Financial Vetting of Prospective Owners

**e- Survey Results**

*Mike O’Dell, Harbour Square*

In early April, Coalition members were asked to describe their policy and procedure relative to vetting the financial capability of prospective owners.

The issue was raised by a Coalition member whose board was reviewing and updating their application process for new owners. Because their policy and process was viewed by some of their co-owners as invasive, they wanted to learn how other co-ops treated financial vetting. Were board members involved or was the task delegated to others? If board members were involved, how many of the board members had access to the applicant’s detailed financial information? And regardless of who was involved, how was the information safeguarded?

The results showed a range of processes from relying on a real estate agent providing the information (especially true for very small cooperatives) or the board having exclusive responsibility, to management or special committees assuming the financial reviews. The detailed results from the individual responses from our members were compiled into a table and distributed to our member cooperatives’ presidents, their representatives to the Coalition, and their managers (if they had them).

(Continued, page 2)

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Investment Seminar

**Save the Date: June 9**

*Steve McKevitt, Beverly Court*

2012 has been recognized as the International Year of Co-operatives by the United Nations. This is an acknowledgement by the international community that co-operatives drive the economy, respond to social change, are resilient to the global economic crisis and are serious, successful businesses creating jobs in all sectors. For more information: [http://www.2012.coop/en](http://www.2012.coop/en)

**Support and Service Animals**

**Their Role in “No Pets” Housing: When to Say Yes and When to Say No**

*Linda Chandlee, Harbour Square*

A vexing question for cooperatives which occurs more and more frequently is when is it necessary to suspend a “no pets” rule in order to comply with the federal Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, especially when the pet in question is an “emotional support animal”? It must be noted at the outset that the law recognizes the right of disabled

(Continued, page 2)
**Investment Seminar**  
**Save the Date: June 9**  
(Continued from page 1)

Reserves, and why the reserves are needed. And why proper planning can help prevent a financial surprise when a Cooperative Board has to go to its membership to discuss building maintenance.

All Coalition members and those involved with their co-op’s finances (committee members, managers, etc.) are invited.

**Financial Vetting**  
(Continued from page 1)

The responses proved to be interesting reading and should prove helpful to all Coalition members to learn how different co-ops (from the very small to the very large) go about vetting prospective purchasers and the care they take to protect information they collect and to ensure the prospective buyer’s privacy.

Why re-invent the wheel if we can share our individual experiences? Thanks to our many members who responded to the questions.

**Support and Service Animals**  
(Continued from page 1)

persons to keep emotional support animals if the following conditions are met:

- The person in question must meet the legal definition of a person with a disability;
- The service animal is necessary as a “reasonable accommodation” to allow the disabled person to fully use and enjoy his dwelling and common area;
- The person formally requests a reasonable accommodations and provides supporting documentation from a treating or diagnosing professional.

No cooperative would think of banning a seeing-eye dog, and they must view emotional support animals in the same detached way.

The question arises as to when is there a true disability, requiring the emotional support animal for the use and enjoyment of the unit and common areas versus when is the applicant perhaps reluctant to give up a treasured family pet?

The simplest solution is the three part test above. The applicant must request a reasonable accommodation as a disabled person, provide written documentation from a professional that s/he meets the definition of a disabled individual, and that s/he would be prevented from the full enjoyment of the unit and common areas without the emotional support animal.

While it is obvious that service animals must have specialized training, e.g. seeing-eye dogs, dogs trained to predict epileptic seizures, dogs for the hearing impaired, it is important to note that there is no specific training nor certification for an emotional support animals.

A member cooperative recently faced with a request from a prospective tenant to permit their “certified” emotional support animal requested that the prospective tenant provide a letter from the treating professional substantiating the request. The prospective tenant did not wish to provide such a letter and dropped the application. The cooperative was well within its legal rights to request this information.

The letter from the treating professional does not have to go into an individual’s diagnosis or medical history, and a cooperative cannot request this information. The letter simply must state: (i) that the individual is disabled, and (ii) that the requested emotional support animal is needed as a reasonable accommodation, in order for the individual to be able to fully use and enjoy the unit and common areas. Some cooperatives have had their attorneys develop forms for this purpose, to ensure that the health care provider properly states his/her professional opinion on both required points.

A balanced policy concerning service animals as well as emotional support will ensure that prospective owners with verifiable needs will be welcome in cooperatives in accordance with the law. Violation of the Fair Housing Act, even if unintentional or inadvertent, can result in serious legal and financial consequences for a cooperative, so it is advisable to have any prospective policy reviewed by the cooperative’s attorney.

**Energy Benchmarking Seminar**  
*Nancy Skinkle, The Broadmoor*

The Coalition is working with the District Department of the Environment to schedule a seminar on the Energy Benchmarking initiative underway in the City. The seminar will feature an overview of the program including the reasons for the effort and initial results and will conclude with a technical demonstration of the Energy Star software tool, Portfolio Manager.

Please note that building owners will not have to submit energy benchmarking data to the District prior to the regulations being finalized later this spring. These regulations are still being reviewed and once released, building owners will also be given a grace period after the regulations are final in order to allow them time to collect the data needed to complete the exercise.

For more information on the Energy Benchmarking, see recent past issues of this newsletter (http://www.coopsdc.org/newsletters.html) as well as e-mail blasts we’ve sent to our members.
**New Web Sponsor!**

**Professional Documents Service**

**Meeting Minutes Services**

The Coalition is pleased to announce that The Professional Documents Service (PDS) is a new Coalition web sponsor and supporter of the District’s cooperative housing community!

Many Coalition members use the services of a skilled professional to capture and draft minutes of board and special meetings. Please consider The Professional Documents Service when you need such a service (temporarily or on a permanent basis when your existing service expires). Visit their listing on our web site (http://www.coopsdc.org/meetingminutes.htm).

**The Professional Documents Service (PDS)** provides trained, impartial meeting minutes services to condominiums, cooperatives and homeowners associations in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. PDS utilizes a team of skilled professionals to attend your meetings (whether regular, annual or special in nature), prepare your draft minutes, and make any necessary revisions to prepare the final version - all for one flat price per meeting! Visit http://thepdservice.com/site/ for more, or call (202) 365-8508.

**Remember:** If you contact a Coalition web sponsor, please let them know that you learned about them from the Coalition web site!

**Welcome PDS and thank you for supporting the District's cooperative housing community!**

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**Co-ops’ 2013 Taxable Assessments Increase**

*Mike O’Dell (Harbour Square)*

Proposed 2013 real estate tax assessment valuations for the city’s market-rate cooperatives increased over 2012. Very few co-ops saw their values decline or remain the same; most experienced an increase. Collectively, the city’s market-rate cooperatives exceed $1 billion in value. Individual increases ranged from slightly less than $100,000 to several millions of dollars. A detailed story will appear in the next issue of the Coalition News.

**Another Great CAI Expo!**

*Carl Gerber, President, DC/CHC*

As it has for the several years, the DC Cooperative Housing Coalition participated as an affiliated partner in the Washington Metropolitan Chapter Community Associations Institute (WMCCAI) 2012 CAI Expo held on Saturday, March 31, 2012 at the Washington Convention Center. The event is the largest community association industry event in the Washington metro area. WMCCAI estimated that in addition to 190 companies and organizations in the exhibit hall, more than 1,700 attended the event.

In addition to the vendor Expo, the WMCCAI offered a number of classes, many of which were attended by our member cooperatives. The Expo provides an excellent opportunity for Board members to discuss current problems and potential solutions with a number of companies, e.g., the options for replacing windows or for annual pool maintenance and operations. Mark your calendar for next year’s Expo: March 23, 2013. We thank the WMCCAI for inviting us as an Allied Partner.

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**New Coalition Board Members**

The Coalition welcomes back Russ Rader (The Westmoreland, 60 units) and new director Ray Olson (River Park Mutual Homes, 518 units) to its 13-member Board.

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About DC/CHC, the Coalition

Established in 1984, 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, $1.50 per unit per year (12.5 cents per month).

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 DC/CHC, Inc., a nonprofit, IRS Code Section 501(c)(6) organization in the District of Columbia, May 24, 1993.

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