

# Neighborhood News



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## The Impact of Vacant Houses on Neighborhoods

With foreclosures approaching 7,000 properties and grass growing rapidly with the recent rains, Neighborhood Services is making a call for citizen action on vacant homes. Vacant homes tend to progress from tall grass to broken windows which must be boarded. Graffiti, criminal activity, structure deterioration and blight often follow. To stop the progression, citizens are asked to assess vacant homes and report the information to Neighborhood Services.

A "Neighborhood Eyes and Ears Checklist for Vacant Houses" is available on the Prince William County government website in the Residents section under Neighborhoods, or from Neighborhood Services for citizens with facsimile machines. The checklist will focus citizens on the conditions that may lead to safety

*(See Vacant, p. 2)*

## Neighborhood Leaders' Meetings Commence

Residents active in their communities were invited to the first Neighborhood Leaders' Meeting on June 24, 2008. About 20 leaders attended to learn how other communities in Prince William County deal with neighborhood issues.

Vacant houses were the main topic for the evening. Vacant houses can be "adopted" by using the form at the PWC website under the "Neighborhoods" topic. It is important to continue to report tall grass and weeds cases to Neighborhood Services so that the property does not decline through stages of vandalism, building deterioration and more serious crime. Tall grass cases are reported to Neighborhood Services at 703-792-7018.

Connie Moser, Lindendale coordinator

*(See Leaders, page 2)*

## Training on Rules Enforcement for Condo/HOA Leaders, Owners

### "It's All About the Rules"

This special Saturday session on July 26 will present two courses that focus on the rules. Together, they will arm the attendee with the knowledge of creating and enforcing covenants, bylaws and rules. First, "RESOLVED That There Will Be Rules:" Definite advantages exist when rules are established as resolutions passed by the Board. Find out the criteria for valid and enforceable rules, steps in developing and enforcing rules and the resolution format. "Covenants Compliance" is the second piece of

rules. It is easy to let covenants violations slide, but the consequences of 'no action' range from inequity challenges from homeowners to court decisions that potentially limit the community association's ability to enforce covenants in the future.

The training will be held at the McCoart Government Center, 1 County Complex Court, Woodbridge VA 22192. Registration is required; please call 703-792-7018. This class has a \$15 registration fee to cover materials and refreshments.

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*(Leaders, from page 1)*

shared her experiences in dealing with neighborhood problems. She has worked with external home repairs for income-eligible neighbors through Habitat for Humanity's Brush With Kindness program. Connie and her husband Bill maintain a community website. Connie reports graffiti and urged others to join the Clean Community Council's graffiti abatement program. Connie and Bill have cleared out overgrown areas and planted them with perennials to decrease the potential for criminal activity.

#### Unsolicited Newspapers

Diane Puckett reported on the nationwide lawsuits against *The Examiner* and how she had to be vigilant with emails to the *Potomac News/Journal Messenger* to prevent the unwanted delivery of the *Pulse*. She also mentioned the tool of contacting the Magistrate's Office to seek a citizen's complaint for littering or trespassing against the paper. Karen Montagna mentioned that such papers have to be put on doorknobs in Fairfax County. Pat Reilly will check with counterparts in Fairfax to see if there is an opportunity for a similar ordinance in PWC. Mr. Horton's form letter, mentioned by Allison Kipp, may be helpful, too.

#### Popsicle Signs

Because of caseload, Neighborhood Services is not prosecuting businesses that advertise illegally with these signs. The Litter Crew continues to pick them up, and volunteers can "Adopt-A-Spot" through the Clean Community Council (703-792-6272) to pick them up legally. Pat Reilly is working on a program where citizen volunteers can remove Popsicle signs throughout the county.

#### Communication and Community Participation

The Sudley and Westgate leaders have had success with electronic distribution of news rather than having meetings. Neighborhood Watch (NW) reports, Crime Prevention Unit bulletins and news about neighbors are distributed to about 65 people.

Neighbors have come through with meals for others when there has been a death in the family. Others responded to requests for food and cold water, big trucks and trailers for the County Clean Up. They conduct training sessions for NW quarterly, where even those who have been trained come back to hear what's new.

The importance of asking for help for specific tasks that have a limited commitment was stressed ; people are much more likely to respond to a 'one-shot' volunteer opportunity. Patty Mattes offered her success of starting with one or two people on a street to get involved with Neighborhood Watch, and asking them who else they knew who would want to sign up. Glendale Community Group is also proceeding with NW one street at a time. The Sudley NW said she started with one street, which was easy enough, so they undertook a second street. The word spread fast.

Patty talked about trying to get a civic association started. Lorna Wallen was willing to share her knowledge of the Dale City Civic Association.

#### Future Meetings

Future topics that the leaders would like to hear about are commercial vehicles, community web sites and email distributions, junk in the yard, speeding, overcrowding pilot program update and the Neighborhood Study recommendations.

The leaders will continue to meet for another 3 months, then will evaluate to see if there is a need to continue the meetings. The next meeting is on July 24 (Thursday) in the Neabsco Conference Room of the McCoart Building – 7:00pm. If you have any special

*(Vacant, from p. 1)*

or health problems for residents. A completed checklist may be faxed to Neighborhood Services at 703-792-5969, or may be completed before telephoning the information to the division at 703-792-7018. Neighborhood Services will follow up to secure the vacant properties.