wrecker Service; 703-590-0994  
Trash: American Disposal Services; 703-368-0500