

Cooperatively Challenged Residents Seminar well-attended *By Carl Gerber*

Cooperatives, like society in general, contain a wide variety of people. Most behave in socially accepted ways and treat other residents and the staff in a civil manner. Others, for whatever reason, do not and, as a result, cause friction within the Cooperative and an unpleasant working and living environment. More importantly, some residents can pose a threat to the health and safety of the other residents and to the Cooperative's legal and financial well-being.

Such residents pose a series of interrelated and complex issues that require a balancing between the needs of the cooperative and those of the resident. The first step is identifying or admitting a problem exists and the earlier this is done, the greater the chance that the problem can be resolved without a great deal of time and energy. Equally important to a quick resolution of a problem is having the proper administrative and legal mechanisms in place and using them consistently.

On December 9, 2006, the Cooperative Housing Coalition

presented a seminar on cooperatively challenged residents in the Harbour Square cooperative's Club Room. Twenty-eight people, representing 15 different cooperatives, attended the seminar.



Seminar presenters Joe Douglass, WTP Counsel; Carl Gerber, CHC Vice President; Chris De Young, IONA

The seminar, presented by Joe Douglass and Carl Gerber, identified four kinds of problems posed by residents: harassment and abusive conduct of other residents, the staff, or the Board; disturbance of other residents; disruption of management or Board operations; and actions that pose a health or safety hazard not only to the resident but also other residents and the physical structure.

The various types of residents who might cause problems were described. The clueless or

naïve residents are those who have never lived in a multi-family building before such as students, older people selling their homes, and those from other cultures. The physically or psychiatrically challenged residents include those with physical disabilities who are covered by the Fair Housing Act as well as those who abuse alcohol or drugs.

Aged residents are often residents who age after moving into a cooperative and become increasingly frail. There is also a type of individual who is perpetually unhappy or angry and often focus their unhappiness on other residents, the cooperative management, or the Board.



28 people representing 15 co-ops attended the seminar

The seminar then explored various ideas for preventing or addressing problems created by difficult residents. It was stressed that Boards need to

take a proactive stance regarding potential problems. Not doing so could create not only an unpleasant living environment but also possibly result in a disruption of the Cooperative's operations and present a legal and financial liability.

Looking at how to avoid problems or to address those that occur should be a primary goal of any Board. The first step in this is being sure that the cooperative's governing documents (bylaws and house rules) clearly identify the conduct expected for all residents and staff. Being sure that all new residents understand these rules before they move in also helps prevent future problems. One specific suggestion was to have all prospective residents receive a copy of the house rules and bylaws and sign an acknowledgement that they have read and agree to abide by them.

Then next basic part of a proactive approach is to have a clearly defined set of internal procedures for dealing with problems or alleged problems. However, it is critical that any problem or alleged problem be put in writing, either by management or by a resident. Once a complaint has been received, the suggestion was to deal with a problem initially in an informal manner, say a telephone call. If that does not result in a solution the next step

could be a written notice to the offender with the ultimate step being a formal hearing and decision by the Board or a committee. Some cooperatives have the ability to impose a fine or penalty for bad behavior; others can only take away the shares of a resident who refuses to comply with a Board action.

It was emphasized repeatedly that there must be a well-defined procedure in place before any complaint can be addressed, that every step must be documented in writing, and that the procedures must be applied consistently.



Q&A period offered an opportunity to talk about specific problems and solutions.

While cooperatives are living units and not care facilities, it was suggested that some problems with residents, particularly those that are aging or abusing alcohol or drugs, might be avoided if outside help were available.

Chris DeYoung, from IONA Senior Services, outlined the services that are available in the District for helping senior citizens remain in their own homes as well as the procedures

that need to be followed if a senior resident is no longer able to live independently. Ideally the resident or a family member or friend will seek the assistance of an outside group such as IONA. A cooperative can facilitate such connection if they maintain a list of contacts for each resident who might be called if the resident is having a problem. If the resident does not voluntarily seek help, the alternative is to ask the District's Adult Protective Services to intervene.

Following the presentations, there was a lively question and answer period that explored specific problems and solutions and informal discussions over coffee and pastries.

Mark your calendars!

Mark your calendars now and look for more detailed information in your postal and e-mail boxes:

February 20, attend the free DC City Council Reception, co-hosted by the Coalition and the DC Chapter of the Community Associations Institute (CAI)

March 31, attend the CAI Annual Convention at the DC Convention Center

Spring, attend the free Coalition seminar on "Homestead Exemption Explained!"

DC Council Reception

You're invited!

February 20

6:00 – 8:00PM

Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Co-hosted by

**DC Cooperative Housing
Coalition (CHC)**
&
**Community Associations
Institute (CAI)**

Meet and talk with Council members and their staffs. An opportunity to mingle with other co-op owners and to show your support for issues important to the city's more than 12,000 co-op owners!

FREE! No reservations

Snacks ∩ Beer ∩ Wine ∩ Soft drinks

Next Saturday Seminar:

Homestead Exemption Explained!

Confused about the city's Homestead Exemption? Join the many co-op owners and their board members who are!

The Coalition's next Saturday Seminar will include representatives from the city's Department of Revenue and Taxation responsible for overseeing and enforcing the exemption policies.



Look for an announcement to be mailed to Coalition members for the date, time, and location of what should prove to be a very valuable session!

Board of Directors**President**

Michael O'Dell
Harbour Square, 447 units

Vice President

Carl Gerber
The Cathedral Avenue, 145 units

Secretary

Art Leabman
1870 Wyoming Avenue, 28 units

Treasurer

Nancy Skinkle
The Broadmoor, 194 units

Directors

Madeline Evanek
Naylor Gardens 318 units

Desmond Foynes
The Presidential, 43 units

Jill Golden
3028 Porter Street, 11 units

William Kammerer
The Chesterfield, 66 units

Russ Radar
The Westmoreland, 59 units

JoAnn Wells
Potomac Plaza Apartments 249 units

Counsel

Joseph Douglass
Whiteford, Taylor & Preston, LLP
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202- 659-6779
jdouglass@wtplaw.com

Administrative Assistant

Terry Leffler
1000 Mercer Place
Frederick, MD 21701-4006
1-301-662-9304
tbleffler@cs.com

Contact us:

CooperativesDC@aol.com

DC/CHC
c/o Harbour Square
520 N Street, SW Suite South 616
Washington, DC 20024

About the Coalition

The DC Cooperative Housing Coalition exists to advance the common interests of cooperative housing associations in the District of Columbia and to promote cooperative housing as a desirable form of home ownership. It is therefore both an advocacy organization that articulates the interests of members before government officials and regulatory agencies and a service organization that provides information and education to members.

Membership is open to all District housing cooperatives, regardless of size. A volunteer board of directors, elected by member co-ops, governs the Coalition. Activities are financed through annual dues.

The Coalition grew out of an ad-hoc group of District cooperatives that formed in response to a judicial ruling that had cast a cloud over many cooperatives by banning proportionate voting. By marshaling the forces of more than 3,000 housing cooperative units, the ad-hoc group persuaded the District's City Council to resolve the matter.

Recognizing the importance to the cooperative housing community of speaking in a single voice and maintaining the ability to respond quickly and knowledgeably to matters affecting cooperative housing, the ad-hoc group decided to form a permanent organization. The Coalition was established in 1984 and was incorporated as the DC/CHC, Inc., a nonprofit, IRS Code Section 501(c)(6) organization in the District of Columbia, in 1993.

FREE**DC Council Reception**

- February 20, 2007
- 6:00 – 8:00PM
- Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
- Meet and talk with Council Members and their staffs

**Reproducing
CHC Member News
Articles**

No special permission is required to use or reproduce articles contained in *CHC Member News*. However, each reproduced material should contain proper acknowledgement of the DC Cooperative Housing Coalition and its *CHC Member News* as the source of the article.

**Does your co-op need
a web site or
one that needs updating?**

CHC is fortunate to have found a talented web designer to create our web site. Luckier still, he is willing to create sites for our member coops at reasonable rates. Go to our web site, www.coopscdc.com, and click on "Contact us." Let us know of your interest and we will pass that information on to him.