

Seneca Overlook

Blunt Commons Homeowners Association

Frequently Asked Questions

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Getting our Storm-water Pond Finished

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Neighborhood Watch—do you want to start one?

Q: Wow, I finally got a street tree! What do I do now?

A: Simply enough, your job is to keep your new tree healthy and happy while it gets used to its new home. During the summer months, the most important thing you can do is WATER, WATER, WATER! At least once a week (preferably twice), lay the end of your garden hose near the base of the trunk of the tree, and let water dribble slowly into the soil for at least 30 min. That's all you need to do till Fall, when you might want to feed the tree. We'll give you directions here later this summer, so keep watching.

Q: What's that hole in the ground behind Yellow Leaf Terrace?

A: Just down the hill behind Yellow Leaf Terrace, the developer is establishing a large pond to catch runoff from the storm sewers along Yellow Leaf Way, Court, and Terrace. Per County requirements, this pond will retain run-off following heavy rainfall (we all remember rainfall, right?) and slowly release it into Seneca Creek, to reduce the possibility of flooding. In addition, our pond is designed to allow some removal of pollutants from the run-off water before it is released into the creek. F.O. Day dug the basic shape of the pond, and put in the water control equipment and channels in the mid-1990s. They must still grade the sides and bottom to the desired contours, plant various aquatic plants within the pond boundary, plant a grassy border with shrubs and small trees around the pond itself, and provide a fence surrounding the pond. Our responsibility, once construction is completed, is maintenance of the pond and surrounding plantings, regular inspection (probably every other year) of the pond by a professional engineer, and any necessary replacement of water control structures or equipment that suffers damage. This will eventually become the single greatest drain on our cash reserves.

Unfortunately, unlike most ponds being built these days, our pond was designed and built to hold a small amount of water (to a depth of no more than 18 inches) all the time, to allow pollutants to be removed by aquatic plants and soil microbes. It is a "wetland" pond; a kind of man-made swamp. The County has not approved any such pond designs since 1994, since they often don't work as planned. However, the water control structures and channels for our pond were approved back in 1993, and are already in place. Therefore, it is too late for us to have the design reconfigured to a dry-pond type without major expense. What this means for the HOA is that our pond will probably be very attractive, as well as potentially dangerous, to children. We will be responsible for maintaining a sound fence and liability insurance to cover potential accidents, and may eventually have to provide mosquito control if local wildlife can't do the job...and no, unfortunately deer don't eat mosquitoes, or we wouldn't have a problem.

We'll do our best to keep you updated on the progress of pond construction as time goes on. If you'd like details on the construction and maintenance of storm water management ponds in Montgomery County, the Dept. of Environmental Protection has a very good guidebook at <http://www.co.mo.md.us/services/dep/DEP/StrmWater/boyd.htm>.

For information concerning our storm water management pond, call Dept. of Natural Resources watershed inspector Tom Wieden at 301-370-3632.

Q: What are my responsibilities as a pet owner in Montgomery County?

A: Let's go over those new County laws again:

You may not allow your pet (**any** pet, not just dogs) to enter anyone else's private property without the permission of the property owner. Fines for violating this law can range from \$100 to \$500. In addition, the property owner has the right to humanely trap the offending pet and have it taken to the County Animal Shelter.

Your dog or unaltered cat must be on a leash when not on your own property.

All pet owners must clean up after their animals (dogs, cats, pot-bellied pigs, ferrets: any pets) that defecate on anyone else's property (including our common areas).

You must double-bag your pet's waste in tightly sealed plastic bags, and discard it with the household trash. Fines for violations can be as high as \$100.

While we're on the subject of your pets--during this hot weather, the only decent place for your pet is in your nice, cool house. State and county animal cruelty laws require that if you leave your pet outside, it must have access to shade, fresh water, and shelter. Don't leave your pet in a car parked outside--even opening the windows doesn't provide enough ventilation to keep the animal cool, and may lead to its escape or theft.

Q: There are pets defecating in my yard. Can the association do anything?

A: If you note persons violating the rules listed above, call **Montgomery County Animal Control** at 301-279-1066. Animal Control will investigate and leave a notice on the owner's door or forward appropriate correspondence. Keep calling Animal Control until problem is resolved. In some cases this might include taking the matter to the Animal Matters Hearing Board of Montgomery County. Visit the Animal Control website for complete information, at: <http://www.co.mo.md.us/services/police/animal/animalhp.htm>.

Q: The deer from the woods are eating my entire garden. Is there anything I can do?

A: In the short term, you can try one of the many remedies that are suggested by friends and neighbors. Hanging pieces of soap (such as Ivory or Irish Spring) in cheesecloth bags from the branches of target plants may work. Spraying foliage with mixes of hot pepper sauce and powdered egg whites (12 tsp. sauce and one egg in one gal water) has been reported to give some protection. **If you find another remedy that works, let us know and we'll print it here!** (Suggestions from deer will not be published.)

The Association's Covenants prohibit the use of 8-foot-high fencing around your yard, and anything shorter is not jump-proof. Finally, our local deer are very smart, hungry, and persistent, so don't expect any remedy to last too long. In the long run, the only way to control deer damage may be to grow plants that deer don't enjoy. The USDA Home and Garden Information Center <http://www.agnr.umd.edu/users/hgic> offers Publication Number FS 655 (which you can download free in .pdf format), that lists plants that deer really like and dislike. Note, though, that as the deer lose more and more of their natural feeding grounds to development, they're likely to learn to eat whatever they can find, so no solution is likely to be permanent. They're our neighbors, and we'll just have to live with them.

Q: Let's talk trash--when is it picked up around here, and why won't they take my old piano?

First, some history--the contract between the HOA and our trash contractor, Waste Management, was written by the developer long before there really were residents or an HOA. While we work on improving the contract terms (or finding a new contractor), here is the current arrangement:

Household trash is collected at your curbside on Monday and Thursday mornings. You **may** place your trash for pickup in heavy duty plastic bags, but since crows, deer, and dogs are very talented at destroying bags, we'd prefer that you place the bags in a sturdy metal or plastic trash can. **You may not use paper bags** for garbage or trash. The collection truck nearly always shows up between 7:00 and 8:00 AM, so please place your trash outside early on each pickup morning. Do not place trash at the curb before dark on the evening before pickup. After trash is collected, you must move your trash container out of public view as soon as possible on the day of pickup. (Refer to the Covenants, Article VI, Use Restrictions, Section(s) 5, page 12)

Now for the fine print. Waste Management will not pick up on News Years Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, or any Snow Emergency Day. **The missed pickup for any of these days will be made up on the next scheduled pickup day.** They will not pick up hazardous materials such as paint, thinners or other caustic items. They will not pick up large items. If you notice a missed pickup day (other than those scheduled misses noted above), call Waste Management at 301-340-0776. If they don't resolve the problem quickly, call Mike Potter at MTM (301-253-1222) to let him know.

Q: The dog ate my recycling bin...what do I do?

A: The local recycling program is operated by Montgomery County. For a new bin, or for additional information, call 301-217-2410. **Just a reminder:** you can now recycle **all paper and cardboard** (tied in bunches, or in brown paper bags), glass containers, and plastic bottles (only those with necks) with a #1 or #2 on the bottom. and further information can be obtained by calling (301) 217-2410. Recyclables are collected at your curbside on Tuesdays, usually in the afternoon. Your recycling bin must be brought in that evening and remain out of public view until the next pickup day. The County will not recycle plastic bags, but many local Giant and Safeway markets (and possibly others) will take them.

Q: Do I have to mow that strip of grass between the sidewalk and the curb?

A: Yes: you the homeowner are responsible for maintaining that area.

Q: What else am I responsible for?

A: Glad you asked. As a homeowner, you are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of you lot and residence **under generally accepted property management guidelines**. Your grass shouldn't be more than 4" tall, your lawn should be free of weeds and trimmed regularly, your fences and mailboxes shouldn't lean, and you may not have unsightly stored materials in your front or rear yard. (For additional details, refer to the Covenants, Article VII, Exterior Maintenance, Section(s) 1-3, page 18). The Architectural Control Committee has drafted some new guidelines for maintenance of your lot. The document will be posted on this web site as soon as it has been reviewed by the lawyers.

Q: I see people driving very fast through the neighborhood. What's the speed limit here?

A: According to the County Police Dept., the speed limit on our streets is 25 miles per hour. You will be arrested for speeding if caught. Remember, there are children playing here—slow down and drive safely!

Q: What about parking in the community?

A: You may not park trucks, commercial vehicles, boats, trailers, or campers within the community. **Trucks and commercial vehicles** are defined in Article VI, Section 12 of the Covenants as any trucks or vans in excess of "three-quarter ton," or any vehicles of any size "with exposed commercial lettering or advertising." We'll be adding more information on this topic as we get it.

You may not store any junk automobiles or vehicles of any nature. All vehicles parked in the community must have current tags. (For details, refer to the Covenants, Article VI, Use Restrictions, Section 12, page 13)

Q: I just live here, but I don't own the house. What do I need to know?

A: Absentee owners must convey all rules and regulations to their tenants on signing of leases to ensure they understand the rules and regulations of the homeowners association. (Refer to the Covenants, Article VI, Use Restrictions, Section(s) 18, page 14).

Q: The house next door has an extraordinary number of people living in it. Can the Association do anything?

A: The Association can get involved only after the witnessing party files a complaint with **Montgomery County Code Enforcement Division** at (301) 217-3750. Again this action must be initiated by the witnessing party. After official records are established the Associations' attorney can become involved if the unit is found to violate county housing codes or the legal documents of the association..

Q: The house next door has been the cause of numerous calls to the police for loud music, fights, disturbing the peace etc. Can the Association do anything to help?

A: The short-term answer is: no. This is a civil matter and homeowners must contact the police. If disturbances continue you should file a Citizen's Two Party Noise Disturbance Complaint with Montgomery County. However, repeated violations of any of any of our Covenants (against offensive activities, etc.) can be cause for establishment of a lien against the owner of the residence. Contact Mike Potter at MTM Management (301-253-1222, or FAX 301-253-1721) for details.

Q: The residents of the house next door are suspected of dealing with illegal substances. What can I do?

A: The complaining party can contact the police (Narcotics Division) directly on suspicious activity of this type and they can guide you as the witnessing party on what to do. Homes that have this activity can be seized under Federal and State statutes.

Q: There's been too darned much vandalism in the neighborhood. What can I do about it?

A: First, be vigilant. If you see something that you know shouldn't be happening, call the Montgomery County Police and to MTM.

Second—be careful. Keep a front light on at night, to deter potential vandals and thieves. Don't leave your garage door(s) open when you're not in the garage. What could be more inviting than a whole collection of unguarded stuff? If you park your car outside, keep the doors locked, and consider a theft deterrent system or alarm. For more detailed information on how to safeguard your property, check the Montgomery Police Department's Crime Prevention web page at <http://www.co.mo.md.us/services/police/crimepre.html>.

Third—if you're really interested, consider getting your neighbors together and forming a **Blunt Commons Neighborhood Watch** program. We'll begin discussing that topic at the July 13 Board of Directors' Meeting, and will post information on the web site as we receive it. A good introductory discussion of just what's involved in a neighborhood watch program is posted at <http://ns1.dpscs.state.md.us/pct/ccpi/neighbor.html>.

Q: If I see covenant violations what should I do?

A: If you are unsure whether a violation has been acted upon by the Association's Board or management, please contact Mike Potter at MTM to inquire.

Q: There are defective items inside and/or outside of my house. What can I do?

A: This situation is beyond the authority of the Association, but is between you and your builder. Contact your builder representative in writing by Certified Mail with a list of items that need to be fixed or replaced. Follow your letter with a phone call, and keep calling until the matter is addressed, or the builder will assume your complaints were corrected. If your home was built by Patriot Homes, call George Kemp at their Customer Service Department, 410-997-5522. If your home was built by Greentree, call Tom Lawrence at 301-652-2400, extension

140. In the event the complaint is not resolved in a reasonable time frame, you should file a complaint with the Montgomery County Office of Consumer Affairs, at 240-777-3636.

Q: When are my monthly HOA fees due?

A: Homeowner fees (currently \$29.40/month) are due on the first of every month, and should be forwarded to MTM Management Associates, P.O. 506, Damascus, MD 20872. Telephone them at 301-253-1222, or fax them at 301-253-1721, for new payment coupons or additional information.

Q: How can I get MY question posted?

A: Send it to <mailto:FAQ@bluntcommons-hoa.freeservers.com>