December 2, 2010

To: Canterbury Village Neighbors
Fr: Dave McElvein, CV Board
Re: Sump Pumps

If you live in a unit that is not a walk-out you have a sump pump in the unfinished portion of your basement. As with most everything inside your unit, the sump pump belongs to, and is the responsibility of, the unit owner. Although there is no way to know how long your sump pump will continue to work, estimated life expectancy is about 10 years (http://www.oldhouseweb.com/how-to-advice/life-expectancy.shtml). Considering the build-dates of our homes, we are at or past that date.

So what do you do?

Verify the pump is doing its job. If you hear it come on periodically that should mean it is working ok. If you have not heard it come on then you can force the pump on by adding 1-5 gallons of water to the sump well (hole in the basement in which the pump sits). Note: if the pump is working the water level should be somewhere around the bottom of the sump well. If the sump pump is not working, call a plumber. If you are not sure, call a plumber.

Even if the sump pump appears to be working correctly you may want to consider replacing the pump as a preventative measure instead of waiting for it to fail. Pump failure could result in water in the basement (wet carpet, etc.). A CV neighbor recently had a plumber replace the sump pump for a total cost of about $170. Considering the cost of water in a finished basement - that's pretty cheap.

But before you replace your existing sump pump you should consider an alternative or addition. Recall that no matter the condition of the sump pump, it is an electrical device that requires AC (household) power. If there is a heavy rain in conjunction with a prolonged power failure then something is going to get wet.

To protect against this type of event, companies make, and Lowe's sells, sump pumps that run on DC (battery) power. These are not meant to be a replacement for an AC pump but as a backup pump. This means that if the AC sump pump fails for any reason, including loss of power, the DC pump will take over and keep your basement dry for as long as the battery lasts. Plan on $400+ to add a DC pump or replacing your existing sump pump with both the AC and DC pumps as one preassembled unit is about $550+. For real numbers contact your plumber.

The bottom line to all of this – consult a plumber that you trust.