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BUILDING AUTOMATION SYSTEMS

Benefits, History, Expectations, Testing and Long-Term Serviceability

FEATURES

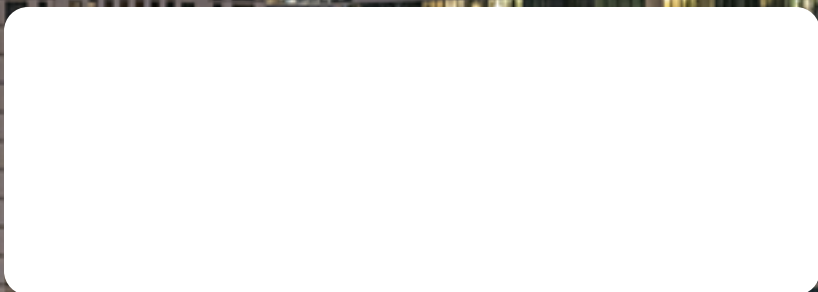
**Drones In Our Communities:
Coming to a Sky Near You**

**Pickleball in your Community
Association: 10 Considerations**

**The Weather and Your Landscape
How Safe are Your Grounds?**

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Project Profile

Building:

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Project Completed:

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Project Coordinator:

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Project Manager:

Phillip Mariotti & Matthew Mariotti

Management:

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Project Goals:

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by Mark Rockwood, PE, QCxP, LEED AP - Elara Engineering

BUILDING AUTOMATION SYSTEMS Benefits, History, Expectations, Testing and Long-Term Serviceability

A modern Building Automation System (BAS) provides a centralized interface that can be used to remotely monitor and control various building systems, including, but not limited to heating, cooling, ventilation, access control, lighting, etc.

With significant advances in computing capabilities over the past four decades, facilities throughout the world have been installing BASs to efficiently control their building systems and automatically notify the appropriate personnel when operation is out of tolerance. Additionally, cloud-based fault detection software is now available to benchmark systems and zones within a building in real-time for optimization and enhanced troubleshooting.

History

The installation of BASs accelerated in the 1980s during the personal computer revolution but was not without issues. The potential benefits (energy reduction, centralized monitoring, remote adjustment, etc.) of replacing simpler, stand-alone controls with centralized computerized controls were certainly attractive. Despite the additional capabilities of these state-of-the-art systems, in some cases, facility owners were left disillusioned as systems may not have controlled as well as they did previously due to inadequate or underperforming installations. As the industry evolved, systems required specialized expertise and finding support for a newly installed BAS proved limited beyond that of the installing contractor. In a worst-case scenario, the owner could be left with a BAS that they would soon need replacement due to a lack of implementation and operating support. If the owner lacked the budget, they were left to manually adjust the system on a regular basis to maintain comfort and control – thus, defeating the purpose and a key benefit of a BAS.

Additionally, at the time, many controllers

continued on page 6



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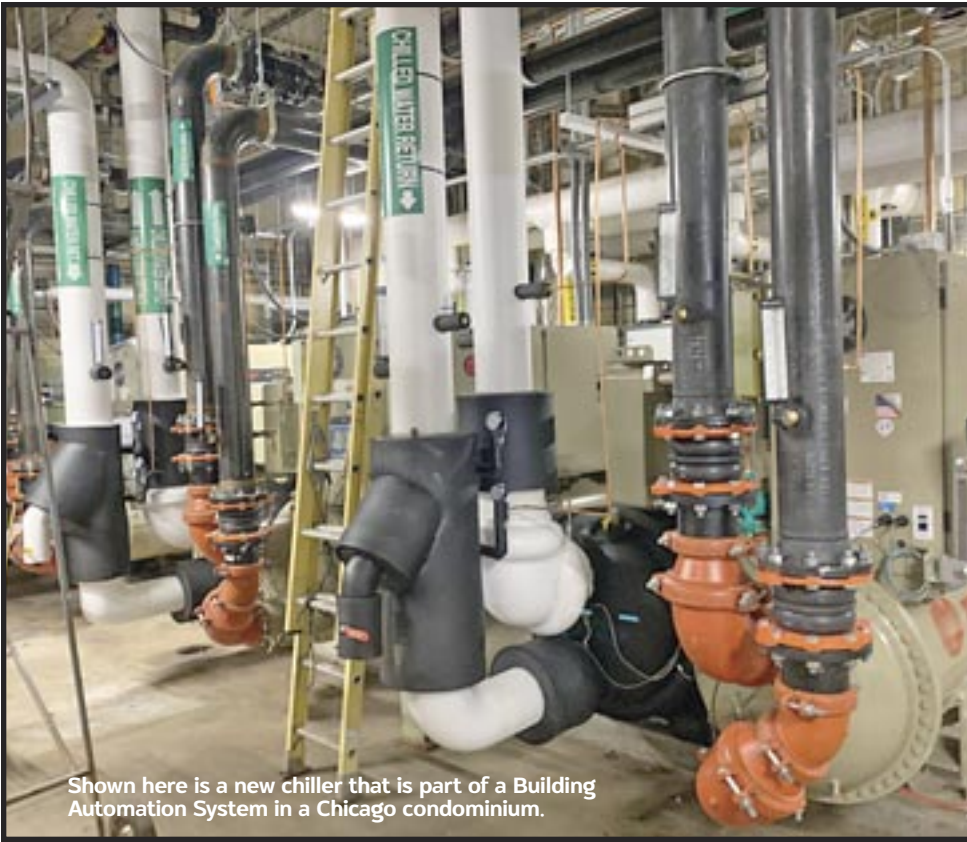
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Shown here is a new chiller that is part of a Building Automation System in a Chicago condominium.

were built to be networked exclusively to other controllers manufactured by the same company using proprietary communication protocols. In many cases, this prevented the owner from being able to expand their existing BAS using a different manufacturer due to impediments to switch to a different product or to an entirely different controls vendor.

BACnet Standard

As the industry has matured, most owners now require control products that utilize open communication protocols such as BACnet. The development of the BACnet standard started in 1987 with the first edition published in 1995. The intent of the BACnet standard is to facilitate interoperability between controllers manufactured and supported by different companies. Since 1995, the BACnet Standard has been widely adopted by several control and equipment manufacturers.

BAS Upgrade / Repair Planning

When an owner is faced with a decision to install a new BAS or to replace an existing BAS, it is recommended to engage a qualified

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consulting engineer for guidance throughout the process. There are several reasons for this:

- An engineer will be familiar with the most current installation best practices including specifying an open protocol BAS.
- An engineer will be able to make quality, independent recommendations regarding product vendors applicable to the owner's specific facility.
- An engineer will be able to design a BAS that is both energy efficient and customized to the facility's unique needs.
- An engineer will be able to advise on whether repair or replacement of the current BAS is the most practical.

Whether installing a new BAS, replacing an existing BAS, or repairing an existing BAS, the process is similar. The first step is to interview the maintenance staff and understand where manual intervention is currently required and where controllability challenges exist. The goal at this stage is to identify what improvements can be made to reduce ongoing maintenance efforts.

The second step is to review the controls infrastructure currently in place to identify how much can be salvaged in the event of a

replacement, and to assess whether a repair or replacement path is most appropriate given the facility's needs and goals.

The third step is to review the system for energy savings opportunities. There are often multiple control related strategies that, if implemented, can reduce energy consumption. These may include the addition of variable frequency drives to reduce fan and pump energy consumption, the addition of advanced controls strategies, and more aggressive equipment scheduling.

The final step of the planning process is to create a scope of work to obtain pricing from BAS contractors.

BAS Contractor Selection

Once pricing is received from the BAS contractors, the pricing is analyzed so that the relative value of each bid can be assessed.

It is important to note that the relationship between a BAS contractor and an owner is often a long-term relationship. Therefore, entering a relationship with a BAS contractor should be given thoughtful consideration. A qualified consulting engineer will be able to advise on the

differences between each proposal and product to help the owner decide on which contractor to select. Many of the controls products on the market today offer similar features, along with unique benefits and quirks, such as programing and video playback differences based on trend data, associated with each product. For example, each manufacturer uses unique programming software. Each software responds differently to contradictory programming instructions – for one manufacturer all lines of code in a program are read by the controller before starting and stopping equipment which results in the last read command being sent to the equipment. For another manufacturer, each programming line is executed immediately – in a case where one programming line commands the equipment on and another programming line commands the equipment off, the equipment will rapidly turn on and off as quickly as the programming scans, which shortens the life of the equipment if not promptly noticed and addressed. The potential issue noted above is an example of an issue that would ideally be identified during functional testing of the system prior to final turnover to the owner.



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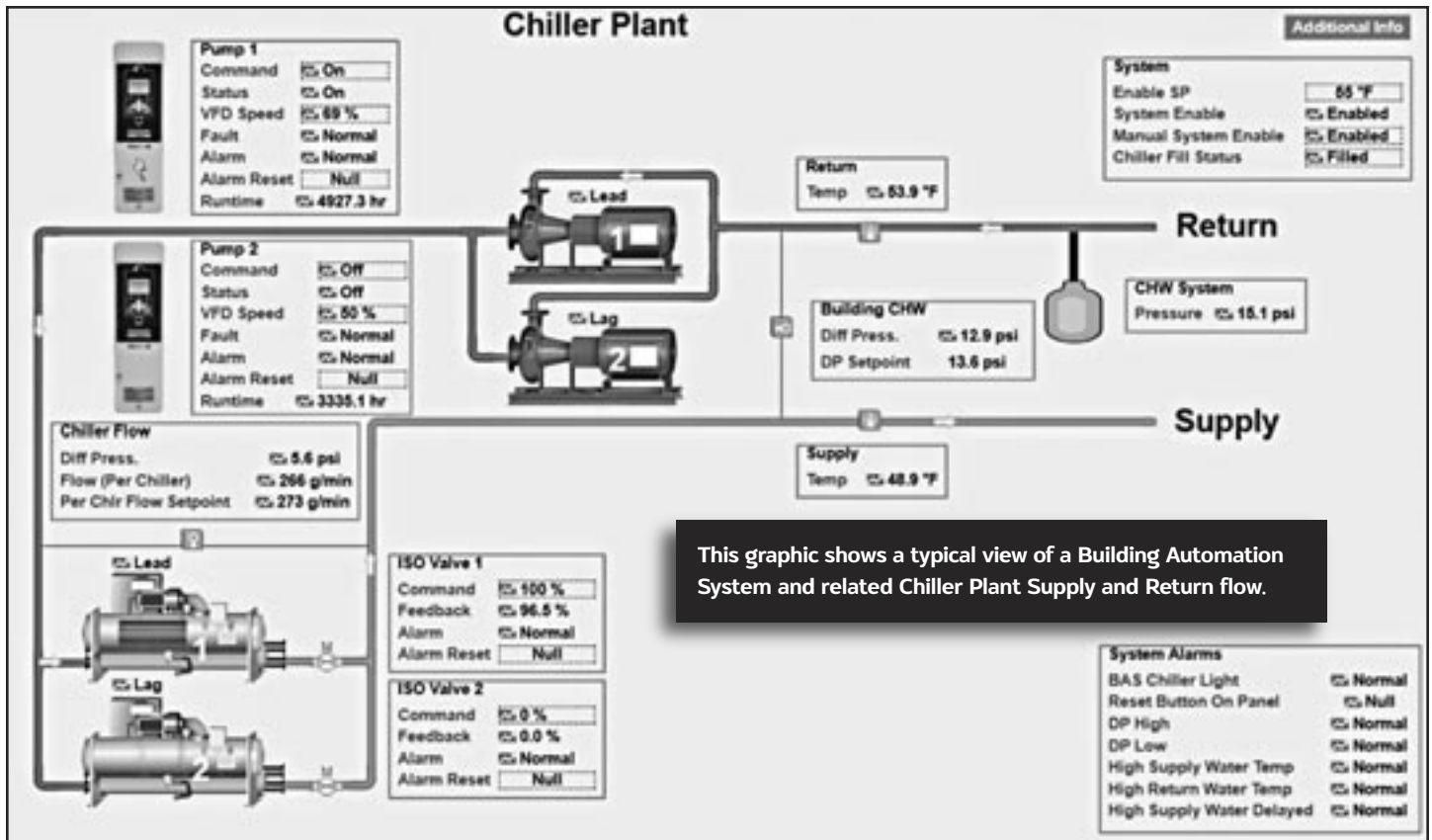
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Functional Testing

Functional testing is a process that simulates various operating conditions and documents the testing results. Operational issues are identified, corrected, and retested as necessary. Functional testing is critical to verify that the controls strategies are properly implemented. This testing becomes most important for the following transient modes of operation as improper operation during any one of these modes is likely to require an urgent service call:

- Lead / lag rotation
- Failover Sequencing
- Equipment stage-up to meet increased load
- Equipment stage-down to meet reduced load

Upon project completion, the owner and maintenance staff should expect the equipment to operate automatically with minimal need for user intervention.

For example, following project completion, the BAS should be able to automatically respond to an equipment failure to maintain some level of building comfort while the issue gets addressed. Note that obtaining this level of reliability and automation is not easy and requires a collaborative effort among the BAS contractor, owner, maintenance staff, consulting engineer, and the individual(s) witnessing functional testing.

Because functional testing represents a snapshot in time and cannot identify every operational issue, additional follow-up is recommended after functional testing efforts are complete, particularly following programming adjustments. It is not uncommon for programming corrections to result in additional issues requiring further correction.

Long Term Serviceability

While the BACnet Standard requires controllers from different manufacturers to communicate with each other, it does not require controllers from different manufacturers to be programmed using software tools from different manufacturers. This is an important distinction. In a BAS installation with controllers from multiple manufacturers, each manufacturer has developed their own programming software to modify the controller programming. BAS contractors are often not able to purchase programming software required for competitor's controllers. If the software tools are not turned over to the owner, then modifications require a technician with the software tools. If the software tools

are turned over to the owner, then any competent technician can service and modify the system. Specifying BACnet alone does not guarantee the owner an open system – the software tools used for system configuration should be turned over to the owner as well, along with administration-level passwords to promote long-term serviceability.

Summary

BASs are commonplace today as the benefits of this type of control system have now been

demonstrated on a large scale, though stand-alone controls remain in many facilities. BASs will continue to evolve in tandem with the continued worldwide advancement of digital platforms, including AI. As such, it will continue to be important to ensure the adoption of BASs by building owners is informed and customized for their specific needs, utilizing the technologies most appropriate for their application. 🍃

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by James A. Slowikowski, Dickler, Kahn, Slowikowski & Zavell, Ltd.

Drones In Our Communities: Coming to a Sky Near You

Most of us are now aware of the portable remote-controlled helicopter-like machines that we see flying around.

As drones become portable and more affordable, we are more likely to see small drones in or around our communities. So, what might this mean for community and buildings? Do they need to be regulated by owners and managers of various properties? Can they be useful to the management or administration of a property?

Are Drones Legal? Are There Laws that Apply?

Drones are unmanned aircraft, so as aircraft they are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration. Presently there are limited FAA regulations that apply. For the most part, the FAA regulations focus on the commercial use of drones rather than private use, or they apply to drones of

a larger size or weight. Those require the operator to be certified by the FAA.

Recreational use of drones or use as a hobby, as opposed to commercial use, is generally permitted by the FAA. There are limited restrictions for recreational/hobby use, including that the drone is used strictly for recreational use, it is not more than 55 pounds, it does not interfere with manned aircraft, it cannot be flown within five miles of airports without prior notice, and use must comply with any applicable local laws. The FAA also has regulations that restrict flying drones above human beings. The drone must be registered, and hobbyists are required to pass a safety test.

There are very few state and local laws pertaining to the use of unmanned aircraft. Illinois has a law that provides that the State has exclusive power to regulate unmanned aircraft,

not in conflict with federal laws.

Illinois law prohibits local governments of municipalities with less than one million inhabitants from passing any ordinance that regulates unmanned aircraft. However, some towns and counties have ordinances prohibiting use of drones in or near the municipality during public events. Illinois law also prohibits using a drone for hunting and fishing or in a manner that will interfere with hunters and fishers.



Can I Fly My Recreational Drone Anywhere?

In a word, no. There is no legal right to fly an unmanned aircraft in or over private property without permission of the property owner.

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Historically, a person's property includes the airspace over the property (at least up to the height where the FAA regulates the airspace). It is likely considered an invasion of privacy. A case in Kentucky in 2015 involved a property owner who was charged with criminal mischief when he used a shotgun to shoot down an unmanned aircraft flying over his home, stating that he believed the drone was recording his daughter while she sunbathed. The judge dismissed all criminal charges, finding in that case that the drone flight over his property was an invasion of privacy.

Can We Pass Rules Regulating Drone Use?

Community associations in most cases should be able to adopt their own rules and regulations prohibiting or limiting use of drones within the association, particularly in common areas. It may depend on the type and set up of the property. Community association property is private property, and typically the association and its board of directors have the authority to govern use and operation of the property. The Illinois Condominium Property Act provides that the board of the condominium association can adopt rules and regulations pertaining to operation and use of the common elements and units. So, a condominium board can restrict use of drones in the common elements, which is most of the property since all areas outside the buildings are generally common elements.

The use of drones in non-condominium townhome and homeowner associations can probably be restricted by the association's board. The governing documents of most community associations grant the board the authority to adopt rules pertaining to the use of common area and association owned property and facilities. Similarly, the documents typically grant authority to regulate use of the homeowners' individual lots. The board should consult its governing documents and the association's attorney to be sure what their authority may be.

Apartment (rental) and office properties can generally institute and enforce rules and regulations with less restriction than community associations. So, it is safe to say apartments and office buildings can regulate the use of drone use by residents or tenants on their property.

Although residents may not have a legal right to use a drone within association property beyond their own property, it may be a good idea to adopt rules so that the board has specific rules and

regulations that it can enforce against violators.

Otherwise, the board may be left with trying to enforce the nuisance provisions of its governing documents, which is not always easy.

Whether or not to adopt rules that restrict drone use is up to the individual boards, as the needs of properties and associations may be different. We often find that rules addressing a particular conduct are not adopted until an event occurs that

highlights the need to address it, because previously nobody envisioned that type of problem would ever arise. This happens when modern technology is introduced to our communities.

Considering the emergence of drone technology, association boards may want to be out in front of drone use before a triggering event occurs, like injury to a resident.

In general, most association rules are adopted for reasons of health, safety, and welfare of the residents, and to maintain peaceful and enjoyable use of the property. From that perspective, preventing potential personal injury or damage to property are legitimate reasons to restrict use of drones. We do not want to hear that a drone flew into a person or someone's vehicle, or broke a window. A board might determine that drones can constitute a nuisance or an unreasonable annoyance, if they are flown near or close to homes or residents. Of course, there is always the question of a resident's invasion of privacy of another resident by using a drone over the property of another homeowner. The drone may have a recording device to view areas the human would not be able to see. A board may want to consider rules to prevent the invasion of privacy. Finally, it is not clear whether associations will be able to restrict use of commercial drones making deliveries to residents. That may depend on FAA regulations as they develop and which may control, like the FCC did with satellite dishes.

Using Drones with Association, Apartment, and Office Buildings

Not all drone use should be considered negative. Drones are becoming useful in different ways to assist property owners and associations with managing and operating their properties. A drone with a high-definition camera can take views and aerial views of the property that were not easily accessible or available in the past. This can be quite helpful to look at the condition of the buildings, such as roofs, chimneys, skylights,



soffits, balconies, and other building components that are not easily accessible. The drone also introduces a safer and less expensive method of inspection of structures. A drone can be used to see if gutters are clogged, rather than someone climbing a

ladder. Drones can get a view from above buildings and all sides of taller buildings. Drones are

also now being used in high-rise office and rental apartment buildings as

well as condominiums. The drone is opening new methods of inspection and maintenance for high-rise and other buildings. In the past, a human would need to erect scaffolding or similar equipment to get to the exteriors of the upper floors of the building. That can be expensive, and has safety concerns. The drone can be used to inspect the façade and windows of any building, even at very high floors, avoiding the use of scaffold. This can be helpful in Chicago where façade inspections and reporting are required of tall buildings. From a maintenance perspective, drones are emerging as a tool for window washing in high-rises. Other technology is being combined with the drone for specialized needs, such as thermal imaging which might assess heating and cooling leaks and other water infiltration to the envelope of a high-rise or other building.

Drones can also be useful for marketing purposes. The drone can take video of the property by a flyover and highlight the facilities and features of the residential or commercial property. This type of drone use is becoming more popular as a marketing tool with realtors selling homes and property.

Another suggestion that has been raised is the use of drones to look for potential violations by a homeowner's association. A drone inspection might disclose exterior alterations or additions by a homeowner that were not authorized by the board. A drone inspection might disclose maintenance and repairs the owner is not performing, that might lead to other problems. Of course, boards should be cautious in using drones for violation inspection purposes, due to the implication of privacy concerns, and the board should consult with the association's attorney.

Drones are flying among us. Is it time for your community association or other property to start considering the implications of unmanned aircraft? 🍃

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Pickleball in your Community Association: 10 Considerations

Pickleball is sweeping the nation as a popular activity for all ages. It is one of the fastest growing sports with over 8 million estimated pickleball players in the US. Before jumping on the bandwagon, consider whether your condominium, homeowner (HOA), or townhome community association has the space, budget, and interest to support a pickleball court. Below are ten considerations for board members, property managers, and community association leaders.

1. Community Needs

Board members need to consider the community's interest in pickleball courts by assessing demand and ensuring that the addition aligns with the association's overall needs and aesthetics. Surveying residents can provide valuable insights into whether adding pickleball would be a worthwhile investment.

2. Evaluating Space

Whether you are building new standalone pickleball courts or converting existing tennis courts, space is also a major factor. Board members need to consider the available space for construction while ensuring regulatory guidelines and safety standards. They must also evaluate the impact on existing amenities, fencing, lighting, and parking.

3. Balancing the Budget

While keeping pickleball court construction or conversion costs within the budget is important, do not compromise on quality. Poor construction can lead to higher maintenance costs in the long run. Careful association financial planning can help balance these aspects effectively.

4. Working with Vendors

Selecting the right vendors for pickleball court construction or conversion is crucial. Ensure that you have clear agreements and maintain open lines of communication. Work with your association's attorney as you evaluate vendor bids, review contracts, check references, confirm contractor licensing, and insurance coverage.



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5. Navigating Building Regulations

Installing a pickleball court is not just a matter of space and interest. You will need to navigate local zoning laws and building codes. Consulting with legal and construction experts can help ensure that your pickleball project complies with all relevant regulations and avoids costly mistakes.

6. Ensuring Accessibility

Make sure that your pickleball courts and other association amenities are accessible to all residents, including those with disabilities. This not only creates a more inclusive community but also ensures compliance with laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

7. Managing Noise

When addressing noise issues related to building pickleball courts or converting tennis courts, board members should consider designating specific hours of use to minimize disturbance. For example, pickleball court access may be limited or prohibited during early mornings and late evenings. Implementing soundproofing measures can also reduce the impact of noise on nearby residents. This can include acoustic barriers or strategic landscaping. Additionally, the placement of the courts should be thoughtfully considered, ideally situating them away from the most noise-sensitive areas.

8. Managing Court Availability and Scheduling

To maximize enjoyment and minimize conflicts, implement a fair system for pickleball court usage. This might include a reservation system or scheduled play times to ensure that all interested association residents get a chance to play.

9. Pickleball Court Maintenance

A pickleball court is an investment that requires ongoing maintenance. There are different upkeep responsibilities involved whether it's an indoor or outdoor court. Or whether the courts are made of asphalt, concrete, hardwood, or other materials. From surface repairs to regular cleaning to weather conditions, maintaining the court is vital to ensure its longevity and continued enjoyment by association residents.

10. Insurance and Legal Concerns

Beyond zoning and permitting issues, board members must also review and possibly update the community's insurance coverage to account for potential pickleball injuries and liabilities. The association's attorney can

also help establish clear rules and regulations including allowing guests, permitting pets on the courts, noise complaints, property damage, and more.

Proactively addressing access and usage can minimize risks and protect the association from potential legal disputes arising from accidents or misuse of the pickleball courts.

Conclusion

Managing a condo association or homeowners association (HOA) is no small task. Volunteer

board members are often thrust into complex decision-making roles that affect their communities while balancing issues including budgeting, legal liabilities, and vendor relationships.

It is critical to understand the nuances of community management, especially regarding association amenities like pickleball courts. Review these considerations with fellow board members and your association's attorney and as you work to foster a positive, engaging, and well-maintained community for all residents. 🍀

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The summer of 2024 is in the books. We made it through the Cicada invasion, the Democratic National Convention, and had a chance to showcase America's best athletes at the summer Olympics in France. Fall is here and so is election season. Hopefully you will make time to be informed and vote in our upcoming elections and encourage the residents of your association to do the same.

With a growing focus on energy efficiency, there is added emphasis on existing high-rise residential buildings in Chicago to lower their energy costs. Our cover story for this issue of CBE is on Building Automation Systems (BAS) as these systems are one of the best methods to help buildings manage their energy use and reduce operating costs. This article provides insight on the benefits, history, expectations, testing and long-term serviceability of BAS.

Another energy related article in this issue is a property profile story on the installation of a new chiller and other improvements recently completed at The Emerald Condominiums in Chicago.

Drone use is ever more popular with individuals, consultants, contractors, and other commercial operators in our society. Drones have several extremely helpful and time saving applications when used properly. There are also some legal concerns and regulatory issues regarding the use of drones so we have provided an article on drone use inside this issue.

Pickleball has become a popular activity for sports enthusiasts, if your association is considering converting tennis courts or installing new courts for residents to use for pickleball, you will find our article on this subject informative and helpful.

Knowing when and how to use outside professionals is an important part of taking care of your property. Our Engineering Insights column offers an article on engaging an engineer or other design professional for capital projects and structural inspections.

We all know that Fall is a good time to prepare for Winter and it is also a great time to do a complete inspection of your common areas for security concerns and to make sure that you and your residents are familiar with important utilities and household items. We have an article in this issue that provides a checklist of things to be informed on such as the location of emergency shut-off valves for gas and water, electrical, cable & phone lines, vents, and other basic items. It is an important part of being prepared and safe in the event of an emergency.

Our regular feature on the weather and your landscape also serves as our The Landscape Buyer column article. This article provides a recap of how the recent past weather is affecting your outdoor landscape and a forecast of general weather conditions for the coming seasons.

State of the Industry Event

Our annual State of the Industry luncheon and seminar will be held on November 21st at the Chicago Cultural Center. We will provide a legal update and have a panel of experts to discuss a number of key topics and trends. Many members of our advisory board will attend this event and would be happy to meet and greet you as well.



We will continue to explore many other building management, maintenance and improvements in coming issues of CBE. If you have an idea or story to share, please let us know. Special thanks to the firms, associations and groups that are Authorized Distributors of Chicagoland Buildings and Environments and Condo Lifestyles. Those of you who are interested in becoming subscribers can obtain subscription information on our website www.chicagoland-buildingsandenvironments.com or contact our office at 630-932-5551 🍀

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The Weather and Your Landscape

As of the date of this writing, August 5, the summer is exactly half over. After three years of the La Nina, this has been a typical El Nino summer so far. El Nino years in Illinois tend to be a little warmer and a little wetter than average. However, this can be affected by other atmospheric phenomena that can enhance or diminish these effects.

Presently our atmosphere seems to be passing through a transitory neutral phase with another La Nina to develop later this fall and winter.

Good Weather for Plantings So Far in 2024

Temperatures have been somewhat above average and rainfall limited to pop-up showers, quite heavy in some places, non-existent in others. Some places resorted to irrigation where the rainfall missed them, but overall, the amount of moisture seems to have been adequate for crops and plantings.

There have been a little more than a dozen days with 90-degree temperatures, with no extended periods of 90-degree days. So far, it has been, as our friend, Professional Meteorologist Greg Soulje predicted, a rather Ho-hum season.

The season has been quite good for plantings. Winter was not particularly stressful although there was a short spell of below-zero nights. Spring was accompanied by good precipitation.

Cicada Invasion

By Memorial Day, plants were in excellent shape, just in time for the cicada invasion. This was a good emergence and there were a lot of them. The singing was loud and some people were annoyed by them. Tiny trees not protected with netting suffered quite a bit, but big established



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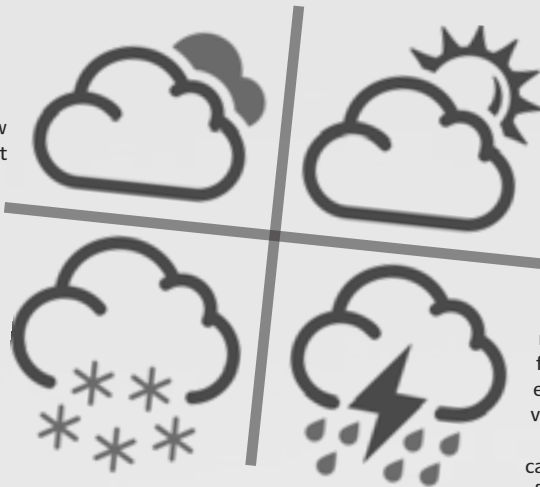
trees simply shed a few twig twigs. After about 10 days it was over with for most areas, some had cicadas longer.

The damage to plantings from the cicadas will quickly heal over. Make sure you are providing good growing conditions, watering as needed, fertilizing to maintain good growth, and watching to make sure no pest problems arise.

Minimal Pest & Disease Problems

Interestingly, pest problems have been minimal according to many observers. Diseases have not been problematic, possibly due to the timing and amounts of rainfall. Insect problems have not been as common as generally expected, but likewise, beneficial creatures such as bees and butterflies seem to be at low numbers.

Except in locales where excessive rains caused problems, even mosquitoes seem not to be especially troublesome. In our town, we are accustomed to seeing night hawks and chimney swifts in big numbers. So far there have been very



few of either, with no flying insects for them to feed upon.

Long Range Weather Pattern

To get an idea of what to expect for the rest of the summer and for upcoming fall and early winter, we again visited with Mr. Soulje.

According to Greg, we can expect a fair amount of heat for the remainder of the summer and into

fall, with the warmer-than-normal temperatures interrupted by brief cool spells, an up-and-down kind of season. The outlook is for drier conditions with no major fall storms, but no drought.

All of this could be modified by what comes off the Atlantic. The dust from the Sahara and the warm Atlantic could spawn storms, maybe hurricanes, that could eventually affect weather here.

Soulje expects the fall to be extended with good conditions for outdoor work and plenty of time for planting and clean-up this year.

There will be no early snow storms, with no early frost and Indian Summer. Winter will be slow to

arrive. The La Nina will ramp up in early winter.

We saw three LaNina years, 2021 - 2023 with moderate weather, no prolonged cold or heat or drought. La Nina summers tend to be warmer and drier and falls cooler. Winters tend to be quite variable, warmer, and wetter than average with more snow and winter storms and short periods of cold.

However, winters are not clear cut as they are affected by Lake Michigan and other atmospheric events. In general, the characteristics of any specific ENSO event (El Nino Southern Oscillation) are influenced by the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, the North Atlantic Oscillation, the Quasi-Biennial Oscillation, and other phenomena, thus the forecasts are complicated.

Could we read a possible short-lived, Polar Vortex somewhere in the mix? It happened last year.

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center suggests normal temperatures for the next three to four months accompanied by early dryness and increasing moisture later in the period.

Preparations for Upcoming Seasons

Keeping the future weather in mind, some preparations can be made for the upcoming seasons. If the rest of summer does become increasingly dry, watering to bank soil moisture is a good idea. Wetting the soil builds a reservoir for trees and shrubs all winter. Do not let plantings go

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By the way, as much as we hate to think of it, the cold and snow are right around the corner, and we need to be prepared for any eventuality.

into winter in a dry condition.

Plantings can benefit from fertilizer. Trees damaged by cicadas will need to make new growth to repair the damage done by the cicada egg laying. It may be best to apply fertilizer after the plantings go dormant.

Protect foliage from insects and diseases. They are producing the carbohydrates the plants will accumulate for use during the winter and in spring as they begin new growth.

Late summer is a good time to trim hedges. Most of the growth for the year has taken place and they will tend to stay in shape for the rest of the season. Flowering shrubs should not be trimmed now. The flower buds are already set and trimming will remove them, eliminating the blooms for next year.

Planting Season is Right Around the Corner.

There is time to identify where any new plants may be advantageous. Some plants may have outgrown their usefulness. New varieties may better serve the need than plants already there. Newer pest-resistant kinds may stay more attractive and less costly to keep looking good. Also, many new things have come into the market that have never been a part of our plant pallet before. Mild winters have made plants appropriate for this area that were not reliable in the past. Try some on a small scale to see how perform before more are planted.

Make an appointment with your landscape consultant or contractor to discuss what plants have been giving them trouble, what plants they think will add to the appearance of your site, or what they suggest that might make the care of your site more successful, more attractive, and less costly. If the job is easier for them, you should find it paying off in the long run.

Make Snow Removal Plans Now too

By the way, as much as we hate to think of it, the cold and snow are right around the corner, and we need to be prepared for any eventuality. Be sure to have your snow removal contract up to date while things are still less hectic. While you are meeting with your contractor you might at least mention your thoughts for the winter and make sure you both are on the same wave length.

Maybe that is the time to discuss any suggestions you might have for where to put snow, what holiday decorations you expect to put up, and any other thoughts that come to mind. 🍃

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by Russ Riendeau, PhD

How Safe are Your Grounds?

When was the last time you really walked around inspecting your property?

If you traveled by air lately, you may have viewed your Captain walking around the jumbo jet for a mandated preflight inspection prior to your boarding. His inspection is conducted in order to be sure the aircraft was safe and ready for flight. You can and should follow this simple process.

How well do you know what is buried under the grass dirt of your common area grounds or yard? Do you know where the wires and pipes are that stick out of the grass around your condo or townhouse? Do you know where they lead to?

Too often, condo owners forget to pay attention to the common areas around their units because they assume the management company will see the problems and fix them. Wrong. You and I need to pay attention to what is around our dwellings and especially to report anything that can become a safety issue. Don't assume anything and always be sure to report what you see in writing to your association's management company.

And, if you are the management company, it's a great practice to consistently remind your residents to monitor changes in their common areas that could be dangerous. So, be sure to look out for what dangerous landmines lay under your children's feet, your dog's paws or your contractor's lawnmower blades that could create serious injury or even death?

With summer in full swing and fall approaching, the grass needs to be cut. It is critical you, as a resident, walk your property to ensure it is safe, as well as knowing what equipment and where utilities are vulnerable. Be sure to educate your family on all of these aspects of your property as well.

As a former home builder, as well as a Mayo Clinic Certified Wellness Coach, I was trained to always be aware of our daily surroundings and to be sure "safety is first" to prevent accidents of all kinds. You too, as the owner of your property, need to maintain your investment to retain value, as well as protect against the consequences of accidents and potential lawsuits. Maintaining your equipment is less costly than running-to-failure, any engineer will swear to it.

Here is a checklist of 15 critical actions you can take this weekend to make your home safer, as well as retain its value. Note: If you don't know what a mechanical fixture does, contact a licensed professional or your management company to inspect.

1. Locate and inspect your B-Box (the main exterior water shutoff valve to your house). If you live in any suburban townhouse or condo association, this valve will be a 5" round steel disk in your parkway, embedded in the sidewalk or in your front yard. Is it sticking up too high to trip on or has it been hit with a lawnmower blade? Is the disk chipped, broken or bent? Maybe you can't even find it? If it is damaged, can't be located or dangerously above the grass, call the water department of your town and they will come out to inspect and replace/repair/test if needed. You may have to raise the dirt around it, but it's a small investment to protect your children, pets and danger of metal pieces striking someone. Painting the metal disk a bright blue, red or yellow is also a good safety measure.

2. Locate your house waste line cleanout pipe to the main sanitary line along the street. Most new houses today have a PVC treaded 4-6" cleanout access cap in the yard where the waste line leaves the house. If you don't have one, you probably have a cleanout in your basement or slab of the home. Is it secure, level with the ground? Have you had your sewer rodded out in the last 5 years? If not, better to hire a plumber to inspect it, rather than the cleaning company to suck up toilet water from your bedroom carpet. Again, your city public works department can help you locate this waste line or a plumber. Painting the cap with a bright color is good way to bring awareness.

3. Where are your gas lines, electrical, phone and cable lines located at in your yard?

Call J.U.L.I.E to have this location service come out for FREE and

they will locate and mark where all your utility lines are. You will be surprised where they are and protect against sticking a shovel in the ground and creating a dangerous fire, explosion or even worse, your cable goes out for the weekend. Make a map of these utilities and keep it handy.

4. Old pipes or wires sticking out of the ground? If you don't know what these wires are or pipes that you can't trace, call a plumber, electrician or even the Fire Department non-emergency number for advice. Don't risk handling these yourself without a professional inspecting them first.

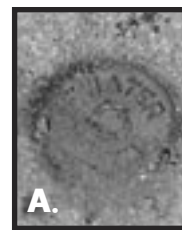
5. Sidewalk heaving or trip steps? Sidewalks crack and heave with frost, large tree roots, and sink with ground water changes. Grind down or replace sidewalk squares to prevent injuries and chances of lawsuits, as well. And it shows you take care of your property.

6. Where is your electrical service ground wire in the ground by your electric meter? Most single family/multi-family homes will have a 1/2-3/4" solid copper rod hammered many feet into the soil with another 1/4" thick wire bolted to this rod that runs to your electrical breaker panel. This is a critical safety measure to reduce the risks of being electrocuted should there be a malfunction in your electrical service. These ground rods can be hard to find. They may be under bushes, behind air conditioners, plants or pavers, etc. If you find it, paint it red or yellow so it stands out and protect it from being smashed or covered. A licensed electrician can also inspect to be sure it is secure and up to code.

7. Can you access your gas meter shut-off and your electrical service meter disconnect? Are they buried in dense bushes or behind a fence or junk? Now is the time to inspect and clear a path.

8. Property iron markers. (This may apply to management only.) All corners of your property should have a 1" metal pipe buried at each corner to allow surveyors to show your land ownership, as well as knowing where a fence can be installed, bushes, driveways, etc. Many of the irons will be difficult to find, buried under decades of dirt, leaves, etc. Finding these irons now will save you time and money if you go to sell your house and have to pay a surveyor to find the irons. Paint them yellow if you find them and if you don't have a Plat of Survey for your property, take some measurements from your house corners to record locations for future needs.

9. Sump Pump discharge pipes compromised? Inspect the discharge area to be sure the pipe is extended far enough away from the foundation to help prevent backflow in heavy rains. Is it pitched away from the foundation? Is the ground sunk around the foundation allowing more water to saturate your soil and over work your sump pump? Fix it now or call the carpet people after it floods. Your choice, of course. Also, now is a good time to inspect and replace your sump pump before it fails. I replace mine every 5 years, regardless of how much use. Remember: if your neighbor's pump fails, it can affect your basement and flooding.



A. B-Box in Cement
B. Air Condition Lines
C. Dangerous Dryer Vent

D. Damaged B-Box



E. Waste Cleanout



10. Window well covers and drains. Are your window wells all covered and secured to prevent kids, pets or skunks from falling into the well? Are the covers pitched and secured to the foundation/house to prevent rain water filling them up in a storm? Are the drains in the wells free of debris? Have you tested them lately?

11. Gutter downspouts secure and taking water away from the foundation? Don't make your pumps work that hard by not getting gutter water away from the foundation immediately. One down spout turned the wrong way can flood a basement in less than an hour in a heavy rain.

12. Air conditioner: Is it level and are the lines/wires protected? Unbalanced compressors can cause strain on the motor and reduce wear and even overheat bearings. Wrapping the freon lines and electrical wiring with foam padding protects them from weed whackers, shovels, rodents, and other sharp objects. Easy to level and insulate for less than \$10 dollars, in most cases.

13. Is your address visible from the street? Unless you never want to be found, make sure your address can be seen from an emergency vehicle on the street. Leave your front porch light on as well all night to allow visibility; Criminals hate bright lights.

14. Trim the bushes away from windows. Criminals love dark areas and love to break in doors and windows not covered in light.

15. Inspect your dryer vent. Is it clogged? Is the flap working? Are your clothes taking longer to dry? If so, it is a fire hazard. Time to get it cleaned and inspected.

Additional notes: Check smoke alarm batteries every 6 months. Check your garage door opener to be sure it is safe and secure. Do you have a fire extinguisher in your garage?

I encourage you to put this list on your refrigerator and check off each item to protect your children, pets, family and enhance the value of your home. Realtors too, can use this as a valuable check list for houses they are trying to sell. 🍀

About the author:
 Russ Riendeau, PhD, is a behavioral scientist, Mayo Clinic Certified Wellness Coach, a former homebuilder and author of 14 books on various subjects related to psychology and business.

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by Trey Waldman – Waldman Engineering Consultants, Inc.

Engaging an Engineer for Capital Projects and Structural Inspections

Knowing When to Involve a Design Professional in Capital Improvement Projects can be the Key to a Successful Project.

In the realm of capital repair or replacement projects, the initial engagement of a structural engineer marks a pivotal step toward ensuring capital improvement project's success. The conventional route often sees association boards and managers considering a project directly soliciting bids from contractors, a method that can yield disparate scopes of work and varying solutions. The essence of involving a structural engineer or architect early lies in their expertise to conduct comprehensive inspections and evaluations, thereby accurately defining the project scope through detailed specifications and drawings. This foundational work not only streamlines the bidding process by providing contractors with a clear set of criteria to bid on but also enhances the accuracy

and competitiveness of the bids received.

The role of the structural engineer or architect extends beyond the planning phase into construction monitoring, acting as an independent third party on behalf of the building owners. This critical oversight includes regular site visits, progress reporting, and ensuring a transparent communication flow between the contractors executing the work and the owners. Such rigorous monitoring underscores the importance of quality control throughout the project lifecycle and guards against the pitfalls of deferred issue resolution, which can prove both costly and time-consuming. By advocating for the involvement of structural engineers from the project's conception through to completion, the process

not only fosters competitive pricing but also aligns closely with budget and time expectations, minimizing potential disruptions and elevating the project's overall success rate.

Using a Design Professional to Conduct Inspections Can Prevent Major Problems

One question we often encounter is: "How often should I schedule a structural inspection for my property?" This is a vital question every community association board or building owner should be asking. Regular structural inspections can catch minor problems before they turn into major, costly repairs.

How Often Should a Structural Inspection be Carried Out?

The general recommendation for a comprehensive structural inspection by a certified structural engineer is once every 3-5 years, with the exact timing depending on your property's age and overall condition. However,

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different components of your property demand varying frequencies of inspection. Here is a brief rundown:

1. **Roofing:** Annually, and after any extreme weather events. A leaking roof can create a range of problems, from water damage to structural weakening.
2. **Foundation:** Structural inspections every 3-5 years, unless you notice visible signs of cracking, settling, or water damage.
3. **External Walls:** Similar to the foundation, an inspection every 3-5 years is recommended.
4. **Internal Structures:** These include floor joists, load-bearing walls, and beams. Typically, a structural inspection every 5 years is adequate, but call a structural engineer immediately if you spot any warning signs.
5. **HVAC, Electrical and Plumbing Systems:** It's wise to have these checked annually by a certified professional to ensure they aren't causing any hidden structural issues.

Keep in mind, this is a general guide. If your property is in an area prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods, or if your building is older, more frequent structural inspections are advised.

Warning Signs Your Property Needs a Structural Inspection

There are certain red flags that should prompt immediate contact with a structural engineer. Let's discuss some of these warning signs of structural issues:

1. **Cracks:** Small, hairline cracks might be merely cosmetic, but larger, expanding cracks—especially in foundation walls or floors—could indicate grave structural issues.
2. **Sagging or Uneven Floors:** Sloping or sagging floors could signal problems with the support structures beneath the floor.
3. **Sticking Doors and Windows:** These could indicate a shift in your home's structure, often related to foundation issues.

4. **Water Damage:** Signs of water damage, such as mold, mildew, or rot, could hint at structural issues.

5. **Bowed Walls:** Walls that are bowing in or out may indicate problems with the home's foundation or load-bearing walls.

In conclusion, preventive maintenance, including regular structural inspections, is a crucial part of building management and maintenance. Spotting warning signs of structural issues early on can save you significant repair costs in the future and ensures that your property remains a safe place for you and everyone who resides there. Don't hesitate to contact a structural engineer if you notice anything unusual – it's always better to err on the side of caution when it comes to the structural integrity of your building. And if you are considering a capital improvement project, it pays to consult and involve a design professional. 🍃



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by Dominique Cowens – FirstService Residential Illinois

The Emerald is Cool, and Now “Chill” with New Chillers

“Chill.” The Emerald is cool, especially now that it has completed a much-needed chiller replacement project. Prior to the new chiller installation, it was not uncommon for the previous 15+ year old chiller system to experience failure.



After performing an eddy current test, a nondestructive test that provides valuable information on the condition and remaining useful life of chiller evaporator tubes, the board was informed that 60% of the evaporator tubes on the North Tower chiller had possible stress cracks and would require extensive repairs or replacement. The association's South Tower chiller also experienced some operational issues and failing evaporator tubes.

Planning and execution heat up

The board set out by partnering with Hayes Mechanical for the chiller replacement project. One of the biggest challenges that faced this venture was the availability of parts and installation timing. Even though this project was approved in 2022, due to supply chain challenges, it took nearly a year before the parts would become available for installation, in late 2023. Once the equipment was ready, it would take ideal weather conditions before the replacement itself could take place. Earlier this year, during the spring, crews were able to perform the system install. There were many moving parts, including the need for a large

A large advertisement for Habitat Chicago. The background is a low-angle shot of a modern glass skyscraper reaching into a blue sky with light clouds. On the left side, there is a graphic overlay with a blue and purple background. The Habitat logo, consisting of stylized vertical bars, is at the top. Below it, the word "HABITAT" is written in large, bold, white capital letters with a trademark symbol. Underneath, the text "Your Vision, Our Mission: Elevate Your Living Experience!" is written in white. A horizontal line separates this from the next section of text: "Experience condo living reimagined with Habitat. Our dedicated team ensures your comfort through seamless maintenance and a thriving community that's designed for you." At the bottom of the graphic, the website "HABITAT.COM", phone number "312-527-5400", and email "CONDOMGMT@HABITAT.COM" are listed in white.



crane, which was placed on south Green Street just west of the building. Coordination with the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) was also required for the closure of streets/sidewalks to operate the crane safely. Additionally, flaggers, barricades, and signage were posted for the safety of everyone in the area. Permitting was also required with the City of Chicago Building Department for the HVAC replacement. Fortunately, all this planning and coordination was managed with the assistance of Hayes Mechanical. 46 weeks later and \$1 million dollars in investment by the community, the project was completed.

Cool finish

Since the installation, residents are “chilling” as they enjoy summer with the new chillers. Francisco Ramirez, Community Association Manager, is proud to report that to date the chillers have been running smoothly. Along with

consistently comfortable temperatures, homeowners also reap the benefits of considerable energy rebates due to the highly efficient chillers. The new chillers include VFDs (Variable Frequency Drives) which control the condenser fan motors. These VFDs not only help save energy, but also help extend equipment life expectancy by reducing fan motor wear and tear. This leads to financial savings, and better return on investment, for homeowners in the short term and long term by increasing their property’s value.

About The Emerald

The Emerald, located neatly in West Loop near Green and Monroe, is an elegant and sophisticated modern high-rise. Erected in 2008 these twin contemporary buildings house 212 condominium residences throughout 12 floors between both twin towers. Under the updated aesthetics are many environmentally-responsible materials,

including bamboo, recycled fiber fabrics and low-VOC paint. All these choices were made with the intention of keeping the community’s sustainability efforts at the forefront. While eco-friendly choices were at the foundation of the building’s development, tasteful and chic design captures the attention. Residents appreciate a plethora of property perks such as open concept housing designs, floor-to-ceiling windows, breathtaking skyline views, and even a private bar, “Club Emerald”. These are just some of the property features residents enjoy. Just outside their doors await upscale community amenities such as Restaurant Row, a glowing nightlife, lush green parks, and convenient access to one of the best public transportation systems in the country.

Board at the helm

The condo association board is comprised of five caring and invested homeowners who desire to see the Emerald be “THE destination condo building of the West Loop!” With that, in recent years the board has approved and completed a major façade project in 2019, which concluded in 2020 and undertook an extensive hallway remodel in 2021. With their last reserve study completed in 2021 the board understands the importance of healthy fiscal management and continues to work to fund the reserves for upcoming capital projects. 🍃

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