

# Sentinel News



*A newsletter for owners and residents*

*November 2005*

## Annual Meeting Thursday December 1

The 2005 Annual Meeting of the Sentinel of Landmark Owners Association is Thursday, December 1, at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room. Please plan to attend. If you cannot attend, please complete a proxy and give it to the Management Office. If a quorum (over 50 percent of unit owners in person or by proxy) is not present, the meeting will need to be rescheduled, which will incur unnecessary costs for the Association.

Be sure to check out the Sentinel website, at [www.sentinelcondos.org](http://www.sentinelcondos.org), for the monthly Board of Directors meeting minutes, elevator announcements, the handyman listing, general information such as the office hours and the night guard's phone number.

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*Message from the President...*

## Interior Renovation

*Where We Have Been, Where We Are,  
and... Where We Are Going?*

Dear Fellow Association Members,

Over the course of the past few months, the Board of Directors has considered the next phase of the renovation of our building's interior. As we approach our annual Association meeting, I would like to take this opportunity to recount in detail what is going on.

As you may recall, following upgrades to the lobby and the lobby-level and lower-level hallways in the fall of 2003, the Board conducted a survey to determine your views on what might come next. Different people may have taken different things from the results of that survey, but one thing was clear to me: Given a rough-estimated cost of \$500,000 – approximately \$1,800 per unit, to be raised either through a special assessment or an increase in condo fees or a combination of both – less than a majority (44%) favored a major renovation of the building's hallways at that point.

*(continued on page 2)*

# FYI

*Holiday Party Dec. 14*

**Please join your fellow residents for the annual Sentinel Holiday Party on Wednesday, December 14 starting at 6:30 p.m.**

**Food will be catered by Daks Restaurant and there will be door prizes. If you'd like to volunteer to help, please contact the Management Office.**

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### **Holiday Week office hours:**

Fri. 23 Dec.	8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Sat. 24 Dec.	8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
Mon. 26 Dec.	Closed
Tue. 27 Dec.	7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Wed. 28 Dec.	7:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Thu. 29 Dec.	7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Fri. 30 Dec.	8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Sat. 31 Dec.	8:00 a.m. – 12 noon
Mon. 2 Jan.	Closed
Tue. 3 Jan.	7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

*Message from the President (continued from page 1)*

Additionally, none of the smaller projects specified in the survey – e.g. changes to the Community Room or the Exercise Facility – received anywhere near majority support. The Board set the subject of building renovation aside, with an eye toward saving more money and revisiting the issue down the road.

Then last fall, it was suggested that another option for funding be considered: a bank loan – a fairly common practice for such projects. Because such a loan likely could be obtained at a relatively favorable interest rate, it was the consensus of the Board that options for renovation and funding be reconsidered. The Board engaged a highly regarded consultant, Design Alliance Incorporated (DA), to conduct what is called a feasibility study and to present basic options at three different price levels – high-end, medium, and low-end – for a major renovation of the hallways. DA produced the study and cost estimates of \$1.47 million, \$1.31 million and \$994,000. It should be noted with regard to those figures that the study incorporated areas of the building that we might not wish to include in the next phase, e.g. the stairwells, which can be kept on a separate maintenance schedule. It also should be noted that cost estimates could come down as a result of competition by contractors bidding on the work. Nevertheless, we are talking about a very large amount of money in any case – plus, if any of that money is to be borrowed, the interest.

So now the broad question now is, where do we go from here? The Board has made no decisions. There are far many more questions at this early stage than there are answers. And also contrary to what some think, directors are not necessarily of one mind on this. We have heard from many of you and, like you, we have different opinions. Keep in mind, we are Association members and residents just as you are, with the same concerns and the same differences in how we weigh those concerns. To offer the most obvious example of what I am talking about, I favored waiting until we had the money saved before beginning such a project. By my estimate, this would have meant a renovation of some kind in 2008-09. The Board's consensus, however, was to proceed immediately.

As I see it, on the one hand: Our hallways could use some help. The carpet is stained in some areas; the lighting is dim; and most importantly the wallpaper is in many places damaged, discolored, and peeling. Unfortunately, we no longer have any replacement paper in stock, and that particular kind of paper no longer is manufactured. The last interior renovation was undertaken in 1989, and from what I understand the average life expectancy of such a project without some sort of renovation is 15 years. Some residents have said they do not look forward to escorting their guests through the halls. Deteriorating hallways could drag down property values; renovation could enhance those values.

On the other hand: Interior renovation isn't a necessity like garage structure repairs or boiler replacements; it is the equivalent of elective surgery. It is an issue over which we have control. How much should we spend in addition to what we *have to* spend to ensure the structural integrity and efficient day-to-day operation of the building? To keep up with the necessities, our condo fees have increased 15 percent beyond the general rate of inflation over the past 15 years. In real dollars, for a two-bedroom unit such as my own, that comes to about \$875 a year. That is not an insignificant added expense! While this phenomenon is not unique to the Sentinel – every building costs more to maintain as it ages, and every condo in the area has experienced the same huge increases in expenses (particularly energy and insurance costs) over the past several years – that does not make the fee increases any easier to deal with, particularly for those among us whose budgets were tight to begin with. Interior renovation obviously will add significantly to that bill. In enhancing the value of our common property, we should be mindful not to shred family budgets. Sharply increased operating costs could drag down property values.

I should take a moment here to say there is some good news on the money front. The Association owns a unit in the building (originally a residence for the building engineer; we now use it as a rental property), and the Board plans to sell that. We estimate that the minimum value of this unit is \$250,000.

*(continued on page 3)*

*Message from the President (continued from page 2)*

In addition, there are very interesting possibilities for arrangements with communications companies to place satellite antennas on our roof in exchange for thousands of dollars in rental income. By one estimate, we could make as much as \$240,000 a year from this: a huge chunk of change! Combine the income from the sale of the Association's unit and the antenna space rental and we could have approximately \$500,000 or so in one year that could be put toward renovation. The Board is committed to exploring the options here.

That said, we are still looking at a significant expense, and there is no ideal option for raising the money. A bank loan would provide whatever money we would need to supplement whatever other monies we can put toward it, but of course repayment would also include thousands of dollars in interest. A special assessment would negate the need for interest payments, but it would take a 2/3 vote of the Association membership to approve. It should be noted here, too, that: 1) a special assessment would present a hardship to some of our members; 2) most of those we have heard from to date are very cool to the idea, to say the least; and 3) an important selling point for the Sentinel in the real estate market is that we have never imposed a special assessment. Another option, of course, is waiting until we have the money to implement whatever plan we approve – possibly with an added condo fee increase to get us there faster and put more money in the bank over the years for future renovations. Or we could do some combination of any or all of the above.

So as you can see, we have some big decisions to make. At this point, I think it would be helpful to step back and explain how I see my role in all of this and how it fits into the bigger picture of how we proceed. Essentially, I wear two hats. First, as a member of the Board of Directors, I listen and learn and make my own judgments. But as Board president, chosen by the other directors, I am also an implementer of Board policy. So, while my preference as a director was to save more money with an eye toward a major renovation in 2008-09, my job as president/board chairman is to oversee a process that moves us toward completing a renovation sooner if that continues to be the Board's goal.

And that is where we are today. We have a feasibility study, which is essentially an outline. Before proceeding with a renovation, we would need to decide many issues in terms of both design and funding, including: which areas of the building would we renovate? What are the advantages/disadvantages/costs of various materials? Will the cost be as great as the feasibility study estimates? And most importantly, whatever the cost, how do we finance it? Speaking for myself, I would like to see the most durable, most easily maintained, most easily cleaned materials possible used. The Board will have to decide whether it might be worth greater expense for some materials which promise to be longer-lasting. To cite one specific example: I think wallpaper is a mistake. It is too easily damaged, too difficult to fix, and eventually we might run out of replacement stock without any way to obtain more – the situation we are in today! We as a Board have not yet begun to decide these issues.

I realize this has been a particularly long message. But when I contemplated what I was going to say on the subject at this year's Association Meeting, I was reminded of what historian Shelby Foote said when asked why his tome on the Civil War ran three volumes. He answered that if he was going to tell the story at all, he wanted to tell it as completely as possible. Basically that is what I have tried to do here. You now know essentially as much as I do.

I am looking forward to this year's Association meeting – **please mark you calendars: Thursday, December 1, 7:00 p.m.** – where we will discuss this further. You are welcome, and indeed encouraged, to ask questions and to express your views. I hope that if you do have questions or comments, you will attend. In my judgment, this will be the most important annual meeting we have had in my 15 years here. Your views will influence how the Board proceeds – as it should be! Even if you have made those views known to us before, I invite you to do so again, as the whole Association needs to hear them.

Sincerely,  
Bruce Wilmot  
November 2005

*The next Board of Directors meeting will be on Tuesday, December 6, at 7:00 p.m.*

## Rules and Regulations Revised

Over the past year, the Board of Directors has conducted a review of all of the Sentinel's Rules and Regulations. Most of the revisions adopted as a result of that review were minor corrections or clarifications. Occasionally, however, a substantive change was made. Copies of the revised Rules and Regulations will be available online or at the Management Office beginning December 15. Everyone is responsible for knowing the rules, so please review them at your earliest convenience.

<http://www.sentinelcondos.org/rules.html>

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### *In-Unit Plumbing Services Available through the Office*

A few months ago the Board approved a plan to enable the Sentinel maintenance staff to perform in-unit plumbing work for the Association. Many residents have already had work completed within their units. If you have a leaking faucet or malfunctioning plumbing, please contact Susan or Mia in the Management Office and they will schedule the work and notify you of the anticipated charges. Please do not stop maintenance staff in the building to make requests as all work orders must come from the office. All work will be performed during normal business hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; no work will be done on weekends or holidays.

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### *Holiday Toy Drive Underway*

The annual holiday toy drive continues through Friday, December 16. Please donate new unused and unwrapped toys for children of all ages: dolls, sports equipment, blocks, trains, trucks and cars, games and puzzles, cameras and film, books, arts and crafts materials, and infant/toddler items. Please bring your donations to the Management Office. The drive is sponsored by Community Partners for Children, who will also accept cash donations at P.O. Box 2738, Alexandria, VA 22301; phone 703-683-1012. (CPC is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, CFC/UW No. 8362.)

October 6, 2005

Sentinel of Landmark Owners / Board of Directors:

My name is Jonathan Shinn and I currently live in Unit #1005. The purpose of this letter is to formally introduce myself and submit my name to the owners of the Sentinel of Landmark as a candidate for the Board of Directors.

Originally from Houston, I spent nearly all of my years in Texas. I attended the University of North Texas and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music Performance. While earning my degree, I also worked full-time for Gap Inc. as an assistant store manager for three years. In my free time I would teach music lessons at local public schools and perform for various performing groups in the Dallas/Fort Worth region. Upon graduating, I began my service in the United States Army and was stationed at Fort Myer here in Arlington, Virginia. Nearly three years later I am still serving in the United States Army Band – "Pershing's Own" – and have taken permanent residence here.

As an owner at the Sentinel of Landmark, I am interested in working closely with the Association as a member of the Board of Directors. Having been to nearly every meeting since moving here a year ago, I've learned so much about what an important role the Board of Directors plays in the management of a large community such as this. Management skills, teamwork, and precision are crucial. It would be an honor for me to be able to bring my skills to the table and serve this community. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Shinn

#### *Management Office Note*

*S-C Management is still interviewing qualified applicants for the Building Manager's position. In the meantime, Susan Craddock-Allnutt will continue as our interim manager. Once a candidate is chosen, Susan will stay for a period for training purposes.*

# Some Reminders from the Management Office

## *Parking*

Recent inspections found numerous vehicles parked in the parking structures without displaying the proper Sentinel parking stickers or hanging placards. Some vehicles also have expired state and city tags and inspection stickers. This practice is in violation of the Parking and Towing Policy. All vehicles parked in the Sentinel of Landmark parking facilities must display either a Sentinel parking sticker or mirror hanger. **Vehicles parked in the unassigned spaces on the West side upper parking deck will be towed if they do not display a Sentinel parking permit.**

## *Elevators*

Please do not prop the elevator doors open with packages or other objects, as this can cause damage to the elevator mechanisms. Also, please remember that some residents live directly across from the elevators, and they are subjected to noises that other residents don't have to cope with, such as loud conversations, elevator doors banging and beeping when propped open, and the sound of the alarm bells when activated. Please be courteous when waiting for the elevator, especially during the evening hours.

Many grocery or variety stores sell wheeled folding carts that you can use to take parcels to your unit.

## *Pets*

All pets must be registered with the Management Office, even if they are visiting. Make sure you provide a current copy of City of Alexandria licensing and rabies information for our files. All dogs must be on leash while walking anywhere outside of your unit within the community. The City has a leash law requirement as well that dogs must be leashed at all times.

## *Guard Escort*

If you need an escort through the building in the evening, call the security guard at 571-214-5207, or you may call the office number, 703-823-1951, and the answering service will page the guard. You may also go to the front entry system and dial 000 to reach the answering service. The guard is on the premises every night from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.

## *Door-to-door Solicitations...*

...of any type are prohibited with the exception of notices from Management.

## *Trash Room Usage*

Please do NOT place trash bags on the floor of the trash rooms. All trash must be placed in plastic bags and tied shut. All trash bags must be placed in the trash chute, or taken to one of the main trash rooms at the loading docks if they will not fit in the chute. Do not leave anything on the floor of the trash rooms. Trash left on the floors will create unwanted odors and attract bugs. All newspapers and recycling materials are to be taken to the receptacles in the loading dock areas and not left on the trash room floors.

## *Balconies*

There are still some balconies that have inappropriate balcony furnishings and are cluttered. Balconies are not to be used as storage areas. Also, please remember that barbecuing of any type is prohibited on balconies. If you have a grill stored on your balcony it must be removed.

Also, if you must smoke on the balcony, please refrain from throwing cigarette butts or matches off the balcony. We have had several incidents of small brush fires near the building which could have been very dangerous if they had not been caught early.

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## **Sentinel News – November 2005**

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