

Thatchmont Board Meeting – Mar. 23, 2010

Trustees: Neil Golden, Victor Frank, Sarah Leaf-Herrmann, Arthur Mattuck, Victor Samarov,
Rosemary Trainor G&G: Sheryl Sarkis Absent: Lifei Guo

Financial Report

Sheryl presented the report.

1. **Final accounting** on the 2009 budget and year-end reserves:

The figures presented at the meeting were not entirely clear, and after some e-mail correspondence, there are still questions (which has delayed these minutes). We have in addition lost our Treasurer, Victor Frank (see below).

Taking into account still outstanding 2009 payables, Sheryl estimated on 3/31 that there would be a 2009 budget surplus of 25K. The minutes of our next meeting should be able to give the final picture of the 2009 budget and how much our reserves have increased beyond the firm figure of 140K in the January minutes.

2. **Masonry supplement.** The following figures are rounded and come (4/13) from the G&G Comptroller; two of them may need correction and are being looked into.

Bank loan: 404K (original loan); reduced to 225K (final loan) by a 179K payback

Total paid in full by 22 unitowners: 328K

Balance (10-year loan by 15 owners): 222K

Cost of Masonry Project: 580K (572K paid so far) (being reviewed)

Current Monthly Thatchmont payment to bank: \$2,561

Current Monthly Supplemental Fee Payments by unit-owners: \$2,461 (being reviewed)

3. **Current year.** On schedule; Amory St. condos owe us 3.5K (overdue) for snow and trash removal.

Old Business

1. The **14 Egmont lock** on the main door has been fixed, and no further work on or overall changes to the Thatchmont locks is currently planned.

2. The **Egmont hot water problem** described in the previous minutes is now fixed, but paying for an unneeded mixing valve (\$885) installed as a first attempt at diagnosis is still under consideration. (Charges for a similarly unneeded circulation pump (\$400) were waived by Devaney.)

3. A leaking **half-roof over 25 Thatcher #5** has given trouble over recent years. It is over 20 years old. Snow buildup, and an ice dam forming by the roof deck walkway blocks have been recent culprits; a hole was also discovered nearby in the rubber membrane. It was inspected this December and January and replacement was recommended. Three bids were obtained differing wildly in price and disagreeing on the scope and details of the work needed. An independent roofing consultant will be asked to provide a scope of work required and perhaps an estimate of likely cost.

4. Parking-lot **cracks in the asphalt** have developed – this is normal and was expected. Bids will be obtained to seal the cracks this summer, to prevent water seeping in and damaging the paving when it freezes in winter. More controversial is whether to apply seal-coating over the whole area; whether it's needed is less clear, and it would require subsequent restriping of the lot. A decision on this is being deferred.

5. A 4K bid for **several handrails** in two of the parking-lot stairwells was received. A revised bid for just two long handrails (one each at 15 and 19 Thatcher) has been obtained (still too high). The other stairwells have enough handrails; these two are both the deepest, and the two without a top-to-bottom handrail.

6. The **proposed amendment to the By-laws** requiring approval by the unit-owners for any large supplement to the condo fee voted by the trustees was on the agenda. Discussion of it was postponed at the request of the proposer, due to the absence of Lifei, who was out of town at a professional meeting.

7. Bids were obtained to repair the **landscaping damage** due to the masonry project, and for regular maintenance of the landscaping. The Thatchmont yew hedge is severely damaged by the masonry and sidewalk project; it may need a heavy pruning and several years to recover. The upper Egmont hedge will get a few filler privets. Volunteers will for the present take care of the maintenance, with Sheryl making suggestions on needed work following her weekly visits. (First-year owner Alex LeCarme pruned during the winter most of the shrubs on Egmont St.)

New Business

1. The **Five-year plan** is up for revision. We need to estimate what the main expenditures will be over the next few years. An important question is whether and on what schedule condo fees should be raised to increase the reserve. With a large enough reserve we would not need to levy supplemental fees to meet sudden large expenses.

As a preliminary go-round for the next capital project for the five-year plan, back stairwell painting was proposed. Several trustees felt that exterior painting was more urgent: painting the areas that had been missed last time (basement windows principally), and redoing ones that seem to have deteriorated rapidly in the interim, in order to avoid expensive windowsill replacement.

2. **Leaks from the heavy rains in March and early April** – a stalled nor’easter, blown by gusting northeast winds delivering around ten inches of water in two days – an unprecedented amount for this area – have been a source of concern, especially in view of the expensive masonry work last fall.

Of the earlier reported leaks, three were from roofs, and correctable (leak under roof door, unremoved chimney, bent flashing). All but one of the rest were from the Thatcher St. north (parking-lot) side – our side most vulnerable to such a nor’easter because of its exposure and use of more porous brick than the Egmont north (street) side.

Since some of the Thatcher leaks were around windows that had lintels replaced last fall, the masonry company (with our engineering consultant Tom Heger supervising and inspecting) erected scaffolding, removed brick layers, and examined a second floor replacement lintel. The work had been done correctly, but all three layers of brick were saturated. This was the situation up to the Trustees’ meeting.

Subsequent to the Trustees’ meeting, more leaks were reported, including some on the Egmont building’s north (street) face, casting doubt on whether the severity of the storm and the method of construction in the 1920’s could be the sole explanation. A number of unit owners contributed e-mail opinions and theories. After an earlier e-mail to unit-owners soliciting reports on any leaks in their units, Neil summarized where we stood in an e-mail on April 5; for the sake of those unit-owners who did not see it, here is its essence, with some editing for concision:

“Like many of you I am concerned about the water tightness of our buildings. While we have had a record amount of rainfall, we have also not had leaks in the building to any significant extent until now. Are the leaks the result of the masonry work that was done, or of the record rainfall?

I met with Paul Bruno (Pres., B&M Restoration) and Tom Heger (Pres., D.M. Berg Consultants), as previously arranged by Sheryl (G& G Mgmt.); this is what was learned.

1. We had leaks principally on the back side of Thatcher, mostly on the second floor. There were also a few other places where water leaked in.

2. We had a record amount of rain: a 10-inch nor’east storm with strong wind-blown rain from a constant direction, followed by a 2-inch storm the following week, and a 4-inch storm the week after that. (This was 1/3 of our average annual rainfall, within 3 weeks).

3. The work B&M performed was to replace lintels on over 100 windows, and repoint the top 6 feet or so of masonry. They also spot repointed some other areas. It rained a number of times since, but no leaks were reported until the March and April storms.

4. After the March storm, B&M opened a lintel on the back side of Thatcher to determine if the lintel and flashing were installed correctly. It was, and the brick directly behind the lintel was dry (as it was protected by the flashing); the most interior brick – there are three layers – was wet, presumably from water moving down the interior of the wall.

The interior brick and mortar had deteriorated, due to age. Tom Heger said that this was not unusual, as the interior brick was not erected carefully, and the mortar used would not have been the prime mortar that was used on the exterior (1920's construction).

5. On the back of the Thatcher building, we observed a clear delineation between where the repointing occurred, and the darker water-saturated brick below. We also observed dry spots on the back wall where it had been previously repointed. In some case wet areas were seen within the repointed patches where an area was skipped. We did not have leaks on the second floor where it was repointed previously above the windows.

6. For comparison, the Freeman St. building on the other side of Knyvet Park, with similar exposure to ours, had minor, if any leaks. It had saturated brick in a few areas, mostly in alcoves. A large portion of that building has been repointed either fully or down to the first floor, which is protected from northeast wind-driven rain by a row of garages.

7. Tom and Paul contend that because of the severity of the 10-inch rain and the two subsequent storms, the two interior brick layers did not dry out, and were easily saturated in the last storm.

8. If we want, they can perform a water test on the building. Water would be sprayed against two wall – one original, one repointed – to determine how fast it penetrates to the interior, and how adequately the repointing increases our water-tightness. Paul will send a proposal for this, and the Trustees will try to decide on the right course of action.”

Subsequent e-mails from unit-owners (with responses from Neil) over the next few days expressed opinions about the worthwhileness of the proposed test, and whether the test should be performed by an independent company; new theories about the leakage and whether or not sealing the building after the masonry job would have prevented the leaks; and questions about the relevance of Freeman St. and other buildings (with possibly different interior wall construction).

There was also the over-arching question: if it really was a once-in-fifty years thing, some would be content to trust the statistics, but if global climate change is going to make this sort of extreme weather more common, what then – build an ark?

3. **Trustee resignation.** (e-mail business, 4/17/10) Victor Frank has resigned as trustee, due to the pending sale of his unit, leaving a trustee vacancy at 20 Egmont. Michael Springer (20 Egmont, unit 2) had indicated an interest in the position, and has agreed to accept if elected. According to our by-laws, Thatchmont unit-owners have 30 days to elect a replacement for Victor; after that the Trustees can act to select a replacement.

4. **Next meeting** Tuesday, May 25, 6:30 PM, location TBA.

Arthur Mattuck
Rec. Secretary