

How To Develop A Building Maintenance Plan That Withstands The Test Of Time

By James Fell Jr.

Over the past decade and a half, the gulf coast area has been witness to some unforgettable set of circumstances. Aside from the pounding of previous hurricanes, condominium owners (and managers) have had to endure a declining economy, a change in politics, budget cuts, an adjustment in real estate pricing and a major oil spill. Now, with spring and summer growing closer with the passing of every sunset, the promise of a prosperous and rental-packed season is on the horizon.

Considering the overall value of a typical condominium along the gulf coast depends upon the existing and future performance of the building components, the employment of a good preventative maintenance plan has proven to withstand the test of time. In order to get ready for whatever lies ahead, condominium owners and boards of directors, more than ever, cannot afford to neglect the maintenance of their buildings.

Maintenance can basically be defined as routine scheduled work needed to properly protect constructed building components. For the purpose of this discussion we are going to focus on the maintenance of the building envelope, which includes the exterior weatherproofing. A major failure due to long-termed neglect in this area can cost an owner a year's worth of rental income and a lifetime of aggravation and inconveniences.

The maintenance of a building envelope can be wrapped into three phases—planning, inspection and execution. It is advisable to solicit the assistance of professionals who are specialized in specific areas, rather than have a single entity try and perform all the services on a building envelope.

The key to a good maintenance plan is to perform the necessary inspections routinely, identify issues and properly address them on a timely basis. By doing this, the costs of performing

minor repairs should outweigh the costs of replacement and will extend the overall service life expectancy of the building components.

The Planning Phase

Just like any other major project, the planning phase is typically the most critical. Within this phase a clear description of the goals for the preventative maintenance plan should be established, the subject areas it is intended to cover, along with the protocols for inspections and who is going to perform those inspections.

As part of this phase, one should also take into consideration the use of outside professionals and define what their responsibilities are to include. For instance, only a qualified glazing contractor should perform window/sliding glass door repairs/replacements.

The Inspection Phase

With respect to the inspection phase, it should include routine and specific inspections by qualified individuals to determine existing performance levels and to identify any work that needs to be performed.

Before the inspections are implemented, an initial overall condition survey should be performed for all the components involved. This type of survey is useful in establishing a base line of the existing components and will assist in determining what type of future inspections and repair work is needed.

The Execution Phase

Once you have established a detailed plan and determined who is responsible for

performing the inspections and overall maintenance, it is time for the execution phase of the plan. Under this scenario the routine inspections, maintenance work and repairs will need to be implemented.

As part of the execution phase, it is advisable to create a maintenance book that can catalog all the services performed in a chronological order. This type of documentation can serve to be invaluable when it comes to turnover of board members, association management, and even for use and review by prospective new buyers.

Other Considerations

Implementing a building maintenance plan for an association, regardless of the size of the property, will require a great deal of commitment by the board and their owners. For this reason we recommend the board of directors also create a building/grounds committee. While they may not have any legal authority or power, the members of the committee can assist the board with gathering information related to the maintenance plan, its progress and providing an outlet for owners to correspond. The association's website should also provide updated information about the maintenance plan progress. ■



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