

Charlestown

CHARLESTOWN OWNERS ASSOCIATION

July 21, 2010

Carlton Burkhammer
Chief Fire Marshal
Fairfax County Fire Department
10220 Page Avenue
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Chief Burkhammer:

I am the President of the Charlestown Owner's Association (COA) – a 500 town-home community in Springfield built in 1968-1972. Your office (Marlene Moran) recently issued a Notice of Inspection that requires the COA to establish and mark (with paint and signs) fire lanes on our community streets. It further requires that the work be completed prior to 23 July 2010.

We share your desire to ensure safe and ready access and passage for emergency vehicles throughout our community and we will make changes. The board of directors approved changes at its' July 20, 2010 meeting to be implemented not later than August 31, 2010. Before describing those changes I would like to provide some information about our community:

1. Charlestown is 40 years old and was constructed (including internal COA roads and parking areas) in accordance with then existing standards.
2. We have no record of any instance of any emergency vehicle having a problem moving within the community.
3. The COA has many areas where parking is prohibited (by yellow painted curbs) because of safety, access, or visibility reasons (behind stop signs and/or at corners) or adjacent to fire hydrants. These curb areas however are not yet marked with "fire lane" signs.
4. Trash, utility, UPS and FEDEX delivery, other service trucks and moving vans as well as emergency vehicles regularly move within the community without difficulty.
5. Some of our interior streets are a little over 30 feet wide. Parking is allowed on both sides of these streets leaving 18 feet in the center for traffic and emergency vehicle access.
6. Traffic once you are inside the community is very light. None of our streets are through streets and none of the community streets are used by non-residents as shortcuts to major roadways. Passage is not difficult – but we agree that the 30 foot wide streets would be better used as one-way streets.
7. Our other streets are: entrances to cul-de-sacs or parking areas; connectors between parking areas; or, parking areas themselves. These travel ways are 24 feet in width. Most but not all of these areas currently have yellow painted curbs prohibiting parking on one side. With this restriction, the travel lane is 18 feet wide, which would normally allow passage of two way traffic and which definitely can accommodate emergency vehicle traffic. Traffic in these

areas is also extremely light and limited to residents, visitors and the occasional service or emergency vehicle. Speed limits are 25 mph on the streets and 10 mph in the parking areas.

8. Parking within Charlestown is limited as it is in all town-home communities. Residents naturally do not wish to lose more parking spaces than is essential for safe passage.
9. Your inspector indicates that her inspection and Notice of Inspection were the result of another association's comment/complaint based on their compliance issues – not due to any reported or actual problem with emergency access in our community. I also understand that Fairfax County standards are not applied to streets maintained by VDOT. This certainly creates a double standard and I would like to point out that many streets near Charlestown are no wider than ours but have unrestricted parking and two way traffic that is less regulated or limited than traffic within Charlestown.

We certainly agree with the need to ensure that emergency vehicles have safe access. In response to the Notice of Inspection, the Board of Directors agreed to further improve access and safety by completing the following prior to August 31, 2010:

1. Make Lakinhurst Lane and Willow Forge Road one-way streets. Ms. Moran agreed that this would be acceptable, but stated we should coordinate with VDOT for sign placement as these streets empty into VDOT streets.
2. Ensure that parking on all other streets (cul-de-sacs and parking areas – 24 feet in width) is limited to one side. This will leave an 18 foot travel lane in each of these areas. As mentioned, these areas are extremely lightly traveled (residents, visitors and the occasional service/emergency vehicle) and passage will continue to be readily available.
3. Install Fire Lane signs at each entrance to the community. These would be the same as those placed at each entrance to the Cardinal Forest Community and would state: "All Yellow Curbs are Fire Lanes. No Parking or Standing at Any Time".

We believe that these measures will provide enhanced prompt and safe passage for all emergency vehicles throughout Charlestown and should satisfactorily respond to the concerns addressed by the Notice of Inspection. .

Ms. Moran stated that to be fully compliant we should prohibit parking on both sides of all of the 24 foot wide streets and areas since most of them are cul-de-sacs which could not be limited to one-way travel. This would leave a travel lane of 24 feet – considerably more than needed for emergency or any other vehicle. This additional restriction besides providing more travel space than needed would effectively eliminate all parking other than the current allowance of two assigned spaces per home. Guest parking would be limited to about 25 spaces for the entire community plus what could be found on VDOT streets, which are primarily on the periphery of the community. In our opinion, removal of all of the current curb parking in all areas that are 24 feet wide and so very lightly traveled would create more accessibility issues than it would cure as visitors and service providers would have to either double park on wider streets or they would park in an unsafe manner congesting narrower streets and possibly interfering with sight lines, fire hydrants, etc. Given that there are no known accessibility problems within our community, we believe removal of these curb parking spaces would be an unnecessary and unduly harsh solution to what is actually a non-issue. As mentioned above the community was built to the then existing standards and has a 40 year history of ready access by emergency vehicles. Such

action would also generate a real hardship for our residents who have more than two vehicles and would eliminate almost all parking available to guests and visitors.

We request that you consider the actions that we are taking (outlined above) as sufficient – given the very light traffic on Charlestown community cul-de-sacs and in parking areas and waive any requirement for further action. If you would like to meet on-site to review our proposed solutions, I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience. Please contact me at 703-644-4652 or by email at DandKIngalsbe@msn.com if you would like to schedule a meeting or if you have any questions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Duane G. Ingalsbe
President, Board of Directors
Charlestown Owner's Association

c.c. Chief Ronald L. Mastin, Fairfax County Fire Department
Mr. Pat Herrity, Supervisor, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.
Ms. Marlene Moran, Office of the Fairfax County Fire Marshal
Mr. Thomas Mazzei, President, Cardinal Management Group