

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

Preventative Maintenance: Common Areas

Last week, we started discussing items to be inspected in an annual maintenance review. This week is a continuation of the review with additional important items to your community. If you missed last week's e-newsletter or would like to re-read part one of this series, please [click here](#).

Continuing our inspection, the following items should be included:

Fencing: Whether this be wood fencing, chain link, aluminum or wrought iron, all will require some general maintenance or repair at some point. Rain can change ground contours and may cause posts to be exposed which may cause the fence to become unstable. In wood fencing, only the posts should have earth to wood contact. Otherwise the fence may be susceptible to insect infestation or rot. Check to make sure the posts are solid. Additionally, irrigation constantly hitting a fence can have an adverse effect on the life of the material. Replacing worn out or rotted sections or components can increase the useful life and hold off total replacement allowing time to accumulate needed funds for that purpose.

Check common area lighting: this can be up lighting in the landscaping, at the entrance, lining walkways or sidewalks, lights on buildings or in hallways. Replace broken fixtures and look into the possibility of replacing light bulbs with more energy efficient, brighter lighting. This will provide greater safety and lower your electric bill.

Walk the common area landscaping with your landscape contractor and make a punch list of items needing attention. The irrigation system should be checked for broken pipes, missing or broken heads, clogged valves. Splash blocks should be added where downspouts dump into landscaped areas to disperse the water better. Look for water ponding. Whether it be on walkways, or around building foundations, appropriate drainage (sock drains, drain tile pipe, French drains) will help alleviate damage to foundations and safety issues on walkways.

Have trees inspected. Trees are one of the biggest assets and should be closely inspected every 3 years by an arborist. Look for split and broken branches,

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disease and overgrowth that will require knowledgeable "corrective" care. Don't rely on your landscape contractor (unless holding Arborist designation) to provide this care. Appropriate trimming is necessary for both the health of the tree, the aesthetic detail of the property and safety.

Inspect the pool and spa with a pool maintenance contractor. Is the interior surface of the pool (plaster, marcite, pebble tec, fiberglass) in good condition? Check the coping and railings and ladders for condition and safety. Does the deck, stairs or entry into the pool pose any trip hazards? In the spring, check to ensure the pool pumps and filters have been serviced and are operating in optimum condition. In the fall, check pool heaters to make sure when you fire them up, they work.

OK - we've done a lot of looking and writing and inspecting. Springing into action takes planning. First, we need to take our inspections and compile lists for the components. Next, we need to prioritize the areas that have the most need. Check the budget to see what funds are available for what projects.

If there are jobs that can be deferred, put that list in your budget prep file for the next year. You'll need this information to prepare for that for next year. After prioritizing, obtain bids for those components that need attention. If bid specs need to be written so the bids are "apples to apples", that job will need to be assigned.

Not everything will need to be done immediately. Set a realistic schedule so your accomplishments at refurbishing coincide with the time they can best be performed. You don't want to be painting in the middle of the summer rains, or replacing sod in the middle of the winter.

Develop a maintenance plan. Define the guideline for maintenance of each component assuring professional, lasting repairs. Avoid the band-aid mentality - it will cost you dearly. Use your service providers to determine reasonable methods and costs.

Allocate funds: The best maintenance plan in the world is useless if not properly funded. Since money comes from the operating budget and increasing the

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maintenance budget is not popular, it is critical to have the plan that justifies the budget. Build the budget around the maintenance program, not vice versa.

Follow-up on the work: Have the Maintenance Committee (properly established and armed with guidelines on exactly what their job is, what their authority is and the means they use to report to the Board) or community association manager do at least quarterly inspections and put the observations in writing for the file. The report can be used as a check list for the maintenance or landscaping people doing the corrective work.

Build service continuity. Establish long term relationships with reputable service providers for continuity. Once a provider understands and provides the service you are looking for, why reinvent the wheel every time the Board changes? Check each vendor's costs at budget time to confirm that the Association is getting a competitive price.

If a preventive maintenance program is implemented, the association can not only help protect itself from unscheduled special assessments but will enhance the unit values as well. The purpose of preventive maintenance is to spend some money now to save a lot later. It is a legacy deeply appreciated by those that follow.

Next Week: Sample checklists