

# MERIFIELD ACRES NEWSLETTER

Quarterly

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**FINANCIAL CONCERNS** - Merifield Acres Landowners Association Board of Directors is faced with an ever-present and growing problem of insufficient funds to maintain the quality of our subdivision. Our expenses in 1994, typical of recent years, were approximately as follows:

administrative costs	\$ 900
capital projects	7,300
insurance/legal/misc fees	1,700
misc materials/supplies	1,800
repairs/electricity	900
resident manager	31,900
roads improvement/repair	23,900
taxes	<u>1,200</u>
TOTAL	\$ 69,600

Administrative expenses included the cost of mailings, upkeep of office equipment, printing, office supplies, etc. Major capital expenses this year were the purchase of a wood chipper for use by the resident manager in tree/brush removal and cleanup, and the cost of materials for replacement of street signs throughout the community. Insurance and other fees include costs of bonding for the president and treasurer as well as general liability and fire insurance and certain court and legal fees incurred in carrying out MALA's business. The miscellaneous materials and supplies include items needed for maintenance, from posts to repair fences to seed and fertilizer to keep the roadsides planted. The item of repairs/electricity was for the cost of electricity for lights at the entrance gate and repair of those lights destroyed by vandalism. The resident manager's contract provides for his work in mowing, snow removal, tree and brush removal, security patrols and various tasks for the general upkeep and maintainence of the area. The roads improvement item covers the cost of a paving contractor to resurface and repair the major damage to our roads. Finally, the tax item covers the cost of state and federal taxes and their preparation.

Regular assessments were about \$48,700 in 1994, and \$3000 of interest from emergency accounts along with the special assessment provided the necessary funds to allow us to meet our obligations. Even if the assessments were increased to the level of the cap imposed by the restrictive covenants, the assessments would only increase by an amount to bring the total from that source to \$53,500. So, we have the dilemma that our available income from assessments and other normal sources is not able to meet our present level of expenditures. As property owners in Merifield Acres, we must make a decision as to whether we are willing to pay higher assessments and/or donations and maintain our community at its present level, or keep the current level of assessments and support and live with the consequences.

The Board is studying means of saving funds and cutting back on expenses wherever possible. This is evident in the discussion in the next item in the Newsletter. However, in the foreseeable future, the effect of taking no action to improve MALA's income could become fairly apparent. Cuts in administrative costs could result in less communication by doing away with our Newsletter. Elimination of capital projects could result in our not being able to purchase the buffer land needed in the vicinity of our entrance gate to protect our community from the possible location of a trailer park or some other less desirable neighbor there. It might preclude our building of a maintenance shed and area needed to securely house equipment and supplies, or providing some other facility identified as desirable in future years. Reducing the dollar amount of the contract for a resident manager would result in less frequent mowings in the summer months, the overall reduction of maintenance and upkeep following snow and wind storms, and a general reduction in the quality of our community. Finally, reduction of expenses for roads maintenance will lead to poorer quality roads throughout Merifield Acres.

If roads are allowed to deteriorate with potholes and mowing is reduced so the community looks rundown, property values will decline and the area will be less attractive to newcomers. Banks will be less likely to make loans for new building in the area, and overall the community will suffer. We do not believe this is what our present landowner membership wants. Please, let us hear your thoughts on how to remedy this critical situation.

SECURITY POLICY - The number of homes in Merifield Acres occupied full time and part time has increased over the past several years to such an extent that MALA cannot provide ample on-site security inspection on a regular basis. The cost would be prohibitive. Under these circumstances, the Board feels the best protection can be achieved by adopting a community-watch type of system in which property owners should notify neighbors when they plan to be absent and ask the neighbor to check their property from time to time and notify the proper persons (local sheriff or the property owner himself) of any problems. In going to this type of system, it is planned to reduce the number of hours for the Resident Manager devoted to security to only those hours needed to maintain a passive security on his part in observing and addressing any situations occurring during his daily work schedule within the subdivision. This should free some of his hours for other important work. He would no longer be the point-of-contact for individual property owners who want their home observed while they are absent. Notice of this new policy is being given now so property owners can be planning ahead to have it fully effective in the next six months. Please, let us hear your thoughts on other means which might make our community a safer place to live and own property.

ROADS IMPROVEMENT - Because of inadequate funds, road repair and upgrade scheduled for early summer will be limited to upgrade with asphalt on Lewis Drive between Occoneechee and Lakepoint; to rebuild as much of Meriwether Drive as we can; to add additional asphalt to Lakepoint Drive at Hollyfield and at the steepest hill on Merifield Drive; and to make various repairs on Oak Run, Center Court, Hazelnut, West Point, and on several circles as funds allow. Street name signs have been completed; "STOP AHEAD" signs are planned for several sites. Critical tree removal will commence to allow fire truck access to all areas in Merifield Acres. The Resident Manager will apply the hours devoted to this safety effort of the Forestry Committee to pay off the cost of the wood chipper under an agreement whereby he will eventually own the chipper outright.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS - The items mentioned below cover a wide range of unrelated subjects which need to be brought to your attention for your information and as reminders from past discussions.

The duties of the Treasurer have become very time-consuming and are more than should be expected of an officer not paid for his services. This work requires not only keeping records of the income and expenses of the Association, but also keeping abreast of all the purchases and sales of property within Merifield Acres as well as the status of assessment payments and taking action to insure payment of delinquent assessments. Therefore, the Board of Directors deems it necessary to add an Assistant Treasurer to the officers of the Board to assist the Treasurer in carrying out the duties of that office. This addition will require definition of the role of the Assistant Treasurer and its inclusion in the By-Laws of the Association.

As a matter of better security, property owners are reminded to display auto stickers on their vehicles identifying them as property owners. These may be secured from Merlin Huff (804-374-9435) or from Dennis Hayes (804-374-2083).

Residents planning to install TV dishes are reminded to get permission from the Architectural Committee for these installations. If located in the front yards, these should be screened with appropriate plantings.

The walking trail along part of Lakepoint Drive has been a benefit for joggers and walkers in the area. However, we remind all who walk or run in that area where traffic is heavy to use the path as a safety measure. Plans are to improve the path by killing the grass and upgrade of the gravel bed as necessary.

Please let us hear your thoughts regarding the financial and security matters discussed above, and address your written comments to: Margaret White, President, MALA, 63 Cheverly Road, Clarksville, Virginia 23927.