

GHI Crawl Space Stories

Version 4 (final)

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**Compiled from submissions to Christopher A. Shuman for the GHI Building
Committee's Crawl Space Task Force**

**Note, stories may have been lightly edited from the original submission(s) to
improve clarity and/or have been reformatted for this document.**

Frame Units

GHI Crawlspace issues – a problem for > ten years -- 54-D Ridge (a K3M type, part of row 54 A-F)

From about late March until November, a strong odor like mildew or stagnant-water hits my nose first thing on waking in the morning. Not only is it a lousy way to start the day but it's a serious letdown to be reminded first thing that after 11 years and periodic requests to GHI this problem hasn't been taken seriously, let alone resolved. It is so strong at times, particularly after it rains, that I've actually had to dissuade some guests from staying, I run the A/C so cold to overcome the dampness and odor my unit could double as a meat locker. I first complained to GHI in May of 2004*, curious enough about what might be going on down there that I stuck a camera through the GS vent and took pictures. These showed a 3-4 foot tall space and a habitat reminiscent of a frat house toga party: bare wood sub-floor with insulation hanging down over wires and pipes, plastic floor covering uneven and in disarray, and blobs of pink insulation (looks like vomit) and black something (shaped like feces) on the floor. Later photos show water ponding in spots on the plastic. My apologies if you're reading this over dinner.

The odor vanishes during the colder weather, replaced by chilly floors and cold air drafts through cracks. Both the cold air drafts and the odor are strongest in the space beneath my kitchen cabinets**. There is a noticeable warp in the floor, enough that furniture is shimmed over an inch in spots. I'd previously assumed this was building settlement after 70+ years. Now I'm not so sure.

Elsewhere in the row, a neighbor in a one-bedroom at the far end complains about the dampness, saying that his interior doors at times won't shut due to the wood expansion—and he runs several dehumidifiers. The odor and cold is also a problem for the neighbor in a one-bedroom (lower) next to me (we share a plumbing or “wet wall”).

Previous visual evidence was from the GS vents, but last month I was able to access the crawl via the doors on the SS. A friend and I could see that the crawl

floor actually varies from about 2' to 4' in depth (so does not resemble models we've seen), and we also saw the following: 2-foot tall plants growing along the wet wall near the vent; SS wall/pipe penetration points not adequately sealed (including the sewer cleanout); foundation walls had black spots which on closer inspection appeared to be growing around small holes and cracks; unsealed holes where the water and sewer pipes run up through the kitchen floor (explains ** above); small gaps in the subfloor beneath my kitchen and my neighbor's bath; hot water pipes not insulated; and the vapor barrier was extensively torn and missing in large swathes.

*Following is an excerpt of an email sent to GHI on May 14, 2004 (when the only way to request maintenance was to leave a phone message).

Sent: Friday, May 14, 2004 1:07 PM

Subject: 54D Ridge - thanks etc.

> Dear Mary,

> I'm the person you spoke with yesterday about the crawlspace issues. Thanks very much for faxing me the report of May 3. I appreciate it.

>

> Please let me know if there is a preferred way to follow up on my current service request to check for the source of odors in the crawlspace beneath 54-D. I think I mentioned, when I moved in (this January) I saw cats going
in and out through the small window in the back. I've since sealed that, and the odor was mild throughout the winter but with the increase in outside temperature it's gotten very strong. ...

The End.

1) I live in a frame unit that smells of mildew from spring until cold weather sets in. The smell (and probably spores) seep through my floorboards (original oak floors) and ruin rug liners that I put down under my room size area rugs. I have had to get rid of several of these liners, at my cost. I have also purchased air purifiers (also at my cost) to run through the year so I do not have allergic reactions. My service side space between the sidewalk and house is almost always damp. Whenever we have rain, the smell of mildew is very much stronger. **Name withheld by request**

2) It was good running into you yesterday. I think that your petition is a really good idea. It is certainly frustrating to have to continue waiting for items that we have essentially already paid for with our monthly co-op fees. As you can probably tell from the 2 stories below, my husband and I aren't the most patient people when it comes to getting home maintenance items completed.

We live in a frame home and my husband primarily telecommutes. Two winters ago when he started telecommuting, he noticed that the floor was really cold and cranking up the heat and wearing thick socks with lined moccasins didn't help. We didn't want to have to beg or wait for GHI to remedy this (see story below for waiting on new windows), so we went to Home Depot and bought a vapor barrier and mid-grade ("better" option in good-better-best choice quality) insulation for ~\$200. My husband, who worked construction to put himself through his undergraduate degree, and father-in-law spent about 3 hours installing it the next weekend and we have noticed a considerable improvement in the reduction of cold drafts coming through the floor.

When I purchased my home in September 2009 the seals on ALL the windows were broken but Kathy Linkenhoker with GHI mentioned that there were plans to replace the windows and that part of the monthly co-op fees went to the reserves to pay for such necessary upkeep. It has now been five years and the windows are still not replaced. Condensation occurs on the inside of the windows and creates mold that I have to remove on a monthly basis with Chlorox. The condensation returns the next day and more mold not long after. I called GHI to request that they replace at least the 3 windows in the back upstairs bedrooms to removed the cause of the mold hazard. I was told that the black mold is not a health concern (completely untrue) and maintenance dropped by 3 containers of DampRid to put out, which isn't really safe since one of the bedrooms is for my 2-year-old son. We already replaced the window in the bathroom when we remodeled it with a \$1600 top of the line Andersen window since the window that was originally in the bathroom likely never met building code requirements (it was 2 windows sandwiched together). I mentioned to both individuals that I talked to at GHI when I described the above problems that if they would not act to replace windows that have exceeded their useful lifetimes that our co-op fee has paid into for more than

30 years, we would act ourselves at the first warm day in spring to replace those windows ourselves and would not ask for permission to do so.

Please feel free to share these stories with whoever you feel is necessary. Thanks again for your hard work and dedication to this problem. **Amber Emory**

3) I live in a two-bedroom frame house. In the summer of 2013 I noticed that my downstairs, original wood floors were buckling. I contacted GHI maintenance. They told me that the humidity in my house was higher than it should be. However they were never able to tell me exactly why the floors had buckled other than noticing that the vents to the crawl space had not been opened. It had been a very wet spring with lots of heavy rains so they believed that was sufficient to cause the problem. I think the heavy rain may have aggravated an already existing moisture issue in my crawl space. **Kris White**

4) I would like to share my crawl space story.

I live in a frame home, end unit, adjacent to the woods. There is an area of the crawl space right under my house that collects water. There is a pump, but it often is not working. When the water gets stagnant, the whole house smells bad. We have to call GHI to get them to come look at the pump quite often.

Also, the insulation in the crawl space right under the stair case keeps falling down. It is especially uncomfortable during the winter on windy days were you can just feel the cold coming in between the steps.

So we have a stinky and cold house due to bad management of the crawl space under my unit.

I have looked under my crawl space and I can see my steps straight on. There is no flooring at all there. The insulation has to be stapled to the bottom part of the steps. Or perhaps glued would be better. The thing is, it keeps falling down.

I have not checked the status of the pump in a couple of months. It is a bit of a hassle to get the key for the crawl space from GHI. Perhaps I can request to have a

copy so whenever the house smells funny I can check if it is the pooling water in the crawl space... **Luisa Robles**

5) When Verizon installed FiOS in our home three years ago the tech reported water standing in the crawl space. I reported this to GHI at the time and then six months later when nothing had been done. They claimed they knew nothing about it. Initial contact was three to four years ago when FiOS was installed and follow up was two years ago. We dropped it after that. We are in a frame unit. For now, I'd rather not you use my name at this point as I'm not yet sure where I stand on how things proceed with all that needs to be done to upgrade our units.

To be honest, while maintenance is responsive to calls, I think GHI as a whole is very unresponsive to the long-term structural problems. This pilot program has been a complete failure in my view as we are a long ways away from even getting the basics of the upgrade done and it looks like nothing that was done with the pilot units such as upgraded insulation and heating will be done or offered to the rest of the membership. A lot of time and money has been wasted and another cold winter is upon us with no end in sight. **Name withheld by request**

6) I have several stories. The most significant of which is how I got my cat. I live in one of the F2E's.

Back in November 2011, I heard meowing. At first, I thought it was just my neighbor's cats although it was fairly loud. I know they had escaped once and I didn't think much of the meowing. At the time, it was driving my dog nuts. She kept looking all around for the new "friend" who she could hear but not see.

For the next hour or so, I kept hearing it. Sometimes it would get louder, sometimes softer, but it became clearly evident it wasn't just my neighbor's cats. I tried to look outside to see if I saw any glowing eyes in the dark, but there was nothing in either the back or front yards. As the night grew on - and it got colder- the meows became more distressed. In all honesty, I finally said a prayer and told God I'd go outside in the freezing temps if that cat meowed one more time. Right after that, the cat meowed.

I yanked on my boots and coat - it was only 24F out- at 10:00 pm that night. As I looked for the creature making the pitiful sounds, I quickly realized it was coming from the crawlspace. My neighbor - who was still up- is a firefighter and I warned him that I was going to call the police to see if they could help. He told me to wait and that he'd help. The moment he took the cover off the crawlspace, we could see two glowing eyes looking back at us. He meowed a question at us and it took three of us - myself, my neighbor, and his son- another hour to coax the very scared and cold kitten out from the crawlspace.

Once we did, I brought him inside, gave him some of the dog's food (not the best but the cat was happy to have any food at that point), and let him sleep in my house. The dog was ecstatic about her new friend - she was like a 13 year old at a Justin Bieber concert. The two quickly became best buddies.

Over the next few days, no one called to claim the missed cat. It was clear he hadn't eaten more than grass for at least a week if not longer. I don't want to think of what would have happened if I hadn't been home and heard Jasper's pitiful cries. He's not a small cat either - at the time, he was kitten and even as fur and bones, he was 7 pounds. He's now a good 20 pound cat. But the point is that he didn't just slip through a crack somewhere.

I'd prefer only my first name used. **Elizabeth**

7) In another story: I mentioned the dog earlier. Miss Ginsie was a fabulous Cavalier King Charles/Cocker Spaniel mix. She loved to chase the squirrels and cats - thinking the cats wanted to play with her. On more than one occasion, she would figure out how to open the fenced gate and chase after her new playmate. Whatever critter she was after, she would follow quickly. I'd be right after her.

Under one of my neighbor's porches was a huge hole for the crawlspace - big enough, it looked, to fit a small human through. Of course, the critters of the neighborhood would run for that for safety and my dog would be right after them. I called GHI once and they seemed uninterested at best about trying to help me get my dog out of the crawlspace. When we opened the bomb shelter doors - or whatever those are- it was clear that the ladder was long gone and the entire thing

was flooded. I don't even want to think about what that is doing to the foundation of these buildings.

Eventually, my pup found her way out on her own and came home. However, there were several instances where she'd get into that crawlspace.

I know such small critters as mice have made it their home - which is why the cats go under there. We've also had snakes and probably a turtle as I've only seen her once and I'm not sure where she really lives. When these critters die in the crawlspace, the smell is horrible and there is little we can do to get rid of it. Because critters can get in there, so can a lot of moisture which brings in mold and termites. I'm not sure if the wood frames are actually structurally sound anymore because of the problems everyone in my court has had with the crawlspace issues.

Feel free to use these stories to illustrate the point. I'd prefer only my first name used. **Elizabeth**

8) Chris,

Regarding my crawlspace:

There are rotten joists between my house and my neighbors below the kitchen that have been damaged by moisture. These have to be replaced. There appears to be a source of moisture there and I don't know if its a plumbing leak or condensation.

There is a 2-story addition on the back with a shallow crawl space, with a concrete block wall separating that space from the main crawl space, which was the original crawl space wall. There was only a small hole between the old and addition crawl spaces, approximately 14 inches by 10 inches, which was the vent opening in the original wall. There was a layer of bricks laying on their side at the bottom of that space mortared into place end-to-end. I chiseled the bricks out, increasing the height of the opening by about 4 inches. This made it possible for me to get through the opening into the addition crawl space. There were fiberglass insulation batts that had fallen down. I pushed them back up and put in steel insulation stays.

I also repaired the batt insulation and installed missing batts in the original crawl space, which included stuffing insulation into the space between my and my

neighbors house. I also insulated and air-sealed (partially) the original space door using aluminum tape and Styrofoam board. I can tell that my insulation repair and installation efforts have reduced the heat flow out of the house and the crawlspace in particular. At night, when I turn the heat pump thermostat down from 70 F to 62 F the house temperature falls at a much slower rate than before the work was done. The new rate is approximately 0.5 F per hour, as compared with 1.0 F per hour previously at current night time temperatures of 38 F. **Tom Moran**

9) This is a frame unit and the problem has been going on for years.

As the humidity increases in the spring, the hardwood floors (First floor) begin to bow, the floor becomes wavy, and the spaces between the boards increases. Then mildew fumes begin wafting up and make it smell very unpleasant in my unit. It's terrible, and probably is a health hazard. This goes on until November/December when finally in response to the lower humidity, the floors flatten out and the spaces between the boards close up.

I keep the humidity down constantly in my unit with dehumidifiers and/or air conditioning during the warm months. GHI came and inspected and said they didn't want to do anything because supposedly something (?) was supposed to happen in 2015. There needs to be a thorough mold/mildew remediation in the crawlspace. **Name withheld by request**

10) Dear Christopher and Ben,

We have been on Hillside Road since moving within GHI in July of this year. We've had an invasion of slugs. They are big ones. We've had spraying done 2-3 times by pest control to no avail. The same night there'd be a dozen slugs in the kitchen. At peak we get sixteen or so slugs that come in at night from the crawl space. They aren't here during the day. My husband thinks the crawl space needs to be sprayed to have any impact, rather than our unit. We also had an industrial dehumidifier for a while, and then GHI tested for dampness and said we were ok. There's some subfloor visible beneath our kitchen drawers, and that seems to be where they come from. The problem has improved recently, but we still get a few slugs now and then.

GHI discovered the leak during the crawl space inspection and to fix it they knocked between our units and installed the dehumidifiers in our kitchens for a while. Our neighbor fared worse. He has said he didn't have slugs though. I am also grateful that they found the leak because our house smelled damp and moldy and we thought it was from a previous leak and were trying to bleach cabinets etc, but it smells better now.

I have also watched the Fios guy hose himself off in the garden and refuse a towel because he didn't want to get remnants of something so vile even on an old towel. So, after watching him emerge completely disgusted, I have to say I haven't expressed any desire in going down there myself. We've had a very busy fall, but as things wind down, perhaps my husband would be interested in taking a look (he's an engineer).

You are welcome to use our names. **Anna and Barrett Bedford-Dillow**

11) Chris:

I have had slugs appear in my kitchen, no doubt coming from the crawl space. My neighbors to the right of me have also had a slug problem. This in addition to mice periodically appearing which probably come from the crawl space. The crawl space neglect is the most major issue facing us and needs to be addressed before other allocations. **Irv Wartell**

12) Here's mine:

I live on Hillside Rd. (an end frame) and have lived here for 25 years. For years I would be aware of the sump pump coming on and off during and after periods of heavy rainfall and snow melt. It was below my unit and it was never too loud or disturbing. I knew it was doing its 'job'. About 18 months ago I noticed that the noise emanating from it had changed. It was somewhat louder and it had a higher pitched (whining) sound, but it still came on for awhile if rainy days came along and was off during dry periods or when we just had light showers. It was still doing 'its job,' I think...

After almost a month without rain, then several days of rain followed, but this time I heard nothing at all. So I called in to maintenance to report that I think the pump had failed. Weeks later after more rain I heard (barely) a quieter pump working and was glad to know that GHI had checked on the situation and repaired or replaced it.

One Monday morning early (about 6 am), I put out some items for trash and recycling and I noticed a raccoon going through some trash items of a neighbors. A few days later we realized that raccoons had been entering the crawl space under our 4 frame units through at least one of the metal ventilation vents that are just above the ground line, as the vent cover was always lying on the ground after it was popped back in its space. My neighbor took care of calling this problem in and animal control was successful in setting some cage-like apparatus just outside the vent to remove the raccoons from our crawl space. This procedure took about a week. I had heard that a small camera was used to access the crawl space to verify the presence of raccoons and this was confirmed along with the presence of mice.

Though I never followed up with any staff about the episode, I had suspected that maybe the raccoons disturbed the sump pump and it had been tipped over and thus wasn't functioning correctly as a result of being shoved around or tipped over. (??).

So, questions come to mind:

How often are sump pumps inspected? Shouldn't they be made more stable? When they are inspected or replaced, shouldn't staff also be qualified (or trained in some way) to help identify whether there is evidence that animals are entering the crawl spaces? If there has been evidence that raccoons or other animals are present and dwelling in the crawl spaces, are staff members then reporting this.?

Note: there are no raccoons living below our crawl spaces here now. Mice maybe. The vents have been installed more tightly. **Bob Snyder**

13) My experience has been similar to that reported by Bob Snyder. I live in an end unit on Laurel Hill Road. My sump pump under my unit has broken down twice in the 24 years I have lived here. On the first occasion, I stopped hearing the sump pump working, and called Maintenance. When the maintenance person

checked it out, he said it was "hot" when he touched it, and unplugged it. It was then replaced.

On the second occasion (within the past couple of years), the sound coming from the pump was different than normal. When the maintenance person checked it, I think he said that some valve or something was stuck, preventing proper operation. The pump again was replaced.

I have also discovered the crawl space vent knocked out and lying on the ground on several occasions. I recently noticed the vent on my neighbor's house right next door was recently knocked out as well. **Name withheld by request**

14) Justin has been in the crawl space (because the Comcast guy was too chicken to go down there). He observed that much of the insulation has fallen down; some insulation was installed upside-down; the barrier on the ground is torn and/or damaged; it's very wet (probably due to poor/no sump pump performance). We have luckily never had any problems with slugs (thank goodness!).

We had a horrendous time with ants this year, but I don't know that it was an issue directly related to the crawl space. We did, however, spray all around the house, and they were still coming in. We think they were coming up through the foundation and walls. We have had one mouse, but our former barn cat-turned house cat rectified that situation quickly. The floor is extremely cold, as well. I'm sure this is an issue that many deal with. Thank you, **Kiley and Justin Cullen**

15) The following is a letter that was sent to Eldon Ralph and Steven Skolnik on 19 October 2014. We met with Mr. Ralph and George Bachman on 28 October 2014 to resolve the issues mentioned in this letter. As of this date, Mr. Ralph came out and personally inspected the crawlspace and floor. We are slated to have work done on landscape drainage next summer. The small hole in the floor was sealed off. All of the steam pipes were removed and any potential opening for animal entry was sealed off. It has also been made a priority to address animal issues immediately rather than waiting for babies to grow up and move. Mr. Bachman also apologized for any misunderstandings regarding personal issues.

Laura Shaffer

In April, we contacted GHI maintenance about an animal problem under our frame unit. This was after I called Greenbelt animal control and was told that GHI dealt with the issue. Each evening for the months of April, May, and June (we're not sure about July as we were out of town for the month due to overseas work), an animal was heard screeching and ripping out the underside of the floor. The response to our concerns was first that these were raccoons that would be out by July after the babies were big enough to forage on their own. Not acceptable – the animal was very loud and destroying property. After a second email, we were told that a contractor with live traps would be out to take care of the problem because the cooperative had decided this was the best way to deal with the problem. I worked as a teenager in a rural veterinary clinic for 3 years. Injured and abandoned infant wildlife – including raccoons, possums, skunks, birds, squirrels, chipmunks, cougars, coyotes, foxes, weasels, and bears – were frequently brought in for free treatment in addition to our regular patients of cats, dogs, ferrets, and farm livestock. I often took home baby wild animals overnight because they needed to be fed every couple of hours. I know what wild and domestic animals and their babies sound like. This was no family of raccoons, feral cats or dogs, or squirrels – as I was assured they were by GHI who never came out to check. This was a single adult possum; maybe a raccoon but it sounded way more like a possum. I also know that unless the live trap guy took only 30 minutes to set up and remove traps, no one ever came to do anything. My husband works from home. No one came. We were told earlier this October that

someone visited our home 4 times. 4 times and nothing was resolved. So if they said they came, GHI just paid someone for unacceptable work or a fat lie about the work they said they did but didn't. That is not acceptable given the monthly fees everyone in this cooperative pays to cover situations like this. My husband and I love animals, but we will not tolerate animals destroying our home - particularly when they are destroying a floor that GHI is responsible for maintaining but not doing anything about to fix.

At the same time we reported the animal problem, we also reported problems with water in the access shaft. Then in May we reported that the shaft for accessing the water meters and crawlspace underneath our row was flooding again. At one point in the spring we were able to look and there was at least 5 feet of standing water in the 7-8 foot deep shaft space. This was more than 2 days after the previous rainfall. The email we sent was in conjunction with a report on animal activity under our home. GHI Maintenance came out to repair damage. They added a second pump to the current sump pump that was shutting down when the electric line powering this pump was overwhelmed with flood water. We were also told that the leaky areas in the foundation creating this flooding were plugged. When my husband and I were allowed to check earlier this month, we saw that the old pipes which were transferring the water into the shaft were essentially capped over with material that seems rather flimsy. Why weren't these pipes removed completely? The pipes are old, not in use, and basically just funneling water under the house – which contributes to rot, mold, and a moldy smell in our home after we've been away for work related travel and shorter trips. There are also large crickets, usually found in humid caves, that live in this access shaft - suggesting that this area is ALWAYS wet and moldy.

Mr. Peter Joseph came out in September to look at our yard and see if we might be eligible for assistance with repair on drains or the addition of drainage lines. He immediately saw that our portion of the row sits in a swale that directs water into our foundation. Mr. Joseph stated that we would be put on a list for next summer's work. His idea would be to add some drainage lines to funnel the water away from the foundation and modify the drainpipes to do this as well. We are very appreciative of Mr. Joseph's efforts and look forward to working with him next summer. After this is done, we can finally do something more with our yard space

– including some terracing which we hope will also help with the drainage issues we've been experiencing.

As part of this yard work to improve drainage, we would like to remove 2 trees at the property edge of our side yard. They are mulberries – a species well known for aggressive root systems that break apart drainage pipes. We suspect that the trees are mucking up our current drainage system, including underground pipes, and don't want future problems if we install more drainage in the yard. We were informed by GHI that we need to submit a Type 2 permit to request permission to remove trees in our own yard. I was told this permit process is a response to a single member of the cooperative who feels that people should not be removing trees from their yards. I will fill out the permit form, but in protest I would like to reiterate that this is my yard and I am attempting to prevent further foundation problems. I am happy to give money or donate time to plant trees elsewhere in the forest areas of Greenbelt, however these trees in my yard need removing and I feel like this single individual is preventing me from exercising my rights to make decisions about my own home.

In regards to the floor, we have finally gotten Mr. Bachman to come out and take a look on 8 October 2014. He spoke to my husband and I about repairing the floor in the morning. We also took a look inside the access shaft. We would like to weatherize our home. Last winter, our first in 59D Ridge Rd., the home was extremely cold. Much of the heat put out by the heat runs and the portable unit I purchased is dissipated by cold air seeping through the floor and windows (I can put up plastic on the windows). As a result we would like to install a floating floor with a thin layer of insulation – but not before we get the original floor repaired. Mr. Bachman came out to assess the sagging corner in our living room (more than ½ inch), as well as a general unevenness throughout the living room space. This corner was not sagging when I made the original repair request in April, but over the summer with all the water and animal issues this situation developed. We recognize that older homes will have some wood floor unevenness but more than ½ inch indicates a deeper subflooring problem. The section that sags is directly over the access shaft and in the corner where the animal was tearing things up.

Mr. Bachman told us that older floors will have unevenness (we did know and expect that) and that GHI won't do anything unless it is more than 3/8s of an inch.

He suggested just slapping on cement over the top of the original floor to even things out. I asked him specifically about looking at the subflooring as I want the whole thing repaired if it is rotted. He said it probably wasn't a rotten support beam in the subfloor but that he would send someone to check. An appointment was made to cement over the big uneven spaces and the sagging corner the following week. I was hesitant to accept the offer as cementing over the top seemed unlikely to resolve an underlying issue of a rotted floor support, but Mr. Bachman's manner suggested that he wasn't going to offer anything else. After he left, I explained everything Mr. Bachman said to my husband who is not a primary English speaker (my husband recently immigrated to the US from Spain) as well as my own hesitancy in having this cementing done. My husband, who has done some construction work, told me to call/email GHI Maintenance and cancel the cementing as this was not going to fix the problem. When I did email the office, Mr. Bachman called me back to ask why. I restated my and my husband's original explanation that given the depth of the floor sag, there must be some problem with floor support. Mr. Bachman said that technically GHI didn't have to do anything for the flooring in my living/dining room area, and reminded me of the pre-sale inspection for my home. He said he could send me a copy of the pre-sale inspection. I assured him that I have my own copy (attached). The copy Mr. Bachman sent is equal to mine. At any rate, the pre-sale inspection says that GHI does not cover "hardwood flooring in the serviceside foyer, dining room, living room..." but that "GHI will repair or replace any damaged to original flooring except due to abuse and neglect." In this case, the neglect is that of GHI Maintenance and Mr. Bachman because I informed GHI of the original problem in April when the floor was not sagging. So the cement patch Mr. Bachman suggested is not covered which is fine because I don't want a patch, I want the support in the floor – the infrastructure of my home – repaired. Infrastructure is part of GHI responsibility. On Friday, 17 October, Mr. Bachman and a GHI maintenance worker came to look at the sub-flooring. Mr. Bachman informed me that there is only a 3"x5" hole where he can see the bottom of the original hardwood floors from the access shaft/crawlspace. He said nothing about the floor support. I really cannot believe that the floor is sagging for no reason. During the 8 October visit Mr. Bachman suggested that some past resident could have had a washing machine or water heater leak. That is not my problem. The floor is sagging now and I have not had any problems with flooding from these

machines in my washroom. The whole situation is ridiculous. It is unacceptable to continue to pay monthly co-op fees that cover GHI maintenance when they have not repaired the floor and have been ignoring this problem since April 2014.

The attitude of the GHI's maintenance is schizophrenic. We have received notices to cut our grass, repair our fence – which we took care of immediately – but they ignore our requests for assistance in keeping the infrastructure of our home in good repair. It is pathetic that we are expected to jump and do our part of the Co-op contract, but have to wait months for a response from GHI. In April, we were treated as the problem, not the animal that was making noise and ripping up the underside of our floor night after night. Mr. Bachman has reminded us that GHI homes are old and we should not expect too much. He has told us that “Co-Op Democracy” and committee operation is the reason that money remains unspent and nothing is done to repair homes. True or not, this community needs to get off it's collective ass and do something about the unacceptable home repair situation. If this community is a true democracy, then maybe we need to vote on getting some people into maintenance who are going to get things done. I believe that it might be in the community's best interest to hold a meeting so that people who are having problems like us can relate what is going on, including the disrespectful treatment we are receiving from GHI Maintenance. I can only imagine how much tougher the situation is for elderly people in our community who may not have the resources or ability to get their homes repaired. Do people in GHI Maintenance and Mr. Bachman live in GHI housing?

We are also concerned with all of the contract work that GHI Maintenance does. Right now it seems like there are many bosses but not many workers. The bosses come to look at the problems and maybe if you're lucky they can send someone from GHI Maintenance staff to fix the problem. Otherwise, everything seems to be hired out. How are these companies connected to people in the GHI Maintenance offices? It seems like if GHI hired enough workers they could get things done in house, faster, and cheaper. There might need to be additional training upfront for some workers, but they would be available every day and could do many of the infrastructure repair, tree work/landscaping, housing upgrades, etc. that GHI is currently contracting out for more money and over a longer time period.

My husband, Roberto Diaz Pulgar, has added the following to the above letter.

I, Roberto Diaz Pulgar, think Mr. Bachman is unrepresentable. He laughed in my face. I first went to the offices with my wife to explain the situation, and he lacked the dignity to rise from his chair and come to my house to see the problem. After six months, we returned and spoke to your manager (a woman of Indian descent) and informed her of the vile and disgusting behavior of this employee. Then in October, Mr. Bachman came to my house and laughed at me again. I am not stupid. I know about home construction and repair; in the past I worked at a maintenance job. His solution is to put a cement patch on the floor. The sagging in our floor is due to Mr. Bachman's incompetence. He is the "boss" of GHI Maintenance and all responsibility ends with him. If from day one, someone had come to deal with the animal and the water problems, we would not have the problem with the floor sagging. I find it incredible that this person is the "boss" of GHI maintenance. All I have received from GHI is constraints and complaints – I must cut the grass, repair my fence, and shut my mouth. I'm happy to talk with you and communicate this information. I am sorry that my English is not very good. However, it is important to talk to you about the welfare of this community. I would be willing to attend a community meeting with a translator, paid by me, in order to explain all that has happened to me. Thank you for your time.

Masonry Units

1) Yes, crawlspace. GHI made a good initial effort to take simple steps to improve the situation. (Cleaned the boiler room floor up, so we could see what was going on. Closed a weep hole that brought ground water into the basement. Made sure the sump pump was still running.) But the water still seemed to be coming either through the walls (walls need insulation; ground needs to slope away from house), or through the floor where the old furnace is rusting in place (need to remove furnace - too costly). GHI wasn't willing to do anything else. (Well, GHI did offer to have GHI workman re-slope the ground away from my house, but that never materialized.)

I asked GHI to let me at least do something on my own, if GHI would do no more. So they gave me permission to enter when needed, on my own, by borrowing the key. I drew water away from the house by attaching tubing to the downspouts, and went in once to see after a rain if that had any effect. (It did not.) I intended to then waterproof the walls and reslope the soil myself, but I ran out of steam and ended up not doing anything more.

The few times I attempted to take pictures of the basement, the workmen who escorted me in appeared uncomfortable, and asked that I not (take pictures). It seemed to me that they must have been given instructions not to let the owners document what the water situation was in the basements. That raised questions in my mind as to GHI's intent with regard to a known problem.

These pictures (not shown) show standing water, water weeping through the walls, rust on and around the old furnace base, and the sump-pump lip's higher elevation than the surrounding floor (thereby impeding drainage). Actually, the floor is not very straight generally, causing water to puddle in places other than the sump pump area. **Mara Hemminger**

2) I promised you a story when you came by the other day. Here's what happened about three and a half years ago in our block unit (at 1B)!

We decided to get FIOS, and the guy installing the cable had to drill a hole into the floor of our front hall closet and wire it via the crawlspace. We didn't think much of it at the time, until our wireless went out, twice, because the cable had been damaged. Apparently there were mice down in the crawlspace chewing their way through the cable to get into our hall closet--which is also where we keep the litterbox, so basically these were the stupidest mice on the planet. After the Verizon guy came back twice, he figured out what was going on and put some kind of reinforced covering over the cable so the mice could no longer chew through it and get into the unit, but by then, we eventually learned, the mice had already infected all three of our cats with FLEAS.

We joke around with our friends that "FIOS gave us fleas," but, in fact, it was not Verizon's fault--all of these vermin came from that nasty crawlspace, and getting that infestation under control in the middle of summer while switching to a new job just ruled our lives for a couple of months and was a huge pain in the you know what. Not to mention how awful it was for our girls!

Thanks for working on the issue to make it better! I'll be curious to hear what the task force proposes. **Jenn (& Andre) Errick**

3) I am on Ridge Road in a brick. The crawl space is directly underneath my kitchen. It is always wet. Whenever it rains the water comes cascading down the service side yard and gets in the crawl space. Hence the floor and some of the walls have cracks in them. It is always full of crickets on the walls that get into the house and are difficult to get rid of. When I switched to FIOS the technician refused to go down to the crawl space and installed the box in my living room without telling me he was going to do that. He did disconnect me though from Comcast. **Ellen Weiss**

4) Here at 45 Court in a brick. I saw about a foot of water. GHI put in a drain hose that didn't do much. After about a half year finally got fixed. My neighbor M and I have had considerable paint cracking downstairs and she suffers from mold allergies and she replaced almost all rugs curtains and wallpaper due to mold Not good situation with all the moisture.

The paint and mold problems have been for years. Only accidentally last year did I get to see the standing water. GHI responded quickly I think but it took months and it is impossible to see by myself. You understand. **Harriette Phelps**

5) Our brick unit's crawl space is always under water. Even after it has been "pumped out"(as it is quite often by GHI), it is still at minimum 2 inches deep because the sump pump employed cannot expel the water below that level, given the depth of the crawl space and the height of the point of discharge.

We don't know how long this situation has existed. At the time we purchased the house (October 4, 2013), we went through the usual, thorough indoctrination but nothing much was said about the crawlspace, except that it was there, and that GHI pretty much took care of that.

We never paid any attention to the crawl space until the Spring of 2014 when we had an unusually heavy downpour, flooding a large area on the garden side at the edge of our addition [a point where the flow from our neighbor's sidewalk, from our own garden sidewalk, and from our roof converged.] The crawl space was flooded and that was our first knowledge of a crawl space flooding problem. We assumed that it was a result of the flooding.

George of GHI maintenance explained to us how we could rectify the surface water problem at the corner of the addition. So we hired a landscaper to implement George's plan. Doing so greatly improved the flow of the ground water into the swale. We thought that the landscaping work would also solve the crawlspace problem but soon found out that it did not. We could only conclude that the crawl space flooding was independent of the surface water flooding.

At this point GHI began to monitor the crawl space, pumping it out at various intervals. We can't say how often because we didn't monitor it. But obviously they were taking the problem seriously. Nevertheless, the problem persists and we are greatly concerned that mold or mildew will follow. Alice, who has a better sense of smell than I do, sometimes smells a dank odor in our addition which she feels comes from the crawlspace. But how long can this situation persist before serious mold and mildew take over?

A further point: Was the crawlspace flooded when we bought the house? We don't know because nothing was said about it. (See above.) Shouldn't inspection of the crawlspace be a part of the buyers inspection?

We are new to GHI (since Oct2013) and to how the system works. We have never formally in writing brought our problem to GHI authorities. But when our garden yard was flooded last Spring, GHI came to us and gave us advice on how to rectify the flooding problem. Since that time we have had contact with them through one of their employees. So people have come to look at it but they were not decision-making level. We probably should have made a formal complaint.

We did do a work request on August 7 2014 to webmaster@ghi.coop which said in part: "our crawl space floods whenever there is a serious rainstorm. Currently there is about 1/8-1/4 inch of water on the floor there. We can smell the odor from our addition. Is there a way to remove this water before mold sets in and a more serious problem occurs." [Since then the levels measured have been 3½ and 4 inches, resp.]

GHI's reply was: "The results of this submission may be viewed at: <http://ghi.coop/node/316/submission/6795>" ACCESS DENIED

Joe and Alice Murray

7) I have been concerned about drainage issues at my court for many many years. Although my row of bricks has not suffered crawl space flooding, water and rust in the old boiler room are quite evident. Worse, the neighboring row has suffered repeated flooding and all members and visitors to the Court have had to navigate periodic surface discharge of this water. Over time, I learned that the passive drain in the neighboring row slowly collapsed over several years ago and a 'temporary' pump discharging water through a canvas hose from the crawl space to the adjacent sidewalk lasted many years before the water was finally piped into the storm drain system. Even when the ground is quite dry, this pump continues to operate regularly (except when it fails as it did several times this summer). This regular flow of water makes it obvious that water problems exist all around the court; they are especially obvious during heavy rains. These long-running surface

water problems are due in to the position of the two rows of brick units lying across the overall ground slope which delivers runoff all the way down from Ridge Road, the fact that sidewalks act as de facto swales because they are now lower than the ground surface which allows runoff to bypass storm drains, and the fact that swales have not been maintained properly (the one above the flooding brick row has mature trees growing in it). This poorly managed runoff is partly due to the original design and partly due to poor maintenance.

The water isn't just a problem for crawl spaces either. The upper row of rental garages at the Court has regular flooding through the back wall. After the removal of a shed adjacent to the upper garage a buried storm drain was eventually discovered. This has led to less water in the garages (that has caused rotted interior walls) but the design of the structure is problematic (the garage gutter and down spout require near constant monitoring) and the degraded swale needs to be fixed for water issues in both the row's crawl space, the nearby garages, and to control sediment accumulating in the parking area. **Christopher Shuman**

8) Hi Christopher,

I meant to send you our own experience with our crawlspace much earlier, but better late than never. We live in the end unit of a masonry row off Ridge Road. In late March we noticed that our hot water had become scalding hot, much hotter than it used to be. I filed a maintenance request, and here is what the GHI maintenance person found:

"Found boiler room flooded from recent rains. Pumped out the boiler room and replaced the water heater thermostats. We will follow up to prevent water from flooding the boiler room."

For the next two months or so we had a hose coming out of the crawl space and whenever it rained, a pump would pump out the water through the hose into our yard. The hose disappeared, once it became clear that the rain did not flood the boiler room anymore. I'm not sure what exactly was done to fix the problem. We don't have access to the crawlspace, and it was locked even when the hose was coming out of there. Best wishes, **Claude Aubert**

Additions

1) My experience was actually a fairly positive one, all told, so I'm unsure how well it'll help your case one way or another. It's a mixed bag, so here goes.

We bought our GHI (Frame, with a finished boiler room -- one of the defense house rows) in the fall of 1995. Spring 1996-98 was met with swarms of literally thousands of termites coming through our HVAC wall unit and into the boiler room. Medium-sized winged ants. They died fairly promptly, and were easily vacuumed up, but it was still gross, and upsetting. I contacted GHI each time, and felt a little brushed off; they downplayed the issue. I guess they may have thought I was exaggerating the 1000s figure.

In any event, something else we'd been noticing over the past couple years were a few bouncy spots in our floor, and a section of floor under our side door that was actually coming **apart** from the wall, leaving a 1-2 cm gap between the floor and wall. That floor was noticeably soft as well. A friend of mine who is a mechanical engineer, upon seeing/feeling the floor said it was his opinion that things weren't right with our floorboards or joists, and I might be well advised to take a look. These were either days back before they locked all of the crawlspaces, or ours somehow got missed ... either way, I got my ladder out of my shed, opened the steel doors, hopped down with a flashlight and started taking a look around. I'd gone there before on a couple of occasions to take a look -- when I'd bought the house, and after the termite issues to see if I could find any evidence of the little beasties (and couldn't), and on all previous times, things had been fairly copasetic.

This time, around November of 1998, I was down in my crawlspace looking around with my flashlight. Visually, I still didn't see anything amiss. No clear visual signs of any kind of infestation, or any other big problems. I saw where my floor and wall were coming apart, where the daylight in the room was coming through the crack. Finally I put my hand up to feel one of the joists. It compressed like a dry sponge. Gently, I pushed and pulled back and forth and it wiggled like a loose tooth. I'm no carpenter, but I knew this couldn't be good.

Reported it **again** to GHI, told them my floor had been sinking (unsure if I ever reported **that** -- just the termites), told them I went down into the crawlspace and what I found, and they came out within a day or two. Their carpenter told us there

was extensive termite damage to the joists, and they would need to replace the entire floor. This was the week before Thanksgiving, and they said they'd get started on it the Monday thereafter. I asked if we could still host the meal, and they said if we have enough people in that room, were going to be pulling grandma up out of the crawlspace. In a word, no. Between then and that Monday, we were (carefully) to clear all furniture out, and then they'd be by to roll back the carpet and start rebuilding from scratch.

So. That was the bad side. The good, is that the carpenters came out, worked quickly, and did a nice job, and we had our boiler room back within 2-3 days after the work started. And aside from the inconvenience of having to move furniture and not having 1/3 of our house for a few days, the fact that GHI took care of it entirely kind of showed us our co-op fees in action, and we were fairly pleased. Then again, had they investigated the termite problem when I reported it in 1996 (or even 1997) we might have avoided the issue. Sad that it had to be a reactive action rather than a proactive one.

And finally, I'm incredibly relieved that I had access to my crawlspace, since if I hadn't, I never could/would have examined the underside of the room in the first place, and we would have likely had to pull grandma (along with several aunts, uncles and cousins) out of the crawlspace amongst a collapsed floor. I did notice, much to my surprise, that they put a deadbolt on the crawlspace after the repairs were made, and figured that was an odd action against someone who had the wherewithal to go down and check on things himself, alerting them of the problem.

Name withheld by request

On a related (historical) note:

Christopher:

Several weeks ago we had an encounter while I was taking a walk and you were on your way to a crawl space meeting. I briefly told you about my visit to Greenhills, our sister village in Ohio, and their sad experience with the destructive nature of termites. I don't know if this is pertinent to the current discussion but I do know that these critters can do an enormous amount of damage, silently and invisibly. About the only way to detect them is to do a visible inspection of every foot of crawl space foundation, in both the frame and brick units, including additions. If this is being done, it hasn't been mentioned in any GHI reports that I have seen.

Ed MacArthur