

MERIFIELD ACRES NEWSLETTER

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Question. Do the young members of your household read these newsletters? I know, they're "boring". That's the answer I'd get from my highschool age granddaughter, but what better way is there to introduce them to civics, government, and democracy in action? These subjects are taught in our schools, but here is an opportunity to make "that dumb stuff in text books" come alive. To make this a little less boring, I've inserted a grammatical error and two misspellings. See if your children can find these errors and then reward them appropriately if they can. I'll provide the answers on our website home page in a couple weeks. Watch for it.

Service District Status. Signed petitions are coming in Verrry slowly. We've received some 125 to date. If your petition form got mixed in with the Christmas mail, please find it, sign it, and send it to MALA.

Budget, Budget, Budget. The December Board of Directors meeting addressed and approved the MALA budget for FY2000 (see page 4). The amounts requested by the various MALA activities (Maintenance and upkeep, Roads, Administration, and Community Activities), totaled almost \$8,000 more than our anticipated revenue from assessments and administrative fees. In previous years we probably would have levied a "special assessment" to "balance the budget", but this is no longer possible. As all of you know from personal experience, an out-of-balance budget is no budget at all. We MUST find ways to live within our means and this means reducing expenditures. After much discussion, we opted to eliminate the Security Patrol line from the Manager's contract (\$3,744), and we reduced the amount allocated for contract paving by \$4,145 (from \$14,000). Can we live with this? Of course we can. We have to. Do we like it? Of course not. What's the impact of these reductions? On security, I think the impact will be minimal, provided that we reactivate the Community Watch Program (and this means that we who reside in Merifield Acres on a permanent basis will have to contribute an hour or so a month to this effort). Will the reduction in contract paving cause us to see an impact in the next year? Not likely. But if we have to continue this practice of reducing this element in future years (which is the largest element in the MALA budget except for mowing and general road maintenance), we will see a marked decline in the quality of our roads. This, in a nutshell, is why we are striving so hard to find a solution to our road maintenance funding problem. One Board member argued strenuously for a campaign seeking voluntary contributions to solve our deficit problem and I agreed to include this suggestion in this newsletter. All voluntary contributions will be gratefully accepted. But having said this, I am firmly convinced that the only permanent solution to our finance problems is two-fold, to reduce expenditures and to get a "service district" for roads established.

Covenants. As I promised in our last newsletter, here is another chapter on covenants. Let's call this one "Enforceability". While our covenants lay out rules to govern the smooth operation of our community, these

covenants are notoriously weak in terms of enforceability. It is true that legal action against a property owner by an individual or by an organization such as MALA is possible, going to court requires prior written notification, lawyers, etc. This action is suitable for habitual and egregious violations of our covenant provisions, but what about the person who violates the rule that says open burning is not allowed because it puts all of us in jeopardy. The fire is long out by the time the legal process can be completed and the judge may well turn a blind eye to the violation that did not result in property damage. Of course, the violator is liable for court costs and attorneys' fees. Are there better ways of enforcing our rules? I'd like to hear any ideas you might have on the subject. And speaking of rules, read on.

Property Owners' Association Act. We are in the process of an extensive review of the Virginia Property Owners' Association Act and MALA's administrative practices to ensure that we are in full compliance with the basic statute that governs the administration of homeowner's associations. After receiving an interim report of this review at the last Board of Directors meeting, the Board concluded that a number of the troublesome problems we cope with might be made to go away if there were a well-publicized compilation of the rules and regulations that we need to ensure that Merifield continues to be community we all want it to be. To this end we have begun a process that will lead to the formation of a representative group of Merifield Acres property owners tasked with developing such a compilation. Of necessity, this will be a somewhat lengthy and deliberate process so don't look for immediate results. It's more important to do this right than it is to do it fast.

The composition of the group conducting this effort will be of critical importance. We need clear-thinking property owners representing the several areas in Merifield, so, if you would be willing to assist in this effort, please contact me or Roger Greenhalgh. We may not be able to accommodate everyone who expresses a willingness to participate because a committee that is too large is not effective. If you're wondering if we really need to do this, finish reading this newsletter and do a quick count of the topics treated that are rule-related.

Dogs, Dogs, Dogs. Our four-footed friends are still causing hate and discontent in our community. But unlike a number of other problems that we have, this one is fixable and in a relatively inexpensive way. Listed below are three companies that sell electronic fences (this is just a sampling; there are many others out there as well). Check out "electronic fence" with your web browser. There are a wide variety of "electronic fences" that range in price from \$125 to \$280 with most under \$200. Most come with a 30 day money back - no questions asked - guarantee and those I looked at also had a 1 year warranty. This is such a good deal that I'm almost tempted to buy one of these fences and I don't even own a dog!

Radio Fence of Virginia 1-888-544-3647

Radio Systems Corp. E-Mail pets@canhomes.com

Internet www.canhomes.com/pets/index.htm

Bolts and Bytes Outdoor Containment Systems; 1-888-564-7555

Internet: www.covenantpromotions.com/pets

Litter. There has been a noticeable improvement in the appearance of our public areas, thanks to the efforts of a number of our members who are dedicated trash picker-uppers. Keep up the good work.

Security. Even though we haven't had any recent reports of mischief or vandalism, it is still a good practice to keep your neighbors informed when you plan to be away for a period of time so they can keep an eye out for any unusual activity. Similarly, ask someone in the community to give you a regular phone call to check on your well-being, particularly if you're living by yourself. You won't be imposing and for that matter, the finest compliment you can pay a friend is to ask that person to do something for you.

Community Activities. The Board has been, is, and will be discussing possible activities that have the potential for enhancing community involvement. We would welcome any suggestions. A phone call, E-Mail, or note to me will be appreciated. Apropos of this, one member suggested square dancing. If there is sufficient numbers of interested dosey-doers among us, perhaps this might be something you would be interested in doing. Give Pat Wells a call/E-Mail if you're interested.

Road Speeds. Excessive road speed is still a problem. Youthful drivers seem to get most of the blame but some of us oldsters also need to slow down to make our roads safe for pedestrians and joggers. And if someone yells at you to slow down, don't flip that person a "bird" as one young woman driver did to a Board member recently.

Administrative Assistance/Community Service. We frequently need help in collating and stuffing envelopes for mailings such as this newsletter. If you can spare a couple hours from time-to-time to assist, give Pat Wells a call. In the same vein, some of our young people are required to perform community service as a part of their school, church, scouting, or similar activities. Your Association can frequently find useful chores to satisfy these needs.

Internet Homepage. Visit our new internet website; www.kerrlake.com/mala. Wanda and Jim Fuller of Lake Country Online have been most generous and helpful in getting us up and running. Your comments/suggestions for improvement on this (and any other MALA-related matter) are always welcome.

Lakefest. Lakefest will be the weekend of July 21-23, 2000. Mark your calenders now.