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[CAPITAL PROJECTS REPORT 2026]

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by Pamela Dittmer McKuen

CAPITAL PROJECTS REPORT 2026

DESPITE CHALLENGES, CAPITAL PROJECTS CONTINUE TO PROGRESS AS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS GRAPPLE WITH RESERVE STUDIES AND FINANCES TO KEEP UP

Another year passes, and more capital projects have been completed and initiated for Chicagoland's multifamily and commercial buildings. Each year is different for the industry as market conditions, legal and political climates, and technological innovations evolve. Aging building stock is a factor as are client concerns for sustainability and affordability.

Although certain challenges remain—and new ones emerge, the outlook for 2026 is optimistic. Expectations are for volumes or revenues or both to increase or equal those last year's numbers.

Chicagoland Buildings & Environments surveyed a panel of industry pros who are on

the forefront of capital projects to learn the types of work they have on their drawing board and in the fields. They shared their thoughts on how they are navigating the current business climate, and what they view as upcoming trends and challenges.

The panel also offered their professional expertise to help clients and prospective clients assure their projects run as smoothly as possible.

The participating pros are:

Mike Bonick, vice president and architect at Kellermeyer Godfryt Hart architects and engineers; Thomas Flynn, associate principal and architect at Klein and Hoffman restoration architects and structural engineers; Tricia

Conway, vice president of the Condominium Division for The Habitat Company; Adam Sanders, associate principal and practice leader at Elara Engineering; Frankie Sorrentino, senior vice president at Wintrust Community Advantage financial services; Adam Kahn, partner and association attorney at Levenfeld Pearlstein, L.L.C.; and Tairre Dever Sutton, president and community association manager at Tairre Management Services.

TRENDING CAPITAL PROJECTS

Panelists ranked as the most common projects they are currently seeing as facade restoration, roof replacement and maintenance; riser plumbing pipe, fan coil unit and fire pump replacements; water infiltration investigations; window replacements; elevator modernization; and balcony repairs/restorations. Demand is growing for EV charging

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➤ *Roof replacement and repairs are among the most common projects for Chicago area buildings.*



➤ *Replacement of mechanical equipment including chillers as shown in this photo are common projects for Chicago high rise buildings.*

stations, a highly customized task due to the diverse parking and garage configurations and ownerships. Some buildings are looking to upgrade or renovate their lobbies and other amenities, and management professionals are strongly urging their clients to have reserve studies done or updated.

From Elara Engineering, Adam Sanders reports an increase in riser plumbing pipe, fan coil unit and fire pump replacements, all of

which require intense, detailed navigation and planning.

“Fire pump replacement projects in particular have become complex and challenging,” he said. “They impact multiple aspects of building infrastructure: emergency generators, electrical incoming power feeds, electrical equipment, incoming water services, spatial constraints, and so forth, which contribute to increased costs and difficulties.”

Elara has also experienced a growing number of clients wanting more accurate budgeting included in long-term financial forecasting, resulting in an increase in detailed engineering studies to be incorporated into reserve studies, he added.

From Klein and Hoffman, Thomas Flynn reported: “Our most common types of projects are exterior façade restoration/maintenance, roofing/rooftop deck evaluations and replace-

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ment, window repair/replacement, and property condition assessments (leak investigations/reserve studies/due diligence). We also have a new group that is performing building enclosure commissioning for hospitals, cold storage buildings and other large new construction projects. I am primarily involved in terra cotta projects in terms of façade restoration.”

“There seemed to be more apprehension in commencing capital projects in this past year (2025),” Michael Bonick, of Kellermeyer Godfryt Hart architects and engineers said. “It already appears there will be an uptick in 2026, but it’s too early to say.”

He believes the Fannie Mae-Freddie Mac regulations, which impact the salability of community association units, will play a part in the launch of capital projects. (The panelists speak more about this subject later in this article.)

“Chicago’s high-rise associations are facing a surge of major capital projects as they adapt to infrastructure aging, new safety mandates and rising owner expectations,” said Tricia Conway of The Habitat Company.

THE FIVE MOST COMMON PROJECT TYPES SHE NOTES FOR 2025 AND 2026 ARE:

- **Roofing Replacement and Repairs.** Driven by energy-efficiency mandates and insurance requirements, many high-rises are replacing or upgrading aging systems. Weather and resident disruption are the top challenges.
- **Window Replacement and Facade Restoration.** Both code compliance and water-infiltration issues are driving large-scale window and exterior work. Historic buildings face extra hurdles such as municipal oversight and greater costs.
- **Plumbing Riser and Pipe Replacement Projects.** Deferred replacement cycles for domestic water, kitchen waste, and sanitary stacks are overlapping with emergency repairs. The work is highly disruptive and often exposes hidden conditions.
- **Lobby/Common Area Renovations.** Refreshing lobbies and amenities is critical for market appeal. Delays are common due to supply chain issues and evolving design standards.
- **Balcony/Structural Repairs and Reserve Studies:** Buildings nearing 40 years trigger

mandated structural reviews, leading to numerous balcony and parking structure repair projects. Ensuring code compliance and fitting work into short construction seasons are primary challenges.

“There has been a noticeable uptick in both the number and dollar volume of capital projects planned or underway in 2025, compared with prior years,” Conway said. “Major drivers include deferred work from the pandemic, insurance carrier demands, and updated safety regulations. For 2026, the pace is expected to remain steady or increase, barring major economic disruptions.”

RESERVE STUDIES & BANK LOANS

Tairre Dever Sutton of Tairre Management Services, said she is guiding her client associations to understand the value of performing reserve studies.

“I have had two completed in 2025 and am working to get four more on the books in 2026, so associations have this planning tool for moving forward in the next three to five years,” she said. “Some of my associations are planning roof replacements between now and 2027, so



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we have been working on funding solutions.”

Adam Kahn of Levenfeld Pearlstein, L.L.C., said he has not seen meaningful year-to-year change in the types and numbers of capital projects initiated by his client associations.

“Boards are still balancing the need to undertake capital projects with financial considerations,” he said. “I am seeing them grapple with lender eligibility requirements and deferred maintenance as well as concerns about price increases due to inflation, tariffs, and so forth.”

From a lender’s perspective, “It seems like every year the volume of loan requests for capital projects continues to rise,” said Frankie Sorrentino of Wintrust Community Advantage financial services, who expects the trend to continue into 2026. “We have also seen an uptick in collected prepayments compared to prior years.”

Another trend Sorrentino sees: Many of the draw notes are converting early into fully amortized payments as properties try to shorten the term length.

Wintrust Community Advantage’s clients are borrowing money for an array of capital

projects including balcony repairs, roofing, window and lobby renovation, reserve studies and structural evaluations.

“We are seeing more and more properties focusing on completing and refreshing reserve studies to help pre-plan and budget for large upcoming capital improvement projects,” he said.

CHALLENGES FOR A MODERN DAY

Inflation and lead times continue among the biggest challenges within the industry, the panelists reported. Although labor shortages seem to have eased over previous years, labor costs are high. But there are other challenges as well.

“Every project has unique challenges including code changes, access, schedules, and aligning client expectations with project requirements,” Flynn said. “There seems to be an uptick in properties with multiple owners. Finding common ground for ownership regarding the extent of repairs has been a challenge of late.”

Lead times are returning to normal, but they can be longer on custom and semi-custom products, he added. Labor shortages seem to

have eased, depending on the project and the trade. Material and labor costs continue to increase.

“Currently, Elara is seeing inflation, codes and standards increasing project costs,” Sanders said. “For our current projects, the supply chains appear to be stable. While most of the MEP contractors our firm typically works with are not being impacted greatly by a lack of qualified labor beyond the typical constraints, we are aware of other trades recently being affected. Sanders recommends allowing for longer planning phases of projects to accommodate more flexibility in bidding and implementation.”

“Some boards do not understand the value of a reserve study, so I am working to show them we need to review the documents every few months to make sure we are on point and to mark off items we address,” Sutton said.

On some occasions, receiving timely information and reports from architects and engineers for her projects is a challenge, she said.

TECHNOLOGY ZOOMS FORWARD

New technologies and advancing developments in not-so-new technologies continue to

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impact, sometimes significantly, the various phases of capital projects. Among those being implemented within the industry are:

- Drones for review of exteriors.
- Infrared thermography for the evaluation of water infiltration at facades and roofs,
- Laser scanning of buildings for images of historic buildings where original drawings are not available, --Zoom, Teams and other teleconferencing capabilities for meetings on and off sites for greater flexibility in scheduling and
- Mobile phones for photos and video to address onsite issues in real time.

Artificial Intelligence is making headway for limited uses but remains controversial.

"Virtual meetings continue to be a very welcome transformation, especially during capital projects," Bonick said. "They save a step or two in the process, particularly for condo boards that want to be more directly involved, or when making critical and time-sensitive decisions. It's changed communication much the same way that emails supplanted faxes in the '90s. Information can get to more people, more precisely and faster. Of course, in-person meetings still have many advantages, so I hope those will continue to occur as much as is appropriate or needed."

"We have been using tablets for our field work to help with quantity tracking and preparing field reports," Flynn said. "For investigative efforts, we use infrared cameras to assist with leak investigations and data loggers that track temperature and humidity. The use of drones has become more common as a tool to identify areas of a façade that may require further investigation without the need to set up expensive access equipment. We are starting to look at various AI programs to help streamline some internal processes."

Elara Engineering is requiring contractors to utilize software and equipment to better document existing conditions and work performed during invasive projects. This assists in resolving unit owner disputes, provides project team members the ability to review work performed remotely and provides the Association long term knowledge of what is in the walls.

"AI has not impacted Elara's projects in a major way," Sanders said. "When consulted, AI has resulted in recommendations that are not accurate or that can be detrimental to projects and our client's infrastructure. We continue to research whether AI will progress in a



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meaningful way to assist with the engineering we perform. Projects are benefiting from other technologies such as accurate handheld cameras, project tracking software, organizational tools, and scanning equipment.”

AI’s use of natural language processing (NLP) to have normal conversations and simply “talk” can be useful for non-experts to better understand technical and legal concepts, Bonick said.

Try Bonick’s experiment: Use AI to copy-and-paste a report from your expert, and ask the chatbot to “summarize this in a way that a property manager or condo board member with minimal technical experience could understand and apply.”

Or have some fun and ask A.I. to “explain it to me like my teenage child would explain it to a friend.”

“Of course, there is a limit to how much you can trust the results, similar to the early stages of the internet in the ‘90s,” Bonick said. “Always keep your guard up against the spread of misinformation.”

Khan reminds everyone that AI chatbots like ChatGPT do not replace professional expertise.

“Some boards and managers are relying on ChatGPT to prepare initial drafts of communications,” Khan reported. “It is imperative to remember that ChatGPT is not foolproof, and that human review, revision and customization is imperative. I am seeing more communications that I suspect are prepared by ChatGPT and contain inaccuracies such as not taking the association’s governing documents into account or misstating the law.”

LAWS, CODES AND REGS

New and updated legal requirements within the building and real estate industries have a direct impact on capital projects. We all know what that means: Higher costs and lengthier processes for the clients.

“With codes and standards being updated on a regular basis requiring more complex designs, the costs and planning for capital projects continue to be impacted,” Sanders said. “Clients should be aware that capital projects are taking longer to plan and implement. Proactive approaches benefit clients the most and help minimize the impacts of external factors.”

“Changes to the roofing sections of the

building code seem to have had the bigger impact on our work, particularly new insulation requirements, wind-uplift requirements, and changes to egress requirements for rooftop decks,” Flynn said.

The Purple Elephant in the capital projects room is the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac loan eligibility requirements for community associations. If associations do not qualify, prospective buyers cannot get conventional financing to buy units there. Associations with high levels of deferred maintenance or disrepair cannot qualify, meaning that lenders will not make loans for those properties and thus potentially hamper property values and necessitate expensive capital remediation.

“The guidelines from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are raising the alertness level for buildings looking to avoid the dreaded “blacklist” of ineligibility due to needed critical repairs or deferred maintenance,” Bonick said. “We’ve seen a lot more requests for updated reserve studies and letters explaining the current condition of the building. While unfortunate in the short term, I think this creates an added incentive to budget for regular

maintenance, which will save the association money in the long run and help preserve their property value.”

“Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac loan eligibility requirements are causing issues for a number of our community association clients,” Khan said. “The process of being deemed ineligible for financing and how to become eligible for conventional loans backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac is less than clear. We have been working with clients to address loan eligibility issues including undertaking any necessary maintenance, repair or replacement work that may render the condominium association ineligible for Fannie Mae- or Freddie Mac-backed loans.”

ADVICE FROM THE PROS

The panelists offered a few final recommendations to help clients succeed with their capital projects:

Don't delay. Interest-rate watchers expect slow and steady declines over the next 12 to 24 months, but that doesn't mean you should wait for that to happen, Sorrentino said.

“It is beneficial to tackle the capital projects

and repairs quickly,” he said. “Deferring maintenance can lead to a bigger strain on the community and cause potential problems down the road. If the association is special assessing, interest rates are still less than taking out a HELOC.”

Start two years in advance. Flynn explained the process: For a building that is considering a facade repair project, the investigation should be completed by the fall of Year 1, so that documents can be generated during the winter, bid in late winter to early spring, so that construction may start in the spring of Year 2.


“This is especially important for terra cotta work which has long lead-times of several months and requires multiple steps-- harvesting, color matching, mold fabrication, unit fabrication, and curing,” he said.

Make friends with your bank. Starting the loan and bidding process early helps immensely with the overall efficiency of any capital project, Sorrentino said. Opening communication with the financial institution at the beginning stages helps ensure minimal delays and sets a clear pathway forward. Prior to bidding out a project and pinning a commit-

ment deadline, it's ideal to have the bank start analyzing the associations financials.

Include your attorney. Some projects, like fan coil and riser replacements, invite questions about whether the association or the unit owner has the responsibility to pay for various components. Be prepared for this, Khan said, and ask your legal counsel to opine to educate owners and set expectations appropriately.

Organize your team. Establishing points of contact and defining the responsibilities for the owner, contractor and design professional is an important first step for effective and efficient communication. Lay out the expectations for each role. “For most projects, regular progress meetings help turn problems into solutions and setbacks into progress,” Flynn said.

Talk, talk, talk. The more invasive the project, the more important the communication with unit owners who must live through it. “Consultants who are experienced in working collaboratively should be utilized in board meetings and town hall meetings to accurately inform the residents,” Sanders said. 



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The Code requires annual inspections of all elevators, escalators and other conveyance devices. For condominium buildings within the Central Business District, as defined in the Code, the City of Chicago’s Annual Inspection Certification (“AIC”) program requires property owners to (i) hire an independent third-party inspection company to inspect their elevators and other conveyance devices annually; and (ii) maintain an online account for reporting inspection results.

What are the geographical boundaries where the AIC program is in effect?

Participation in the AIC program is required by all buildings in the “Central Business District” which is defined in Chapter 9-4-010 of the Code as the “district ... beginning at the easternmost point of Division Street extended to Lake Michigan; then west on Division Street to LaSalle Street; then south on LaSalle Street to Chicago Avenue; then west on Chicago Avenue to Halsted Street; then south on Halsted Street to Roosevelt Road; then east on Roosevelt Road to its easternmost point extended to Lake Michigan”.

How is annual reporting handled?

The third-party inspection companies must certify compliance by submitting inspection results via the Department of Buildings online portal. Thereafter, the condominium association pays the AIC fee(s), prints the certificate of compliance for each device and posts the certificates on site.

The City maintains quarterly reporting periods for compliance and each building subject to the AIC program is assigned to one of the four annual due dates. It is recommended that condominium associations and their managing agents calendar annual inspection and reporting deadlines to avoid missing deadlines and being subject to City enforcement remedies for non-compliance.

Annual inspections and AIC reporting are required for as long as a device exists.

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How does the City enforce non-compliance with the AIC program?

Similar to other Code violations, any property not in compliance by its assigned due date with annual inspections and AIC reporting may be prosecuted by the City via its Department of Administrative Hearings and may be subject to monetary fines for ongoing non-compliance. Alternatively, properties with equipment deemed to be dangerous or hazardous may be prosecuted by the City via Circuit Court and could also be subject to monetary fines and/or other enforcement action dictated by the court.

Will the City grant an extension on AIC reporting deadlines if needed?

Yes. Condominium associations may request an extension certificate if a device fails its initial inspection and compliance is not possible before the designated due date. A device might fail its initial inspection because repairs are required, a permit is required or both a permit and repairs are required.

An extension certificate grants the condominium association an additional sixty (60) days beyond the original due date to bring the device into compliance, although additional AIC fees may apply.

What if my building is undergoing an elevator modernization project?

Condominium associations undergoing elevator modernization need their third-party inspection company to report to AIC that their devices are under a modernization permit such that AIC changes the device status from “operational” to “modernization”. AIC fees are still generated, must be paid and any certificates issued by AIC still need to be displayed on site. The third-party inspection company must continue to conduct annual inspections to confirm that the modernization work remains ongoing. Once the modernization project is complete and the modernization permit is approved by the City Elevator Bureau, the third-party inspection company must notify AIC such that the devices are returned to “operational” status.

Are there any exceptions to the AIC reporting requirements?

Yes. Condominium associations can have a device marked “out of service” if the device is not operational for 300 days out of the year and a third-party inspection company verifies that the device is inoperable (i.e. not being used). There is still an annual AIC fee for “out of service” devices, but no certificates are issued.

Devices can only be marked “out of service” for a maximum of two (2) years; thereafter, the device must be decommissioned or repaired and returned to service (and would be subject to annual inspections and AIC reporting requirements again).

Decommissioned devices are not subject to AIC reporting requirements. To formally decommission a device, a licensed elevator contractor must pull a permit to decommission the device. Thereafter, a city inspector verifies that the device has been safely decommissioned and finalizes the permit. Once the permit is finalized, AIC should be notified and the condominium association should request the device be removed from its account with the Department of Buildings. 🍃



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Most of us are eager to get past the winter season and are looking forward to the warmer temperatures of spring that allow us to enjoy the great outdoors. This past winter started early and continued cold and snowy throughout the season with long stretches of below freezing temperatures. It was much different than recent winters and was filled with the typical challenges of a harsh winter including difficult driving conditions, icy sidewalks and parking lots, frozen pipes, ice dams and snow removal.

Our economic conditions have remained more resilient than most people anticipated with unemployment still at historically low levels and plenty of travel and spending still taking place. The housing market has improved slightly with slightly lower interest rates. Some areas are even experiencing a buyer's market. While gas prices have been lower, inflation has not yet retreated to the desired two percent target. Hopefully economic conditions will improve in 2026.

Our cover story for this issue of CBE provides a report on current trends in capital improvement projects. Facade restoration, plumbing riser pipe replacements, and roof replacements rank as the most common types of capital

projects that the professionals we talked to are working on. Our experts are also seeing a variety of other projects including window replacements, parking garage repairs/restoration, fan coil replacements, balcony repairs, mechanical equipment replacement, and electric vehicle (EV) charging station installation. Advance planning and budgeting for your capital reserve fund and/or useful life/reserve studies conducted by professionals is paramount to success in property management.

A timely article on "Dual Temperature Systems" in this edition outlines what they are, challenges of this type of system, and optimization opportunities for those evaluating your mechanical equipment and temperature control. Due to the economics and practicality associated with dual temperature systems, it is anticipated that the use of dual temperature systems will continue far into the future even as new technologies emerge.

This issue provides an overview of the City of Chicago inspection certification program for elevators along with a special feature on how having your property host a "Free Dumpster Weekend" can yield surprising benefits. Our Board Basics column offers a discussion on the benefits of proactive thinking in regard to life safety equipment at non-high rise properties including fire alarms, smoke detectors, back up lighting and door closers/door locks.

An article in our The Landscape Buyer column offers insight on landscape management agreements and landscape budgeting. Our regular Industry Happenings column also appears in this issue.

We will continue to explore other relevant building management trends, challenges, and initiatives in coming issues of BE. If you have an idea or story to share, please call us at 630-932-5551 or email mdavids@condolifestyles.net.

Michael C. Davids
Editor and Publisher

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by Scott Nielsen, Fleck's Landscape

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Landscape Management Agreements: What Condominium and Townhome Communities Should Really Be Budgeting For

Landscape management for multifamily communities has evolved significantly over the past several decades. What was once viewed as a relatively simple service—mowing turf and trimming shrubs—has become a discipline requiring horticultural knowledge, operational planning, regulatory awareness, and long-term site stewardship.

For condominium and townhome boards, as well as residential property managers, understanding what is included, what is assumed, and what is treated as an extra within a landscape management agreement is essential. When expectations are not clearly defined, misunderstandings, budget strain, and dissatisfaction often follow.

Not All Landscape Programs Are the Same

Many landscape service providers offer tiered programs commonly described as basic, standard, preferred, or all-inclusive. While labels vary, the true distinction between programs is rarely the list of services. Instead, the difference is typically found in how often services are performed, how thoroughly they are executed, and how much attention is allocated to detail.

Shrub trimming, for example, may appear in nearly every program description. However, the frequency, timing, and level of refinement can vary considerably. The same holds true for mowing cycles, bed maintenance, fertilization

schedules, and site policing. Understanding these operational differences is far more important than comparing service lists line by line.

Clarifying Expectations Before Making a Change

If a community is generally satisfied with its current provider, it is often more productive to clarify expectations than to assume a new provider will deliver improved results for the same investment. In many cases, service shortfalls stem from unclear scope definitions rather than poor intent or effort.

Open discussions about priorities, expectations, and historical performance allow boards and managers to determine whether adjustments can be made within the existing framework before considering a transition.

Core Services Versus Planned Extras

Even under higher-level landscape management programs, some services are best treated as planned extras rather than assumed inclusions.

These often include:

- Core aeration
- Insect and disease control for turf or plant material
- Supplemental fertilization or specialty weed control
- Irrigation system service and repairs
- Seasonal flower installation and maintenance
- Seeding, sodding, or turf renovation
- Mulch or stone installation
- Tree and shrub replacement
- Major pruning cycles scheduled over multiple years

Separating routine management from planned enhancements allows communities to budget more accurately and avoids frustration when additional needs arise during the season.

Illinois Practices and Changing Methods

Landscape practices in Illinois have evolved due to environmental regulations, recycling requirements, and advances in equipment and agronomic research. Spring power raking has largely been replaced by core aeration. Grass clipping recycling is now common when conditions allow, while professional hand raking remains standard for turf and planting beds.

Fall leaf removal, particularly in mature communities with dense tree canopies, can represent a substantial portion of the annual landscape investment. Expectations regarding both spring and fall cleanup should be clearly outlined to avoid assumptions about labor intensity and disposal requirements.

Local and National Providers

Some communities prefer locally owned service providers with ownership involved in day-to-day operations, while others work with national firms. Neither approach is inherently better. However, boards and managers should recognize that staffing models, supervision structures, and communication practices can differ meaningfully.

Consistency of oversight and clarity of communication often have a greater impact on results than company size alone.

Understanding Budget Reality

Experienced professionals can often assess a site's budget tolerance simply by observing turf density, bed conditions, and overall plant health. When dissatisfaction exists, it should be communicated openly during the bidding or renewal process.

When expectations for higher service levels are not paired with realistic budget discussions, frustration is likely to follow. Clear communication benefits both the community and the service provider.



Tree and Shrub Care Expectations

Most standard landscape management programs include general pruning up to a defined height, low-branch pruning for safety and clearance, and the removal of sucker growth. More intensive services—such as corrective pruning, ornamental shaping, rejuvenation pruning, or structural work—are commonly planned and budgeted separately.

Trimming activities are best defined by plant condition, growth habits, safety considerations, and seasonal timing rather than fixed time allotments. This approach allows service providers to allocate attention where it is most beneficial while maintaining consistency across the property.

When corrective pruning or reshaping is desired, it should be clearly stated so it can be scheduled and executed intentionally rather than assumed during routine visits.

Turf Care Considerations

Regardless of how a program is labeled, turf management typically includes two to four fertilizer applications annually. According to University of Illinois Extension guidelines, most sunny lawns require approximately three pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per growing season. Understanding these benchmarks helps boards and managers evaluate whether programs align with best practices or are being adjusted primarily for budget reasons.

Final Observations

Landscape management agreements are most successful when expectations are explicit, scope is clearly defined, and communication remains transparent throughout the season. Many service challenges arise not from missing services, but from missed timing, inconsistent follow-through, or unclear assumptions.

By approaching landscape management as an ongoing operational partnership—rather than a static checklist—communities are better positioned to preserve plant health, manage budgets responsibly, and maintain the appearance and function of their property over time.

Key Takeaways for Boards and Property Managers

- Landscape program tiers typically differ more by frequency, timing, and labor intensity than by the list of services provided.
- Trimming and pruning expectations should be defined by plant condition, safety, and seasonal timing rather than assumed labor hours.
- Many high-impact services are best planned and budgeted separately to avoid mid-season surprises.
- Missed timing and inconsistent follow-through often create more dissatisfaction than missing services.
- Clear scope definitions and ongoing communication reduce misunderstandings and help align service delivery with budget expectations. 🍃

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by Russ Riendeau, PhD

Free Dumpster Weekend!... The Critical & Surprising Benefits For Your Multi-Family Community

Every Spring or Fall, many townhome and condominium associations sponsor a Free Dumpster Weekend for owners.

The gesture, with good intentions, offers residents that have accumulated possessions from downsizing, as well as, yes, procrastinating with ridding ourselves of stuff, along with guilt of discarding “potentially” useful stuff or the desire to hold on to possessions tied to memories. This free offer also had been successful in the past of bringing people out into the community, as well as reminding people of the benefits of reducing clutter.

There turned out to be some unexpected and unanticipated benefits for the community. The board members had further enhanced the appearance and safety of the community.

Here’s a list of the overall benefits that can come from a Free Dumpster Weekend in your community.

Social Interaction: Community events bring people out of their homes. Something new, meet

someone new. The event shows owners their Board is aware of what is happening in the community; they understand some owners may not have the financial resources to afford the cost of a dumpster or are not able to lift heavy things. It also affords neighbors to get a glimpse of who their neighbors are, what they do, how they treat their property, etc. And this new awareness also raises peoples’ awareness to even potentially dangerous conditions. (We’ll discuss this more below.)

Curb Appeal: Offering owners the opportunity to rid themselves of clutter—for free—helps clean up and improve the overall appearance of the community. Old patio furniture, wall hangings, planters, tools, kids toys, etc., that are allowed however, the owner now has some incentive to upgrade their exterior fixtures. People also get

enthusied and caught up in the exciting pilgrimage of neighbors dragging broken lawn chairs to the dumpster. Pride of place, as sociologists call it, kicks in. We don’t want to be left out. Cars, parked on drive aprons for years may now find a home in a garage. Better to protect a \$35,000 vehicle than Halloween decorations and a grandma’s Lazy Boy. And, someone’s junk could be another’s treasure.

Property Values Rise: Reducing clutter, reducing congestion of guest parking or driveway parking enhances the overall appearance of your community. New buyers, Realtors, bankers, appraisers, insurance companies—all see the impact of a neat and safe community as more valuable in their assessments, pricing and referrals.

Safety Benefits: Given the opportunity to discard excess possessions and accumulated rubbish from garages, basements and storage lockers affords the Board and the community a chance to see potentially dangerous situations: excessive debris in garages or basements, faulty extension cords and

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lights, unsafe stairways, hazardous chemicals, paints, food storage or equipment that could be hiding fire hazards, rodent infestations, water leaks, odors and dust causing poor air quality, cramped living conditions, unsafe shelving units. Or, excessive stuff not allowing access to water, gas or electric shut off valves and switches. Hoarding disorders as well could be discovered that need to be addressed for overall safety reasons with the help of your towns health department or human services.

Raising Awareness of Proactive Home Maintenance:

Encouraging owners to consider discarding unneeded possessions raises awareness to look at and inspect their mechanical systems that have been surrounded by clutter: furnaces, filters and cleaning, water heater ventilation, electrical outlets access and safe usage, access to water and gas shut off valves, dryer vents that have not been inspected, dead mice, leaks under sinks hidden by excessive storage of stuff—all this helps people stumble on potential problems to fix before they become an emergency.

Rules & Regs, Bylaws and Code Enforcement:

Events that encourage owners to participate affords Boards and neighbors to learn what is going on in their community and with neighbors. It gives the Board insights to how they can increase safety concerns; take action with owners engaging in unsafe practices around excessive accumulation of trash; clean-up common areas, make needed repairs hidden by accumulated rubbish and even avoid the Fire Department Inspection of the properties for violations and potential fines. 🍃





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Dual Temperature Systems - What They Are, Challenges, and Optimization Opportunities

DUAL TEMPERATURE SYSTEMS / 2-PIPE VS. 4-PIPE

It is common for large buildings to circulate water through a building to distribute heating and cooling energy as water has the capacity to store and transport energy while using a minimal amount of space. Systems that use water to distribute heating and / or cooling energy are referred to as hydronic systems. Hydronic systems are quite common throughout large buildings and campuses as they are an efficient and cost effective way to provide centralized heating and cooling at scale.

A typical residential unit within a high-rise condominium may use a fan coil unit to provide heating and cooling to the space. A typical fan coil unit may include a blower, a hydronic heating coil, and a hydronic cooling coil. A fan coil unit with separate heating and cooling coils is served by four

(4) pipes to deliver the hot water and chilled water (hot water supply, hot water return, chilled water supply, and chilled water return).

Having separate piping systems for heating and cooling does provide more flexibility at the room level (the occupant can decide whether they want heating or cooling). However, installing another pair of pipes, installing fan coil units and other ventilation equipment with more than one (1) coil to transport thermal energy can require millions of dollars of additional development investment and can occupy otherwise useable space throughout the building. Dual temperature systems utilize only two (2) pipes to deliver both heating and cooling energy from centralized pumping systems within the building.

In dual temperature systems, central valves and equipment are adjusted to send hot water or

chilled water through the hydronic distribution piping. This arrangement requires that the decision to make heating or cooling available is made by the entire building as a whole in lieu of being made by the individual occupants.

Although dual temperature systems have some limitations, there are some notable benefits.

Dual temperature systems provide significant maintenance and future replacement cost savings (a typical line item in reserve studies) as only one coil is typically required for all heating and air conditioning equipment and the amount of piping required for heating and cooling is reduced by nearly 50%. Lastly, there are typically ongoing energy savings resulting from the system being unable to switch immediately to heating or cooling, as the heating and cooling equipment does not have to operate year round. This allows the thermal energy stored within the building structure to partially offset heating and cooling needs during outdoor air temperature fluctua-

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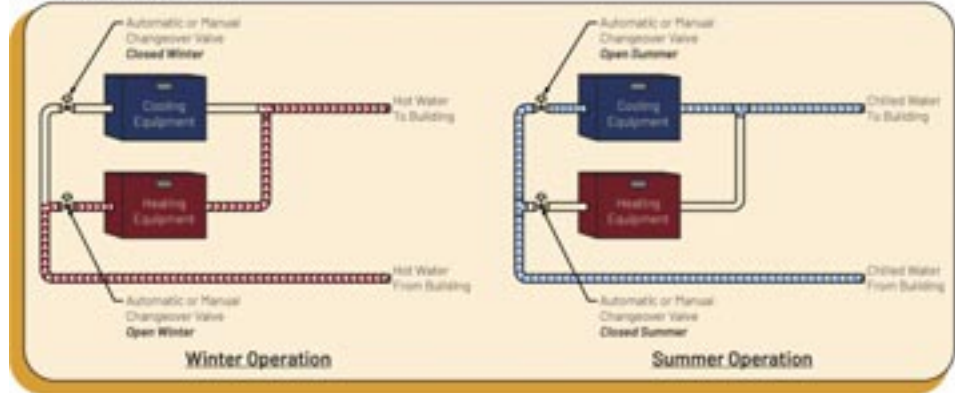
2-Pipe System

tions. For the reasons mentioned above, dual temperature systems have been a common system choice for owners and engineers over the past 50+ years as they have strived to balance comfort needs and construction budgets.

Challenges

Although dual temperature systems provide benefits including reductions in installation cost, energy consumption, and pipe space requirements, dual temperature systems do have some unique challenges.

Since a dual temperature system can only be in heating or cooling at any given time, optimized comfort control may be temporarily unavailable when desired. Meeting the comfort demands of all occupants can be particularly challenging during the shoulder season when the outdoor air temperatures swing between warm and cool weather over the course of a short period. It is common to have cooling requests from one side of a building due to solar exposure, while the opposite side (often the north side) is in the shade and is requesting heating. Additionally, when the system is changing between heating and cooling modes, the system is often temporarily unavailable to provide useful space conditioning. The length of time required to changeover a building is unique to each building and is determined over time through trial and error by building engineering staff and the mechanical service contractors.



Typically, on a transition from heating to cooling, the dual temperature system is passively cooled by circulating water with the heat source shut off. As outdoor air temperatures rise, the passive cooling within the dual temperature loop takes an increasing amount of time. Typically, the reverse is true on a transition from cooling to heating. The dual temperature loop is typically warmed to a neutral water temperature by shutting down the cooling source and circulating water through the building.

Lastly, the changeover process has risks associated with it. It is possible to perform the changeover process too quickly, resulting in equipment damage and costly repairs. For example, it is critical that the dual temperature loop is sufficiently cooled prior to flowing water

through cooling equipment. If the water is too warm, the refrigerant within a chiller can over pressurize and be released. If the temperature of the dual temperature loop is too cool, the thermal shock can damage some boiler models. Additionally, for some buildings, there are known risks of leaks when the piping expands or contracts too quickly.

These risks are mitigated by knowledgeable building engineering staff, knowledgeable service contractors, and proper training on the system. As the building engineers are most familiar with the unique changeover risks associated with the building, it is critical that building ownership and management respects the decision of the building engineer regarding when it is appropriate to change over the building between heating and

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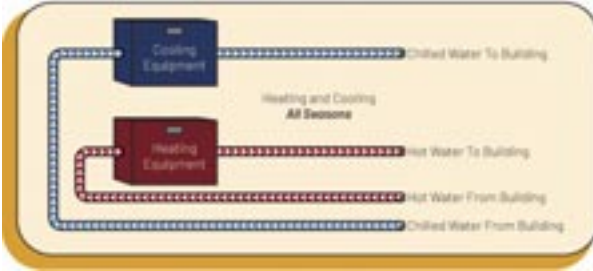
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4-Pipe System



method still relies on the building engineer to make the decision when to switch over the building. However, the main advantage here is that it is possible for the building engineer to make remote adjustments. This can become beneficial for some buildings where the changeover period extends past

normal business hours. The 3rd and final control type for dual temperature systems is “Fully Automatic”. A “Fully Automatic” dual temperature system automatically monitors weather conditions and makes decisions regarding whether to switch the building to heating or cooling without user input. Although a “Fully Automatic” dual temperature system can prevent issues that could result from user error, a “Fully Automatic” system must be thoughtfully designed and thoroughly tested to mitigate the potential issues discussed earlier in this article.

cooling operation to avoid costly repairs.

Dual Temperature System Changeover Control Types

There are three main types of dual temperature control types: fully manual, manual with BAS assist, and fully automatic.

The first and most common control type for dual temperature systems is “Fully Manual”. A dual temperature system that is fully manual has valves and / or pumps used for the changeover process that are only operated by hand. A building engineer for this type of system monitors weather and upcoming forecasts to predict the need to change the building over. Changeover expectations do vary from building to building. Some buildings will typically only changeover twice per year (late spring and late fall). While other buildings do have more frequent changeovers during shoulder season months.

The 2nd control type for dual temperature systems is “Manual with BAS Assist”. This control

normal business hours.

Whenever planning for future mechanical upgrades it is important to understand the existing mechanical systems that are in place and the impact they have on future decision making. Converting a system from dual temperature to (4) four pipe may be desired in some situations to provide more individualized control. Some buildings may desire to convert the dual tempera-

Optimization Opportunities

ture system from “Fully Manual” control to “Manual with BAS Assist” or “Fully Automatic” as mentioned earlier. For some buildings, the changeover process is much longer than they would like it to be and building ownership may desire to reduce changeover time. The feasibility of the possible upgrades referenced above can be evaluated by a qualified engineering professional.

Summary

Dual temperature systems are common with their own unique benefits and drawbacks. It is important for property managers to understand the limitations of dual temperature systems so that comfort expectations can be properly communicated to building occupants. It is also important for ownership and management to respect the building engineer’s decision regarding how often and how quickly to changeover the system between heating and cooling. Due to the economics and practicality associated with dual temperature systems, it is anticipated that the use of dual temperature systems will continue far into the future as new technologies emerge. 🍃

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by Salvatore Sciacca – Chicago Property Services

PROACTIVE THINKING: PENNY WISE OR POUND FOOLISH?

LIFE SAFETY EQUIPMENT CAN SAVE LIVES.

Now that community living has become mainstream and better understood by the general public, it is more essential than ever for the board of directors and the management company to run the operations of the association in a proactive manner. Of course, the term proactive could mean many different things to many different people. Proactive could mean ensuring that the building insurance gets paid so that it does not get cancelled or it could mean that the homeowners are sent an email reminding them to keep their heat above 55 degrees when leaving for their winter home in Florida. It could also mean that the management company reminds the board to set the next board meeting date and time at the end of each board meeting to proactively schedule the next board meeting. Of course, an even more

proactive approach would be to request the board to schedule all the board meetings for the calendar year at the end of the prior calendar year.

But what about components the building life safety systems such as smoke alarms and fire extinguishers? Or what about door closers, locks, lighting sensors, battery backup lighting and water spigot shutoffs? Does it make sense for the association take a proactive approach for these items? Or should the association let these items fail and then repair or replace them as necessary?

PROACTIVE VERSUS REACTIVE APPROACH

The book “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” by Robert M. Pirsig is a great example of the pros and cons of proactive

versus reactive maintenance. In this book, the author compared two motorcycle owners who were referred to as a “romanticist” and “classicalist”. The “romantic” owner chose to not maintain his expensive motorcycle and took a “hope for the best” attitude. He didn’t want to know about the details of how the motorcycle worked and wanted to simply enjoy the ride. Not surprisingly, when his bike broke down, the romanticist become quite frustrated and had to rely on expensive reactive maintenance and mechanics to fix the motorcycle.

On the flip side, the “classical” motorcycle owner who owned an older and much less expensive motorcycle, took a very detailed and proactive approach to maintaining his motorcycle. His motorcycle was always well maintained and had very few unexpected mechanical failures. Although this approach required an investment in time and effort, the

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“classicist” enjoyed getting to know the inner workings of the motorcycle and truly enjoyed this symbiotic approach.

Similarly, when it comes to community association fire & life safety systems, the same two options apply. You can take a hands-off or reactive approach and close your eyes and hope for the best or you can take the time to understand your building’s life safety systems and develop a proactive maintenance program that will check the systems that are designed to keep the homeowners safe and comfortable while ensuring the systems are there and ready to activate in the event of a life safety of fire emergency.

SMOKE ALARMS & FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

For example, you can install smoke alarms that require battery changes every 6 months or you can install a smoke alarm with a sealed 10-year life battery. Regardless of which one you install, they should be tested on a regular basis to ensure they are working. For larger buildings, they should be tested monthly and for smaller buildings every 3 to 6 months. It goes without saying that smoke alarms save

lives and to not check them on a regular basis is just a really BAD idea. Fire extinguishers are also items that should be checked proactively. They should be inspected and certified by a qualified fire safety company on an annual basis and should be visually inspected on a more frequent basis. As an example, one of our buildings had a fire inside one of the units due to a malfunctioning dryer and the homeowner went out into the hallway, grabbed one of the fire extinguishers and used it to suppress the fire. What if this association had not taken a proactive approach and had their fire extinguishers inspected and certified?

BACK-UP LIGHTING

Battery backup lighting is another system that is often overlooked. These systems are designed to activate and illuminate stairwells and hallways in the event there is a power outage. However, the battery inside the unit typically lasts about 2 years and if you don’t check it regularly and/or replace the battery once it fails, the system will stop working. This may result in accidental homeowner injuries the next time there is a power outage and an

evacuation as the stairwells and hallways could be pitch black.

DOOR CLOSERS & DOOR LOCKS

Checking door closers and door locks is another classic example of the benefits of preventative maintenance. You can wait for the door knobs and door handles to fall off and wait for an emergency call from a homeowner saying that they can’t open the door and get inside the building or you can have a technician go around the association on a regular basis and inspect and tighten all loose door handles and door locks. Similarly, you can wait for door closers to slam doors shut or keep doors open as temperatures rise and fall or you can periodically adjust them to take into account effects of the changing seasons before homeowners file a complaint.

PENNY OR A POUND?

In the end, what approach do you want to take? Classicist or Romanticist? Do you want to spend a penny or a pound? The choice is up to you. 🍀

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