

Dear Fellow Homeowners,

Time seems to be flying. It seems like yesterday when some very impressive Holiday lights and decorations adorned our neighborhood. Now we are living with the extremes that winter in Tidewater Virginia brings, a few days of freezing cold and the threat of precipitation, and the next with beautiful warm weather. This makes it tough on our yards since the poor plants can't figure out what season it is, but somehow they survived the "blizzard" we had in January. It won't be long and we'll be planting, fertilizing and mowing our yards again.

Our annual Homeowners Association meeting is in April. This is when we elect the new Board of Directors. Most of your current Board has served at least 2 terms, so that is a plus for experience. However, it is important to have new ideas, personalities and capabilities to keep the Board fresh. I became involved because I wanted to make sure that common sense prevailed in the application of rules and how decisions were being made. This is your chance. Please let us know if you are interested in being a Board member. Even if you are not, we need most of you there for the meeting. In the past, it's taken up to 3 meetings to have the quorum required by the Association bylaws to have an election. It would be good to conduct the election in one meeting.

Speaking of rules, one thing concerns me is how often we hold tribunals, or send out letters to hold tribunals for continued infractions of the architectural guidelines. We try to be reasonable about enforcement since we are homeowners too. You may observe a violation of the guidelines and ask the Board or UPA about the incident, but by law we cannot discuss your neighbor's infraction with you. We can discuss yours and help you better understand the guidelines. In the event of a violation, there is a process we follow designed to respect the rights and privacy of the residents while still bringing about compliance. We don't have a SWAT team to make sure your grass is mowed and your trash can is put away, but we do have Tiffani Lucas of UPA who does a very good job at being consistently fair as we try to maintain our neighborhood. How our neighborhood looks impacts property values, and our quality of life. That is important for those who need to sell their homes. For the rest of us, it is important for our peace of mind. It is your responsibility to keep your property trimmed, your trash can behind the house except on collection day, and to be aware that there is an approval process for changes related to the exterior of your property. In the spring, mowing and trimming will begin and it will be a good time to pressure wash your homes. Many of our residents are deployed or at sea, so help each other out. That's what neighbors do. As long as you properly maintain your property, you should never receive an infraction notice. I hate tribunals. None of us like to hold them and to fine our neighbors for something that can be easily corrected.

The architectural guidelines are being revised based on the Board's experience over the past several years. We desire input from each of you. I believe that many of the guidelines need to be streamlined, some rules eliminated, and a few strengthened. We have some very smart people working on the guidelines; however, they need input from you. You live here. What would you like to see? Please forward your suggestions through Tiffani Lucas at UPA.

We are continuing with AAA Pool Service again this year. You will notice in the minutes that we are required to install new drain covers for the protection of pool users and to comply with the newest laws related to the pool. We are trying a different landscape company this next year. The previous company did a good job, but we think we can get a better value with this new company. One of our drainage ponds has a functioning aerator, which will help minimize the mosquitoes and other insects, and keep down algae growth. Eventually we should have aerators in all the ponds as money and easement permissions allow. Finally we will be doing some improvements at the playground in the spring when weather permits.

As always, safety in the neighborhood is a concern. I have heard from several homeowners about vehicles speeding in the neighborhood and people running stop signs. I've had to do evasive maneuvers to avoid vehicles whose drivers ignore a stop sign near my home. There is not a lot of maneuvering room and frequently there are people (often children) using or crossing the road at this particular stop sign. NOTHING is so urgent that you need to speed through the neighborhood and run stop signs.

The Homeowner Association had to raise the monthly fee this year in order to meet expenses. We've worked hard over the past several years to keep cost under control so we can maintain the same monthly rate, but expenses have risen as our facilities age and need repair and upkeep, and as our service providers have to raise their rates to meet their expenses. Raising the fees was a necessary decision.

Hopefully we will see all of you at the annual meeting. Please get us your thoughts to help us make Kempton Park the neighborhood where you want to live.

Ray Laffoon
President, Kempton Park Homeowners Association