Report of the Strategic Planning Committee

Approved by the Strategic Planning Committee
October 6, 2009

Presented to the Executive Board
October 15, 2009

Committee Membership:

James R. Abbott, Chair
  Lila Achuff
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Introduction

The Strategic Planning Committee (hereinafter the “Committee”) is a committee formed by the Executive Board (hereinafter the “Board”) of the Darlington Woods Condominium Association (hereinafter the “Association”). The purpose of the committee was to assist in “planning and determining long and short term goals [of] the association, its facilities and property” and to facilitate “full and open communication with all members.” (Board Resolution creating Committee)

The Committee has met for more than 25 hours beginning on November 6, 2008. In completing its charge, the Committee established a mission statement for the Association.

Thereafter the Committee set out to review all aspects of the community. The Strategic Planning Committee has divided up the focus areas into the following major categories:

1. Building Maintenance & Protection of Owner Investment
2. Governing Documents, Rules & Board Communication
3. Financial Procedures, Operating Budget & Replacement Reserves
4. Visual Appearance of Community

The process of strategic planning was completed by examining external factors (issues and circumstances that are beyond the control of the condominium association) as well as internal factors (issues and problems that are within the influence of the Association).
To completely examine the internal factors the Committee completed an analysis by examining the strengths and weaknesses facing many aspects of the community.

Finally the Committee created goals and defined strategies and objectives for implementation of each goal.

The Committee submits the following plan to the Executive Board for consideration and recommends that the same be adopted and implemented wherever possible.

**Mission Statement**

The Committee has formulated the following mission statement to guide the direction of the condominium association:

“Our mission is to make Darlington Woods an inclusive community, creating a highly desirable, beautiful, well managed and safe environment.

Because the mission statement represents the primary objective of the Association, it is designed to guide the board in future decision making and planning.
Building Maintenance and Protection of Owner Investment

The Committee identified Building Maintenance as an item of fundamental importance. This coupled with the desire to protect the investment of unit owners lead to the following analysis:

Strengths

1. The exterior appearance of the building is attractive.

2. The Board has, in recent years, addressed certain long-term maintenance items including but not limited to roofs and siding. Additionally, the Board has worked to increase replacement reserves.

3. The Association has established positive relationships with many contractors who can be counted on to perform quality work in the community.

4. The Association has employed on-site management to better address maintenance concerns as they occur.

5. The use of a system of prioritization for roofing replacement has allowed the Association to defer functioning roof replacements and increase replacement reserves.

6. Darlington Woods enjoys a positive reputation among local residents and realtors.

Weaknesses
1. The Association property has many items of deferred maintenance and hidden maintenance items which have not been addressed due to budget concerns. (i.e. roads, sidewalks and roofing)
2. Residents regularly report that maintenance concerns are not addressed in a timely manner.
3. Many residents do not comply with their individual unit maintenance responsibilities for limited common elements including decks, dryer vents and chimney sweeps.
4. Many units throughout the community are sided with inadequate or defective siding. (primarily Brandywine units)
5. Replacement reserves are insufficient to address capital replacements without a significant increase in the funds designated for replacement reserves.

After identifying the strengths and weaknesses related to the building maintenance and investment protection, the Committee established the following goals:

1. The Board must evaluate the system employed for dealing with building maintenance requests in addressing both the response to the request and resolution (if possible) of the maintenance issue in a timely manner balancing aesthetic and operational concerns, financial considerations and safety needs. Responses to maintenance requests
must clearly identify realistic expectations for the eventual resolution by
the Association.

2. The Board should establish a system for prioritizing siding replacement in
the Brandywine buildings based upon the order of necessity with the
siding in the worst condition being replaced first.

3. The Board must establish a comprehensive plan to complete the roof
replacement that was started in 2008 and continue the replacement of
roofs for the entire community.

4. It is understood that gutter replacement will be scheduled to occur during
roof replacement for Longwood units and during siding replacement for
Brandywine units.

5. Tree trimming should occur on a regular basis in order to maintain the
integrity of roofs, siding and the functionality of gutters and
downspouts.

6. A program to inform and encourage homeowners to complete necessary
maintenance responsibilities so that deferred maintenance on limited
common elements for individual units does not result in replacement of
items by the Association or economic loss to other unit owners. (i.e.
decks, chimneys and dryer vents)

7. The Board should consider all options for promoting the community to
nonresidents whenever possible. (i.e. website and/or promotion to local
realtors)
Governing Documents and Communications

The Committee also discussed at length the structure of the Association. In discussing the organizational structure, the Committee considered the governing documents including the Declaration, Bylaws and Rules. The Committee also addressed communication within the Association.

Strengths

1. Board meetings are conducted in public so that interested residents may attend the meetings.
2. Minutes of the meetings of the Board are presented in the newsletter, which is published on a monthly basis.
3. There have been more opportunities for unit owners to become involved in the Association.

Weaknesses

1. The governing documents (Declaration and Bylaws) are difficult to read and understand with ambiguities and vagueness throughout. Moreover, they do not address the current needs of the Association.
2. Very often board votes are conducted while the residents who attend the public meetings are unaware of the full scope of the item being considered.
3. The newsletter may not be completely effective as a tool for the Association to communicate with unit owners.

4. Many unit owners have elected not to participate when provided the opportunity.

5. The Association does not make full use of modern technology to communicate with unit owners.

6. Community rules are not clearly established and/or consistently applied to all residents.

After identifying the strengths and weaknesses related to the governing documents and communications, the Committee established the following goals and/or recommendations:

1. The Board should undertake, via committee or otherwise, to review and deal with changes to the Declaration, Bylaws and Rules.

2. The Board should review current methods of communication and consider email, web application, written (newsletter) and/or other methods of communication to best communicate with both unit owners and the outside community.

3. Procedural changes should be adopted so that the agenda for the board meeting is published prior to the meeting.

4. The Board should consider making public comments offered at the board meeting as part of the minutes. Unit owners should be identified by name and unit number.
5. The Board should, where possible, use the agenda, public meeting, minutes and all other modes of communication to be as informative as possible.

6. The Board should consider increased use of committees to assist in governance of the community.

Financial Procedures, Operating Budget and Replacement Reserve

The Committee also reviewed the financial operations of the Association, the budget and the replacement reserves. The following strengths and weaknesses were revealed:

Strengths:

1. The Board has engaged in long range planning that addresses the need for increased replacement reserves.

2. In recent years, the budget process has been streamlined so that the budget more closely reflects the actual spending of the Association.

3. The monthly assessment has been apportioned so that an increased percentage of each month’s assessment is allocated to the replacement reserves.

Weaknesses:
1. Year to year, fees have continued to increase as a result of additional replacement reserve needs and operating costs.

2. The replacement reserves are insufficient to provide for timely replacement of all capital items.

3. The economic conditions present a circumstance where it has become more expensive for the Association to do business and fee increases create a tougher circumstance for residents.

The following goals were set related to the financial position of the Association:

1. The Association should review other methods of increasing the replacement reserve including but not limited to an increase in the replacement reserve collected at change of ownership.

2. The Board must establish comprehensive financial procedures governing all aspects of collection of revenue and payment of expenses. These procedures should be included in the Association's governing documents.

3. The Association should continue to update (on at least a bi-annual basis) its plan for replacement reserves and consider sharing with residents the long-range plan for use of the replacement reserve.

4. The Board should address the growing disparity between the fee paid by unit owners of the Longwood units and the owners of the Brandywine units.
5. The Board must establish a comprehensive plan to adequately fund replacement reserves without deferring maintenance items to the extent that deferred maintenance/replacement will impact the image of the community.

Visual Appearance of the Community

Finally, the Committee examined and discussed at length the visual appearance of the Community. As a result of the discussion the Committee identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths:

1. Layout of the community – The plan for common area is unique among surrounding communities.
2. Strength of facilities – This community benefits from a pool, tennis courts, club house and common areas.
3. The Association benefits from substantial greenery that surrounds the buildings within the community.
4. The entrance to the community, as well as many of the common areas, are well maintained and present a positive image of the community.
5. Significant common area improvements have enhanced the aesthetic appearance of the landscape throughout the community.
Weaknesses:

1. There is tremendous overgrowth due to the age of vegetation.
2. The signage throughout the community is inadequate and may result in unsafe conditions for residents and visitors.
3. There are concerns with drainage throughout the community as well as the way that the community addresses the retention basin.
4. The lighting throughout the community is not consistent and in some areas may be inadequate.
5. The community may not have adequate parking for all of its residents and/or their guests.
6. There are significant problems with the misuse of common area by residents and/or non-residents including but not limited to pet waste.

After identifying the strengths and weaknesses related to the visual appearance of the community, the Committee established the following goals:

1. The Board should obtain a Master Plan for landscaping that will addresses not only the visual appearance issues including overgrowth, but the drainage concerns that exist in the community. In establishing this plan, the Board must be mindful of the unique layout of the community.
2. The Association should prioritize the facilitation of adequate lighting throughout the community for safety and aesthetic purposes with specific emphasis upon Brandywine Circle.
3. The Board must evaluate and improve signage throughout the community so that street, house and directional signs are appropriately lit and sized to assist drivers, pedestrians and emergency personnel in locating their respective destinations.

4. The Board must adopt a comprehensive parking policy with particular consideration of appropriate vehicle size and storage limitations.

5. The Board must establish a cohesive set of rules governing the use of common areas including addressing pet waste.
Conclusion

The Committee respectfully submits the forgoing report summarizing its evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of many core areas of the community as well as proposed goals for addressing many of the Associations needs with regard to those strengths and weaknesses identified. The Committee recommends that the report be adopted by the Board as the Mission Statement and Strategic Plan for the Association.

The Committee cautions that its decision to focus on the four core areas identified in this report, its evaluation of strengths and weaknesses and its recommended goals are not exhaustive. The report provided is simply a 1st evaluation and will benefit from regular and constant revision and update. With that in mind, the Committee strongly urges the Board to continually revise its Strategic Goals on an annual or bi-annual basis.

While the report encourages the Board to take action with regard to a variety of issues, the Committee recognizes that the Board will not be able to address all issues without the involvement of the community. Therefore the Committee strongly encourages the Board to establish committees of the Board designed to address the issues presented in this report and other community issues as they materialize.

The Committee also encourages unit owners to get involved in these committees as the goals contained in the report cannot be achieved unless the community gets involved and supports the opportunities for improvement.