

Vista del Cañon Newsletter

Winter 2008-2009

GARAGE DOOR QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Most homeowners have responded very positively to the new rollup garage doors. The doors are a huge improvement for our property and our safety. And we have all been waiting a long time to see this happen. A majority of the doors have been installed now, before this season's heavy rains began. Still, as expected, many questions have been asked over the past couple of months. The information provided below should be helpful for everyone.

HAVE THERE BEEN ANY PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW DOORS?

Being metal, of course, the new doors won't ever soak up water like the wooden doors did. They do, however, make more noise and some loud clicking sounds as they open and close. As they are "broken-in," they will make less noise. The insulation around the edges of the new doors keeps the garages more tightly sealed against dust, dirt and moisture. In heavy rains, however, some water can still get underneath the new doors, depending on the concrete surface beneath. And some of the weather stripping fittings have been uneven. The installers have had to chip out sections of wood framing in some garages in order to install the railings. This work needs finishing, priming, painting, etc. Some structural garage details have blocked the railings. And some railings have blocked access to cabinets. But there have been no major problems with the installations so far. If you have an issue with your new garage door installation, please first call the contractor, the Overhead Door Company, at (909) 981-3300.

WHY THE NEW COLOR?

Yes, the white color of the new doors is a big change. It brightens up the property quite a bit. The manufacturer did not offer the doors in the "Birchwood" color of our old garage doors. To get that color, or something close, would have required paying extra for custom painting. Most HOAs have chosen to install white doors. They are the number one seller. That color goes with our window trim, and with our wrought iron. In the summer, the white will reflect heat away from the garages, keeping them and the living areas above, cooler. In the long run, after the economy turns around, these new garage doors will enhance all our property values.

WHY AREN'T THE DOORS CHEAPER?

The cost of these garage doors is actually very competitive - the best quote received. Of course, you have received flyers in the mail showing lower prices for the same size door, but those flyers are misleading. The gauge of metal being quoted in the flyers is usually the thinner 25 gauge, which dents way too easily. We are installing heavier 24 gauge steel sectional doors. Our garage doors also have many features and services not included in the prices advertised on junk mail flyers, such as hauling away the old wooden doors; individual meetings with homeowners at their garages before the doors are installed to answer any questions; adjustment or re-installation of garage door openers that homeowners have already installed, provided they have long enough tracks; any necessary door frame-in work; 20,000 cycle torsion springs for longer life; pinch-resistant safety features; inside locks; weather stripping; vents; and lifetime warranties against manufacturing defects.

WOULDN'T A LOCAL INSTALLER BE CHEAPER?

The installer we are using, the Overhead Door Company, is located in Upland. The other quotes we received, from local installers in Santa Clarita and nearby Sylmar were much higher. Other nearby installers were chased for quotes and never provided any. There wasn't time to chase every installer in the Yellow Pages. The Overhead Door Company is a manufacturer, so we don't have to pay markup to a middleman like we would with local companies who aren't manufacturers.

WHY ARE THE QUOTES BEING KEPT "SECRET?"

The quotes are not being kept secret from anyone. Any homeowner who would like to see copies of the quotes should contact the Property Manager and she can send you copies of the quotes, either by e-mail, fax, paper mail, pick up at her office, however you want. Like with all competitive bids, however, the bidding process itself required that bids be kept "sealed" until all were received and ready to be opened and voted on by the Board. But once opened, the bids aren't "secret" from our homeowners.

WHY WEREN'T THE DOORS PUT TO A VOTE OF ALL HOMEOWNERS?

The outcomes of direct votes on assessments are always very uncertain, might not have reached a quorum, would have caused even more delay and probably meant that none of these new doors would be installed now. That would have exposed all of us to extreme risk this winter of someone being seriously injured or killed by one of the wooden garage doors, if its springs failed to hold it up during a heavy rain. The condition of the wooden doors has been getting worse each year. Many could not be lifted by their openers, after being soaked by rain last winter. We crossed the legal threshold after last winter's heavy rains, to the point where the doors' condition required replacement. Our contractors could not predict which doors would be the

most waterlogged in heavy rains, which way winds and rain might blow. They recommended replacement of all the wooden doors.

The Board has a legal obligation to put critical safety issues first. In matters of public safety like this, where time is urgent, the only responsible thing any Board could do is to vote an emergency assessment and get the work done.

WHAT IF MY NEW GARAGE DOOR HASN'T BEEN INSTALLED YET?

If your new garage door has not yet been installed, we have a heavy rainstorm, and you need help lifting your wooden garage door, or holding it open so you can park your car inside, please contact our security company, Santa Clarita Valley Public Safety, at 661-857-1353. They can send a patrol officer to assist you.

WILL DOOR FRAMES BE PAINTED?

The immediate urgency is to get the doors themselves installed. The Association's painters can take care of garage door frames that need repainting later. It is not feasible to have the garage door installer also paint door frames and stay on schedule.

WHY WEREN'T THE NEW DOORS PAID FOR OUT OF RESERVES?

If the rollup doors had been paid for out of reserves, we would have spent nearly half of all our reserves. That would have left the Association extremely underfunded for all other future long-term maintenance and replacement needs, based on the forecasts in our Reserve Study. The Fiscal 2006 Reserve Study, mailed to all homeowners, indicated that, to be "fully funded" to pay for all known future maintenance and replacement needs, Vista del Cañon needed to have roughly \$1.5million in reserves. Our reserves at the time were one-third of that amount, roughly \$500K. That percentage of funding is very typical for HOAs. It means that some future large maintenance or replacements will have to be paid for through special assessments. Very common at most HOAs. This year's updated reserve study will almost certainly show that even more is needed to be fully funded. Most homeowners prefer to be able to vote directly on special assessments and do not want dues increased high enough each year for reserves to always be fully-funded.

WHY HAVEN'T DUES BEEN INCREASED MORE?

Over the past eight years, dues have been increased an average of 7% per year. Most homeowners who have spoken have told the Boards of Directors that they want dues increases kept to moderate levels. The Board could increase dues up to 20% per year. Increases beyond that must be approved by direct vote of the homeowners. To have saved enough to have the extra money in reserves now to pay for the rollup doors, and still remain one-third funded afterwards, the Boards would have had to increase dues by nearly 17% per year over the past 8 years.

WHAT IF I CAN'T AFFORD THE PAYMENT FOR THE DOOR?

Last spring, when the condition of the wooden garage doors was being inspected after the winter's rains, and last summer, when the legal opinion on the safety emergency was being obtained, and bidding was conducted, no one knew that the economy would crash in October. Unemployment levels are now rising. Mortgage foreclosures are up. Almost everyone is worried about their job. The Board understands this, and has instructed the Property Manager to help homeowners apply for garage door payment plans, if they cannot afford the five-month payment option originally offered. Homeowners need to fill out a simple form to apply for an extended payment plan. A few more questions may be asked to confirm the need and ability to pay.

It can be hard to ask for help. People can feel embarrassed. But the Board members understand how bad the economy has become, and payment plan applications are strictly confidential. So please apply if you are facing a special financial hardship right now.

WHY ARE WE BEING CHARGED INTEREST?

One homeowner commented that the "HOA isn't a bank" so why are we being charged interest for not paying the garage door assessment in full by December 15th? Yes, the HOA is not a bank, and that is all the more reason why it needs to charge something for loaning reserve funds to some homeowners. Even more so than banks, the HOA cannot afford to lend money interest-free. The HOA must pay for the doors out of reserves as they are installed. Homeowners choosing the monthly payments will be reimbursing the HOA months later. There will be a shortfall. This is a "loan" of reserves back to homeowners. Reserves are set aside for the long term maintenance and replacements of all common area components of the property, including roofs, paving, sidewalks, the pool, fencing, gates, etc, not just for garage doors. Especially in this economy, there is a very high risk that some homeowners will not pay their garage door assessments. The HOA will incur costs of collection and some losses on some accounts. Those are costs of lending. Unlike banks, however, the HOA will not get a Federal "bailout."

WHY AT CHRISTMAS?

After receiving the quotes, and getting all the other arrangements in place, the Board voted to purchase the garage doors at its September 23 meeting. Written notice was mailed to all homeowners in a letter dated September 30. The minimum legal due date for payment of a special assessment is 30 days. The Board wanted to give homeowners more notice time than that, so the first payment was not made due until December 1st, more than 60 days later. That would give everyone time to make plans as long as possible before Christmas. No one wanted to take money from people during the Christmas season, but putting off payments until January or February 2009, when many residents would be paying their Christmas credit card bills, wouldn't have helped either.

And the decision to buy the doors could not be announced prior to September 23 because it hadn't yet been voted on by the Board. Even if homeowners telephoned the Property Manager earlier in September, the Manager could not tell them what the decision would be. No one has a crystal ball to predict what issues and debates might occur at a Board meeting, or what final decisions might be.

NEW POOL GUY

A new company, Duane's Pool Service, has been hired to maintain our swimming pool and Jacuzzis. Over the past few weeks, the pool was closed for renovation work that the County Inspector required. The pool was re-plastered, new deco seal and trim installed and some drainage grate covers replaced. The Jacuzzis got an acid wash and replacement lighting. The pool deck slope was corrected to improve water drainage away from the pool. It is good that we didn't have to do this work until the winter, so that last summer's swim season was not interrupted.

SECURITY

Although you can never have enough security, our patrol service has been making a difference. In October, one of our onsite patrol officers stopped a burglary in-progress and helped the Sheriff's Department arrest the burglar. Onsite security also detained a homeowner who had been driving under the influence and had collided with the fence by the Via Princessa entrance. Sheriff's deputies made an arrest in that case as well. The Association has just now received reimbursement for the damage.

ENTRANCE GATES

As you have noticed, the Via Princessa and Sierra Highway entrance gates have been out of order much of the time for the past month. The Association has not been neglecting to repair them. Repairs are being done as quickly as replacement parts can be gotten.

What is happening is that the gates are being rammed by impatient homeowners, visitors or trespassers. They are also being damaged by people climbing and riding on them. When our gate maintenance company looks at the damage, it is easy to tell that this is happening. And the gates are being left open by the Fire Department when they respond to emergency calls and shut off the power.

What can be done? The Association is following up on eyewitness reports it has received about vandalism. Everyone is encouraged to report any vandalism that they witness. The most effective solutions – high-quality camera systems, or stationing security guards at the gates 24-7, would be very expensive. Permanent guards would require a large increase in monthly dues. The repair costs to the gates are very small in comparison. But it is extremely frustrating to keep seeing the gates out of order.

VOLUNTEERS

In many newsletters, homeowners have been asked to volunteer their time to help improve our community. Volunteers are needed who can work in committee settings, who are able to engage in the give-and-take of teams, and who can take direction from the Board. The property needs to be walked constantly, repairs scoped, work monitored, new suggestions made. Getting along with any group of people requires being able to making compromises with one another, so that everyone's needs are met, as much as possible, within the framework of our Association's governing documents. If you can donate some time, please contact the Property Manager.

BOARD ELECTION

Speaking of volunteers, if you are interested in serving on the Board, you have hopefully put your name in nomination for the upcoming election. The deadline was January 28. Ballots will be mailed out soon. Three Board members' positions are up for election: Jim Reedy, Marla Adams and Jim Allaire. Under our bylaws, homeowners do not vote directly on which Board members will hold which offices, President, Vice-President, Treasurer, etc. Those offices are appointed by vote of the elected Board members.

Those who serve on the Board need to bring a commitment to serve all our homeowners, to listen and strike a balance that best meets everyone's needs, set aside personal agendas for the good of all, weigh facts and circumstances, express disagreements, be in tune with our homeowners, make practical decisions and then move on to solve the next issues.

Treasurer's Report

As of December 25, 2008, the following amounts were in the Association's funds:

<i>Cash Operating:</i>	\$106,910.76
<i>Cash Reserves:</i>	\$481,911.81
<i>Total Cash:</i>	\$588,822.57

WEBSITE STATUS

The company that provided our website was bought by another company earlier last year. There was a mix up with our management company. They were not paying the new website provider for several months. That has been straightened out now; the website is back up and running again. It is still a challenge getting current information posted, however.

VISTA DEL CAÑON CONTACTS

PROPERTY MANAGER

Westcom Property Services
Sigrid Mclver (661) 263-8760
sigrid@westcommgmt.com

SECURITY PATROL

Santa Clarita Valley Public Safety
(661) 857-1353

24-HOUR PROPERTY EMERGENCIES

(818) 587-9500

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ken Greaves, President
Jim Reedy, Vice-President
Marla Adams, Treasurer
Jim Allaire, Secretary
Luis Gutierrez, Member-at-Large

BOARD MEETINGS

Meeting Notices Posted on Center Drive
Bulletin Board

WEBSITE

www.vistadelcanon.com
