

# R E P O R T

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## *Message from the President*

*By: Bruce Tobis*

**G**reetings River Piners. By now you have received the December mailing from McShane Management, which includes the notice that the Association expenses (and your dues) will increase by 3.5% when we start the new year. This is a greater increase than we have been accustomed to for the last decade or so, and deserves some explanation. One unusual line item on this year's budget estimate is \$6650 for additional salt. This is a provisional purchase based on the recommendation of our snow removal contractor, due to expected difficulty in obtaining salt later in the winter. The expense is provisional in that we won't be paying for what we don't use, but for the purposes of planning we must admit that we may have to use (and spend) all of it. Furthermore, the budget was put together and approved by the Board before a decision was made on the contract for next year's lawn maintenance. So the draft budget had to accommodate the highest of the lawn maintenance bids that were being considered. Without these two special considerations the budget for operating expenses would have showed roughly a 1% increase. Much of the rest of the overall increase is due to an increase in the amount of our transfer to the reserve fund.

At its November meeting, the Board made the decision to award the lawn maintenance contract for next year to Greenlawn. This decision to stay with Greenlawn, after the difficulties with lawn care that we experienced during 2018, was made only after soliciting bids from a half dozen other lawn contractors and interviewing the one other contractor who seemed capable and was competitively priced. Also at the November meeting, the Board approved the purchase of a

portable, post-mounted, speed indicator, to give drivers feedback on how fast they are driving. Both of these topics are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter.

In the past few weeks we've seen several snowfalls earlier in the season than we are used to, and the unusual weather has interfered with work at River Pines. Both the scheduled November gutter cleaning and the lawn service fall cleanup were delayed, and some new tree plantings are being postponed until next Spring. We also lost the opportunity to do our usual asphalt crack sealing.

Over the past year or so we've been discussing some proposed changes to our Bylaws. At the Fall Association meeting, co-owners expressed a strong preference for voting for each individual change, rather than a single vote for the entire package of eight changes. (That is, the changes that require co-owner approval. Correcting typographical errors, formatting changes, and removing logical inconsistencies do not require a vote by the co-owners.) The Bylaws changes will again be presented to the co-owners for a vote at the next Association meeting, in May 2019. The text of the changes will be identical to that already seen, but the ballot will allow for voting on each item separately. If there are any further explanations needed of the reasons for the changes, or their implications, please ask and your concerns will be addressed in a future newsletter; we will have at least one, and probably two, more editions of this newsletter prior to the Spring meeting. In this issue, you will find articles that give some background information on the proposed limit on the number of rental units, and an explanation of the conflict between lateness and delinquency that needs to be corrected.

## ***Garage Lights***

**F**or some time we've been anticipating the change to new light fixtures on the garages. Quite a few co-owners have also ordered the new fixtures for installation (at co-owner expense) at their porch, patio, and deck locations. According to our latest information, delivery of the new fixtures should occur just about when you receive this newsletter. Installation will therefore have to wait until Spring.

## ***New Site Manager***



**I** know many of you have recently seen or spoken with Larry Bliss, the new site manager here at River Pines. We thought we would give you a brief look at who he is. Larry is a retired architect who has been involved in the planning, design and development of a numerous range of building types throughout his career. He worked for a number of architects in the metropolitan area and also spent 25 years as a building designer and architect for General Motors, Argonaut AEC. He has resided here in the Farmington Hills area for the past 37 years. He is most eager to help us keep River Pines functioning at it's highest standards. If you would like to contact Larry, he can be reached at (248) 767-5093.

### **River Pines Board of Directors**

<b>Bruce Tobis</b>	<b>President</b>
<b>Mark Laktzian</b>	<b>Vice President</b>
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#### **McShane and Associates**

**6230 Orchard Lake Road, Suite 200**

**West Bloomfield, MI 48322**

**Phone: 248-855-6492**

**Winter Hours 9 am—4 pm**

**For Emergencies after 4:00 p.m. call: 248-456-0233**

## ***Welcome New Co-Owners***

*By: The Welcoming Committee*



**R**iver Pines would like to welcome to our neighborhood the following new co-owners. Please update your latest directory, with the information below.

***Greg & Virginia Grodzicki***  
***21860 River Ridge Trail***

***Maurice & Bridget Bronson***  
***21960 River Pines Drive***

***Marilyn Briegel***  
***21755 River Ridge Trail***

***Queonja Dudley***  
***22150 River Ridge Trail***

***Timothy Karna***  
***35086 Red Pine Drive***

## ***Salt Buckets Available***

**I**f you are in need of additional salt due to isolated icy spots, or want the added safety, the Association provides 5 gallon buckets of salt that you can keep. Should you have a bucket that's empty and need more, call Larry Bliss (248) 767-5093 or Greg Nothnagel (734) 323-7594. Note that there are now salt buckets at each of the mail stations.

## ***Winterization***

**I**f you are planning on leaving for any extended period of time during the winter months please follow these tips to avoid pipes from freezing;

- Shut of the main water supply and drain the pipes
- Have a neighbor check in daily; or have a smartphone app that remotely checks a digital measurement of the condo interior are temperature; or any other idea that is as effective

## *When are your dues due?*

According to our Bylaws as they are today, each co-owner's monthly assessment is due on the first day of the month. The co-owner is considered to be in default if payment is not received by that day, up until such time as payment is made. Our late fee, however, is assessed on the tenth day of the month; furthermore, to encourage co-owners to make use of payment by automatic withdrawal, the automated withdrawals are made on the tenth day of the month – as late as possible without incurring a late charge. That leaves us with an awkward situation: all co-owners who are paying their dues by auto-withdrawal – which is perfectly reliable – are in technical default for the first nine days of every month.

This situation, created by having the default date different from the date at which late fees begin, makes no sense. The Board has chosen to correct this by shifting the default date to the tenth of the month. A co-owner is not assessed a late charge until they are in default, and is not in default if a late charge is not applicable. There was some concern expressed at the Fall Association meeting that this change somehow eliminated the 10-day grace period for paying dues, but that is not so. Under the old system, pay your dues by the tenth and everything is ok; under the new system, pay your dues by the tenth and everything is ok. The only difference is bureaucratic: under the old system, pay your dues by auto withdrawal and you're in default at the beginning of every month; under the new system, pay your dues by auto withdrawal and everything is ok.

Since this change has no effect on the rights or responsibilities of co-owners, it does not require co-owner approval, and so there is no need for a vote on this one.

## *Limiting River Pines Rentals*

Over the past year or so we've been discussing some proposed changes to our Bylaws. The Bylaws as currently written place no restriction on the number of units at River Pines that can be rented, and one of the proposed changes is to adopt such a limit.

The proposed limit is 15, or just under 5% of the total. This was questioned at the Fall Association meeting, and this article is intended to give some background behind the number that was chosen.

The duty of the Association is to preserve the value of River Pines. To the current Board it seemed fair to assume that residents who are owners are more likely to be attentive to the long-term maintenance of our community. So the limit should be small, but not so small as to cause any immediate inconvenience. The requirement to keep track of rental units is relatively recent, and so we have only a few years of records, but the largest number of units that was rented at any one time was seven (currently, it is six). The number 15 seemed like a reasonable choice. It was the commitment to maintaining the residential nature of River Pines that also inspired the proposed addition to the Bylaws of not allowing any person or business to own more than one unit at River Pines that is rented; though a few individuals may see a condo at River Pines as an investment, that is not the purpose of River Pines.

There are also objective considerations that could go into this choice. For example, in the extreme case when more than 50% of the units are rentals, the property would be considered rental property for insurance purposes, and mortgage financing would be problematic. Since changes to the Bylaws require a 2/3 majority of co-owners, having more than 33% of the units owned by absentee landlords would make such a situation irreversible. Even at about 20% of the units being rented, conventional lenders may get nervous and treat a loan for a purchase in River Pines as higher risk. These situations, though not likely at River Pines due to its large size, are part of the motivation to have a numerical limit in our governing documents.

## *Smoke Detectors*

Safety is an important concern for all of us. At the Fall Association meeting, a co-owner reported an unusual incident: a neighbor had confessed to disconnecting the smoke detectors in their unit. This notification creates an unusual situation, and prompts the question of whether the Association should react to the information. Since it is clearly preferable to have working smoke detectors in all units, would the Association be liable if it is aware of a lack of detectors and fails to act?

At the Fall meeting we had nothing conclusive to offer, but since then we've consulted our attorney and our insurance agent. According to our insurance agent, there is no insurance liability involved when a co-owner deliberately disconnects their smoke detectors. Disconnecting the smoke detectors, however, creates a potentially unsafe condition. As such, the action violates Article VI, Section 13 of the our Bylaws, which requires that each co-owner maintain their unit in a safe condition. In terms of our rules, this is sufficient cause for the Association to take action to address this problem. Our attorney suggested that a letter to the co-owner asking that the problem be corrected, and an acknowledgment by the co-owner that the problem has been corrected, would be adequate.

After deliberation, the Board decided against sending a letter to the co-owner, preferring instead to discuss the situation with the entire River Pines community through this newsletter article. We also take this opportunity to encourage co-owners to make sure that their smoke detectors are in working order, and to note that it is recommended that smoke detectors be replaced when they are 10 years old.

## *Grounds Information*

As many of you know, we had issues with landscaping during the summer. Our landscaping contractor was not able to obtain the same foreign workers he had used for many years and was required to train an entire new crew. Towards the end of the season, he made significant progress in getting back to the standards we had been used to for many years. After significant discussion and review of several proposals from new contractors, the Board made the decision to stay with the present contractor, Greenlawn. He has been informed that we expect that next year the performance of his crews will return to the standard we have been used for the past few years.

Many of you have probably noticed the white areas on the lawn (not the early snow). This was due to the treatment for bent grass. The bent grass is killed with a chemical treatment and then the area is raked and re-seeded. By the next spring, the grass will look normal. We have completed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the complex with the last section to be completed next fall. Attached are some pictures of areas that have been treated.

Chemical treatment kills bent grass, leaving areas looking white.



Area is then raked and seeded.

# Winter Holiday Safety

Winter holidays are a time for families and friends to get together. That also means a greater risk for fire. Following a few simple tips will ensure a happy and fire-safe holiday season.



## HOLIDAY DECORATING

- Be careful with holiday decorations. Choose decorations that are flame resistant
- Keep lit candles away from decorations and other things that can burn
- Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read manufacturer's instructions for number of light strands to connect
- Use clips, not nails, to hang lights so the cords do not get damaged
- Keep decorations away from windows and doors

## HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING

- Test your smoke alarms and tell guests about your home fire escape plan
- Keep children and pets away from lit candles
- Keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet
- Stay in the kitchen when cooking on the stovetop
- Ask smokers to smoke outside. Remind smokers to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them
- Provide large, deep ashtrays for smokers. Wet cigarette butts with water before discarding

## REMINDER

Don't forget to blow out lit candles when you leave the room or to go bed. Turn off all the string lights and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.



## FACTS



More than a third of home decoration fires are started by candles.



Forty-two percent of decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source

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