

**Villas I at Snowden Overlook Condominium**  
**Suggested Home Maintenance Checklist**  
July 10, 2021

Introduction

As unit owners we are responsible for many aspects of our homes. Periodic maintenance can avoid significant damage that can cost us money both as individual unit owners and as assessment payers for the condominium association that maintains a general “master” insurance policy for each of the units and the common elements of our neighborhood. The master policy covers all of our units except for contents and any improvements made by homeowners since sale by the builder. Each unit owner should maintain HO6 (personal property coverage, liability coverage and specific coverage of improvements to the owner's unit) insurance coverage. Speak with your insurance provider to assure that you understand how the Master Policy \$10,000 deductible will affect you in the event of loss so that you have adequate and appropriate coverage.

The following Maintenance Checklist will help Unit Owners examine specific areas in their home as well as particular conditions that can, and have in the past, resulted in loss. While by no means exhaustive, routinely using this checklist will assist the owner to become better acquainted with the potential for loss and to develop a more critical eye for noticing changes that require action. If you need to hire a contractor, your increased knowledge of the problem will facilitate prompt resolution.

Villas I Board of Directors

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**EMERGENCY RESPONSE:**

Flooding - Fire Sprinklers -- If the fire sprinkler system anywhere in your home emits or leaks water, and there is no fire, or the fire is out, the system can be shut off from the main valve usually located in the basement near the front wall of the house. The valve handle is usually yellow or orange and can be closed by turning it 1/4 turn. Note that this will turn off all water to the unit. The sprinkler system will need to be serviced before water can be restored to the rest of the unit’s plumbing. It is important to familiarize all residents of the home with the location of this valve and to make sure that the valve may be readily accessed. That is, no boxes, shelves or other objects should block access to the valve.

Flooding - Other Plumbing -- If there is not a cut-off valve near the source of the leak (faucet, supply pipe, etc.), turn off all water to your unit except for the fire sprinklers. A valve accomplishing this should be located just above the valve for the entire house (including sprinklers) in the front of the basement. We recommend that you clearly label both of these valves so others can find them in emergencies.

Flooding - from Sump or under Basement Door -- Call plumber or WPM (see “Other Emergency Help” below).

Gas -- If you smell gas, leave the unit, alert your neighbors, and call BGE’s 24-hour emergency service at 800-685-0123.

Other Emergency Help: If you have an urgent maintenance issue, remember that the Villas I management company, WP&M, has a 24-hour number for after-hours emergencies: 443-796-7192. Be aware, however, that in most cases, **you will be billed** for any help sent by WPM.

Fire Department -- Dial 911.

## **PERIODIC MAINTENANCE:**

### Heating and Air Conditioning:

Change basement and attic filters -- At least every Spring and Fall, but more frequently if required by dusty conditions.

Check AC condensation traps in basement and attic to be sure they are clear and perhaps add a little bleach to control mold growth -- Spring and Fall

Check for water dripping from an attic condensate overflow pipe, which usually is a small white plastic pipe exiting the house over the driveway (but some units have pipes that exit on the side, or not at all.) This indicates that the drain line is blocked and requires immediate service.

### Plumbing:

Close cut-off valves for any exterior faucets in the fall to avoid freeze damage. Most units have two, one in the rear and one in the garage, but a few end units also have spigots on the side wall. The rear, garage, and any side or other, spigots should be cut off by closing valves inside your home. These cut-off valves are usually located near the basement furnace. It is also a good idea to open the outside spigot once it is turned off from inside, to allow water to drain or evaporate. All this is to avoid frozen pipes that can flood a basement. Reopen in Spring. The cut-off valves are often located in the basement furnace enclosure.

Note any leaks in water supply pipes, drain pipes, or plumbing fixtures and have them repaired. Check continually under sinks.

Rarely-Used Plumbing -- If you have bathrooms or sinks that are not regularly used, it is useful to run water into any sinks, tubs or showers and flush the toilets about monthly. This prevents the traps from drying out and stops sewer gases from entering your home. It may also help to keep faucet valves working by exercising them.

Dryer Vents: Most of our homes have long pipes that carry the exhaust air from the clothes dryer

through the rear wall of the house. Many of these pipes are so long that they have automatic booster fans installed near the middle to help the exhaust reach the outside. (These fans are usually accessible somewhere in the basement ceiling.) These pipes can slowly accumulate lint that can eventually partially or completely block the pipe and jam the booster fan. These pipes need to be cleaned periodically with special equipment to restore the efficiency of your dryer and prevent lint fires. You can minimize the accumulation of lint by cleaning the lint filter in your dryer frequently, perhaps after every load.

Fire Suppression Sprinklers: It is a good idea to visually inspect the sprinkler heads in your home for any water leakage and to make sure that all painter protection caps are removed, that there are no objects hung from the sprinkler heads, that they are clear of paint or other debris, and that there are no obstructions to sprinkler operation near them. If any of the sprinkler heads are significantly fouled with paint or other material, you should seek the help of a company qualified to work on such systems. Replacement of the affected heads may be required.

In addition, it is highly recommended by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission that the backflow preventer valve in each unit's sprinkler system be replaced every five years. Howard County also supports this recommendation, as well as most manufacturers of the valves. The backflow preventer valve prevents stagnant water, that has been sitting in your home's sprinkler system, from backing up into your drinking water supply. In Villas 1 units, the valve should be located in the basement, in the front of the house, near where the main water supply pipe enters the unit. Replacement of the valve by a plumber qualified to do it should run several hundred dollars.

Garage Doors – These should be lubricated periodically. Apply lubricant to hinges and rollers in door tracks at the side. In addition, the springs at the top of each door should be lubricated with a product such as Service Springs Multipurpose Spray Lube, Door and Operator Lubricant. The springs should be sprayed when the door is down, so the coils will separate slightly to permit the spray to penetrate. (Recommended by Overhead Door technician 12/15/2020)

#### Storm Water Management:

Areaway (at bottom of basement steps to outside) present in some units, and any window wells at basement windows -- There is a drain at the bottom of these structures, meant to carry storm water to your unit's basement sump where it can be pumped out of the house. Remove leaves or other debris that may accumulate there and block the flow of water into the drain. This could allow water to rise and enter at the bottom of doors and windows. Check frequently, during heavy downpours, and especially before extended absences.

Sump pumps -- check operation of pump at least twice a year and during heavy downpours. Consider installation of a backup pump if one is not already installed (see below).

Backup sump pumps -- Some units have these devices installed. Most operate on battery power in the event of main pump failure or power outage. If battery powered, the battery water should be checked at least twice a year and replenished as necessary. Batteries may require replacement every 5 years or so.

Water Alarms -- You may wish to install one or more water alarms that can alert you to water entering the basement or in other vulnerable locations in your home. These alarms are available at hardware stores and on line. They can also be placed in other areas where leaks are possible, such as near clothes washers and under sinks. Some can notify you by email or text message, even when you are away.

Sump pump discharge -- Check that the pump outlet at the rear or side of your unit carries water away from the house. This can be done through grading of soil, splash blocks, or pipe extensions.

Gutters and Downspouts -- If you observe significant overflows during storms, this should be reported to the management company. Note, however, that we sometimes observe some water overflowing even clear gutters during especially heavy downpours. Damage to these items should also be reported to management.

Some downspouts empty into underground pipes. These pipes, as long as they serve only our home (carry water from only our home), and any similar pipes carrying sump pump or other storm water, are our responsibility as unit owners for maintenance, repair and replacement. So please inspect their operation. If they overflow, it could be due to breaks or blockages in the pipe or at its outlet. It could also be caused by blockages downstream, which may be the responsibility of our association. If you are unsure whether the malfunction is in a part for which you are responsible, please contact our management company for assistance.

Grading -- Fill any depressions in your yard that could cause water to flow or pool against the foundation of the house. Also check around the concrete pad at the top of areaway stairs for voids that require filling.

Gas Pipes – Homeowners are responsible for pipes after the gas meter. (BGE is responsible for pipes leading to (supplying gas to) the meter and the meter itself.) These pipes begin outside, leading from the meter to the house. They are usually made of iron that can rust and begin to leak as a consequence. You should consider painting these pipes with rust-resistant paint. They should be checked periodically for peeling paint, rust, gas odor, or other problems.

#### Escape:

Basement Escape Window -- If your home does not have a basement door to the outside, you should have a basement window intended for escape in emergencies. Such a window may be in a window well containing a ladder to the surface outside. Please check periodically that this escape route is unblocked on either the inside or outside and is workable. That is, ensure that the window can be opened readily. All residents of your unit should be aware of the escape window's purpose and location.

#### Exterior:

Plantings – Our yards need maintenance too. Unit owners should:

- Remove and replace dead shrubs and trees.
- Trim or remove trees or shrubs that rub or grow against the house, its gutters or downspouts, privacy fencing, decks, etc. This can do considerable damage to siding and other parts of your home.
- Reseed bare lawn areas.

Siding, Privacy Fences, Decks, Areaway Walls, Steps and Walks – Remove dirt and mold from these surfaces using cleaning products and/or pressure washing.

### **OTHER ITEMS TO BE MONITORED CONTINUOUSLY:**

Roofing -- Report any leaks into the unit to the management company as soon as possible.

Siding -- Report any leaks into the unit to the management company as soon as possible.

Rain Water -- Check for soil erosion. As with sump pump outlets, this problem can be addressed through regrading of soil and/or the addition or adjustment of splash blocks, pipes or other devices to carry rain water from downspouts away from your home.

Electrical -- Loss of power in part of your unit can be a result of a tripped Ground-Fault Interruption (GFI) device. After checking your basement electrical panel for a tripped breaker, check for outlets containing a GFI device. Many units have two in the kitchen and at least two others, one in the basement and one in the first floor powder room. These outlets often have a light that turns on when the device has been tripped, turning off power. It can often be reset by a button on the same outlet. Note that these GFI outlets usually control several other outlets, sometimes in remote areas of the house.

Smoke Detectors -- Most units have 6 or 7 of these. While they should be hard-wired to the house's electrical supply, they also contain backup batteries that should be replaced every 1 to 3 years or so, or when one or more of the detectors begins to chirp. Some detectors may be marked for replacement after a specified period. This information is often located in user manuals or on a label which can often be viewed by rotating the detector so that it can be pulled down from its mount on the ceiling for examination. If you still have some original detectors in place, you should know that it is recommended that all smoke detectors in your home be replaced every ten years. When you replace them, note that even hard-wired detectors, such as those installed in Villas 1 homes, are now available with 10-year batteries. These sealed-in, long-life-battery smoke alarms provide continuous protection for a decade, and the National Fire Protection Association and National Association of State Fire Marshals recommend their use. This could mean no more chirping in the middle of the night. There are also models that detect both smoke and carbon monoxide and those with other features as well. Keep yourself safe by replacing your detectors.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors -- If you have any of these in your home, note that they require periodic replacement. Check the device for the date. It is often recommended that carbon

monoxide detectors be placed on each floor of the house containing an open-flame device, including gas stoves or ovens, fireplaces, and gas furnaces or water heaters. In Villas 1 homes, that suggests that one should be placed, at least, in the basement and on the first floor.

**Bird Roosting** -- In the spring, birds may attempt to build nests in your unit. The most common location is in the vents that exit through the rear or side of your home. Fan vents from seldom-used bathrooms seem to be particularly inviting to birds. These vents are a unit owner responsibility. We have found that cages installed over the vent outlets effectively solve the problem. These cages are available from hardware stores. If you observe birds entering your home anywhere else, please contact our Property Manager.

**Termites and Other Pests** – Some concerns have been raised about termites in the neighborhood and the risk of infestation of individual homes. Some of our units have experienced infestations. Here is some general information about these potential pests and possible responses.

**Responsibility** – Under the Villas 1 condominium documents, as unit owners, we are each primarily responsible for controlling any pests in our units (By-Laws Article XIII, Section 1 and Declaration Article 10(k)). If we should fail or refuse to do so, the Condominium is authorized to enter, inspect and complete extermination, as needed, at our expense. We are aware that some unit owners have arranged with pest control companies to monitor or treat as necessary for termites, which are potentially damaging pests. The condominium association is responsible for all aspects of maintenance of the common elements of Villas 1 (those parts that are not units), which includes, for the most part, roads, sidewalks and a few grassy areas such as that in the Secret Waves square.

**The nature of the pest** – Subterranean termites are native to Maryland. As a result, it is not a surprise when some are found in a neighborhood. On the other hand, when these pests gain entry to the wooden portions of a house, they can slowly do considerable damage to the structure if their presence is not detected and addressed. These insects eat wood but require moist conditions to live. Their most common food is therefore rotting, moist wood such as old tree trunks. They can, however, sometimes reach the wood in houses, even if the wooden part of the house is not in contact with the ground. To do so, they typically construct mud tubes against surfaces such as foundation walls, or exploit cracks in such walls, in both cases to provide protected passages between their underground nests and wood. The most commonly noticed termites are those specialized forms with wings. These “swarmers” leave the nest to seek to start new nests. Most perish. These are not themselves the type of termites that eat wood; those stay largely underground. The swarmers resemble flying ants. Here are links to publications that explain all this in more detail and explain how to tell the difference between ants and termites, one from EPA and two from the University of Maryland Extension Service – <https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/termites-how-identifyand-control-them>, <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/termites> , <https://extension.umd.edu/learn/termite-identification> . All of these articles contain links to related information.

Here is a short version of the main differences between the flying versions of:  
-- TERMITES: Thick waists, Antennae not elbowed, Front and rear wings of equal length.  
-- ANTS: Thin waists, Antennae elbowed, Front and rear wings of unequal length.

Seeing some termites near your home should not alarm you. On the other hand, finding mud tubes on the concrete foundation walls of your home leading from the ground to the top of

the wall is another matter, and may indicate that termites have gained access to the wooden portion of your home. Other observations that may warrant concern include the presence of mud that seals existing cracks or joints in wooden structures, or piles of termite wings inside your home. Most alarming would be the detection of termite-damaged wood. This could happen in a deck—which is the unit owner’s responsibility to maintain, repair and replace (see Bylaws, Art. XIII, Sec. 1(F))—though most pressure-treated wood is resistant to termites. Within individual homes, such damage is sometimes revealed by blistered paint, a soft surface, or a dull sound when the wood is tapped. Any of these observations may suggest an infestation and a possible need to get help from a licensed pest control company. Even then, there is no need for panic, since termites do their damaging work slowly.

So, please do keep your eyes out for possible signs of termite infestation in our neighborhood. If you do observe such signs, please let our property manager, Patricia Lall (plall@wpmlc.com), know about it and what you’ve done in response.

Post Lamps – Each of our homes is equipped with a post lamp in front with a photocell that turns it on each evening. They are part of the lighting design for our neighborhood and contribute both to safety and appearance. Please check your lamp periodically to be sure the bulb does not need replacement and that there are no other problems with the lamp. The lamp and its post may also require painting from time to time.

#### **EXTENDED ABSENCES -- Suggested actions to help avoid damage:**

Consider turning off the water supply. The supply valve for all water but that to the fire sprinklers is usually located in the basement near the front of the house. It is usually a normal valve with a round handle. Below it there may be a yellow or orange handled valve which cuts off water to the entire house, including the sprinkler system.

#### If you DO turn off water to the house:

Turn off water heater. Instructions are usually on the appliance.

Turn off ice makers in any refrigerators. This can often be done by turning off a switch inside the freezer compartment or on the icemaker, or by following other instructions that can often be found there.

If you do NOT turn off water to the house: Please consider turning off the valves supplying hot and cold water to the clothes washer. These valves are located in the laundry room and are connected to the washer by hoses that are more likely to fail than pipes. (For this reason, it is also wise to replace these hoses every few years. The more expensive hoses made with braided metal mesh promise to last longer.) To save energy, you may also wish to set your water heater to a “vacation” or lower-temperature setting.

Thermostats -- Leave heat set to no less than 62 degrees in winter, as required by the Villas 1 by-laws. In summer, set the AC on at about 80 degrees so that it runs enough to discourage mold growth.

Unplug toasters and other appliances that need not operate in your absence.

Leave room, closet, and cabinet doors ajar to encourage ventilation.