UNIVERSITY PLACE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

SUBJECT: Lamp post – 101

The lamp post on your property is not only decorative but is also a part of our community safety. As these are our only street lights, it is vital we keep them in good working order. The following is an explanation on the workings of this fixture and a short troubleshooting procedure for your information.

OVERVIEW: The lamp post system is comprised of four main parts. Failure or the wearing out of any of these parts will cause the lights to malfunction. These parts in order from the house to the post are:

1.) Breaker in the main electrical panel.
2.) Electrical outlet with GFI (ground fault interrupter) usually located in the garage.
3.) Photo cell either located on an outside wall near the ground level or sometimes mounted on the lamp post itself.
4.) Post lamp with bulbs, use of 25 wattage best.

The normal operation is the electrical power from the breaker feeds the GFI and passes electricity to the photo cell which acts as a switch. This switch turns the lamps on at dusk and off at dawn. The photo cell can be tested during the day by placing a piece of black electrical tape over the cell. It can take a minute before the cell operates and the lights turn on.

SAFETY NOTE: Other than changing the light bulbs and resetting the breaker or GFI, all repairs should be done by a qualified electrician.

TROUBLESHOOTING:

1.) Lights are on all the time or just on longer than other post lights: Either shrubbery has overgrown the photo cell or the cell needs replacing. Cut away shrubbery. If lights remain on, have the photo cell replaced.
2.) Lights are off all the time: Change light bulbs. If lights now stay on all the time see trouble shooting item one. If lights remain off, any one of the other items could be the cause. First check the breakers in the main electrical box. If the breaker marked "garage" is tripped, turn it off then back on. If all are "on," check the GFI. This can be tested by plugging a table lamp into the GFI outlet. If the lamp doesn't light, press the test and reset buttons on the GFI. If the lamp still doesn't light, the GFI, the breaker or associated wiring may be bad and in need of replacing. If the lamp lights but the post lamps are still dark, the photo cell is bad. Have it replaced.

Be prepared. Know which breaker and GFI power your lamp post. This is best done when everything is in good working order. Use electrical tape to turn on the post lamps. Trip the GFI in the garage by pushing the test button. You probably have more than one so finding the right one is important. Label the GFI (magic marker works just fine). You may also have more than one garage breaker. Mark this also on the label sheet inside the panel cover.

Any questions? Contact Frank Lange via e-mail: jlange34201@verizon.net.