

# General Information and Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

## Why is it important to perform a Reserve Study?

As previously mentioned, the reserve allocation makes up a significant portion of the total monthly dues. This report provides the essential information that is needed to guide the Board of Directors in establishing the budget in order to run the daily operations of your association. It is suggested that a third party professionally prepare the Reserve Study since there is no vested interest in the property. Also, a professional knows what to look for and how to properly develop an accurate and reliable component list.

## After we have a Reserve Study completed, what do we do with it?

### Step 1: Board Meeting

The Board of Directors has the responsibility to do what is in the best interest of the Association and has significant influence; therefore, the first step is for the Board to meet. This meeting should discuss the results of the reserve study. Invite the Association Manager to attend. The purpose of this meeting should be for the Board to better understand the financial position and the upcoming reserve requirements of the Association. This includes understanding what most influences the results of the Reserve Study

### Step 2: Make a Plan

The Board should then create a plan to determine how best to manage the Association's common area assets and financial position. Using this Reserve Study as a guide, the Board should make the adjustments required to meet the needs of the Association and its members. This includes setting the Reserve Contribution amount.

### Step 3: Association Meeting

After the Board has determined the best course of action, present it to the Association. This allows them to ask questions and understand the direction the community will be heading. This is by far the most important step. Communicating with owners the reasons why will help significantly. Additionally, this brings confidence in the leadership of the Board and unity among the Association members.

### Step 4: Update and Adjust

This Reserve Study is a one year document. It needs to be updated and adjusted annually. Additionally, we recommend regular reviews of your plan. Assess progress and make adjustments as necessary. As already mentioned, we recommend communicating regular updates to the Association members. Whether a major project is underway or postponed for various reasons, the membership will appreciate the update. The purpose of this Reserve Study is to help your community succeed. That only works when you are proactive and consistent.

There are 4 keys to implementing your plan effectively:

- be persistent
- make incremental changes
- monitor & implement your plan continuously
- keep your eye on the ball

Consistently using these keys will help you follow your plan and achieve your goals.

## How often do we update or review the Reserve Study?

Unfortunately, there is a misconception that these reports are good for an extended period of time since the report has projections for the next 30 years. Just like any major line item in the budget, the Reserve Study should be reviewed each

year before the budget is established. Invariably, some assumptions have to be made during the compilation of this analysis. Anticipated events may not materialize and unpredictable circumstances could occur. Deterioration rates and repair/replacement costs may vary from causes that are unforeseen. Earned interest rates may vary from year to year.

These variations could alter the content of the Reserve Study. Therefore, this analysis should be reviewed annually, and a property inspection should be conducted at least once every three years.

### **Is it the law to have a Reserve Study conducted?**

The Government requires reserve analyses in approximately 20 States. Even if it is not currently governed by your State, the chances are very good that the documents of the association require the association to have a reserve fund established. This doesn't mean a Reserve Study is required, but how are you going to know you have enough funds in the account if you don't have the proper information? Some associations look at the reserve fund and think that \$50,000 is a lot of money and they are in good shape. What they don't know is that the roof is going to need to be replaced within 5 years, and the cost of the roof is going to exceed \$75,000. So while \$50,000 sounds like a lot of money, in reality it won't even cover the cost of a roof, let alone all the other amenities the association is responsible to maintain.

### **What is a "Reserve Component" versus an "Operating Component"?**

A "Reserve" component is an item that is the responsibility of the association to maintain, has a limited useful life, predictable remaining useful life, typically occurs on a cyclical basis that exceeds 1 year, and costs above a minimum threshold amount. An "Operating" expense is typically a fixed expense that occurs on an annual basis. For instance, minor repairs to a roof for damage caused by high winds or other weather elements would be considered an "Operating" expense. However, if the entire roof needs to be replaced because it has reached the end of its life expectancy, then the replacement would be considered a reserve expense.

### **What are the grey areas of "maintenance" items that are often seen in a Reserve Study?**

One of the most popular questions revolves around major "maintenance" items, such as painting the buildings or seal coating the asphalt. You may hear from your accountant that since painting or seal coating is not replacing a "capital" item, then it cannot be considered a Reserve issue. However, it is the opinion of several major Reserve Study providers that these items are considered to be major expenses that occur on a cyclical basis. Therefore, it makes it very difficult to ignore a major expense that meets the criteria to be considered a reserve component. Once explained in this context, many accountants tend to agree and will include any expenses, such as these examples, as a reserve component.

### **What happens during the Property Inspection?**

The Property Inspection was conducted following a review of the documents that were established by the developer identifying all common area assets. In some cases, the Board of Directors at some point may have revised the documents. In either case, the most current set of documents was reviewed prior to inspecting the property. In addition, common area assets may have been reported to Community Association Reserves by the client, or by other parties.

Estimated life expectancies and life cycles are based upon conditions that were readily accessible and visible at the time of the inspection. We did not destroy any landscape work, building walls, or perform any methods of intrusive investigation during the inspection. In these cases, information may have been obtained by contacting the contractor or vendor that has worked on the property.

### **What is the Financial Analysis?**

We projected the starting balance by taking the most recent balance statement, adding expected reserve contributions for the rest of the fiscal year, and subtracting any pending projects that will be paid for before the end of the current fiscal year. We compared this number to the ideal reserve balance and arrived at the percent funded level.

**Measures of strength are as follows:**

**0% - 30% Funded** is considered to be a “weak” financial position. Associations that fall into this category are subject to special assessments and deferred maintenance, which could lead to lower property values. If the association is in this position, actions should be taken to improve the financial strength of the reserve fund.

**31% - 69% Funded** is considered a “fair” financial position. The majority of associations fall into this category. While this doesn’t represent financial strength and stability, the likelihood of special assessments and deferred maintenance is diminished. Effort should be taken to continue strengthening the financial position of the reserve fund.

**70% - 99% Funded** is considered a “strong” financial position. This indicates financial strength of a reserve fund and every attempt to maintain this level should be a goal of the association.

**100% Funded** is considered an “ideal” financial position. This means that the association has the exact amount of funds in the reserve account.