

# The Virginia Hills Echo



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April 2014

## Police Warn of Tax Scams

"Your driver's license has been suspended. You will be arrested. You will be deported. We are on our way to your home right now." These are just a few of the many threats that scammers are making against hundreds of Fairfax County residents over the past several weeks. Police warn the public NOT to fall prey to these scammers and to notify police of these criminal incidents.

These telephone scammers are described as demanding, aggressive, threatening, and easily angered when callers don't immediately agree to their demands of "overdue tax balances." Some complainants have described the suspect's as having a heavy accent. Typically, callers demand between \$4,000-\$6,000 in immediate payment of unpaid tax bills. These scams are sophisticated and involve false names, numbers, and "IRS" badge numbers. Suspects often continue to call and harass the recipient.

Police urge residents to:

- Contact IRS if you feel there is any discrepancy with your tax bills. Use the numbers found here: <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Telephone-Assistance>
- Be skeptical if someone insists you owe taxes and must pay with a Green Dot Moneypack.
- Report suspicious or harassing calls to police at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/120413citizenreportingsystem.htm>
- Remember, once money has been wired/sent, it is impossible to recover.
- More information on common scams may be found at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/financialcrimes/commonscams.htm>

## New Real Estate Assessments for 2014

Property owners in Virginia Hills should have received the new assessments of their properties about a month ago. For the 13th year in a row, VHCA has reviewed the assessments done by the County Department of Tax Administration (DTA) for correctness. Most years, VHCA has found no problems with the assessment changes. This is not one of those years.

In previous years, DTA assessed properties in Virginia Hills at 91% of fair market value. This year, apparently, that has changed to approximately 93.5%, resulting in an increase of about 7.4% instead of the expected 4.77%. While this number is within DTA's range of 90-95%, VHCA has been at roughly 91% since 2001 when your Association began checking DTA's work.

VHCA conducted a sample of 40 homes in the neighborhood to insure that the new assessments are uniform across the neighborhood and that the increases are close to the 4.77% (or 7.4%) level. In fact, there has been much wider variation this year than we have seen in recent years. While some variation is due to administrative corrections or improvements made by homeowners, these do not seem to explain this year's issues.

VHCA will be querying DTA for the reasons for these changes and, if appropriate, requesting that DTA review its assessments for the Virginia Hills neighborhood.

Given that there are 850 homes in Virginia Hills, VHCA advises all homeowners to check their individual assessments. Homeowners can go to <http://icare.fairfaxcounty.gov/Main/Home.aspx> to access the County's real estate data base. Search for your property by providing its address, then go to

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### **Virginia Hills Citizens Association Meeting**

**Tuesday, April 8th – 7:30 PM**  
**Old Virginia Hills School, Diana Lane**

**Topic: The Real Estate Market  
in Virginia Hills**

## The President's Corner

### Comment from VHCA President Ralph Zecca

Those of you who read my columns know that I promote the idea of community. I am happy to say that many of you have been very supportive and have reached out to me to volunteer time, money, advice, and friendship. I thank you all and ask that you please continue.

The Virginia Hills Citizens Association (VHCA) is rapidly approaching its biennial election when we members elect our President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Director, and Echo Editor to represent our great community to the County and the other neighborhoods in our area.

I know the first thing that all of you are probably thinking. "I love this place, but I do not have time to do any of the work." Truth be told, the requirements and responsibilities are far less than you think. The actual time commitment is at best a few hours a month. And even then, it is usually shared with your fellow officers.

What are the responsibilities of the various jobs? The President not only writes this column, but runs the VHCA meetings and represents the VHCA to the County government and police. The Vice President fills in for the President, assists with attending meetings on behalf of the VHCA (this is very rare), and runs our speakers program for our VHCA meetings. The Treasurer is responsible for paying VHCA bills, managing our budget, and keeping our accounts in order. The Secretary is responsible for taking the minutes at our VHCA meetings and making sure that they are uploaded to our website. The Membership Director is responsible for public outreach, writing and sending out a letter to the residents of Virginia Hills encouraging them to join the VHCA. Finally, the Echo Editor is responsible for the publication that you are now reading.

If any of these positions are of interest to you, come to this month's meeting. Ask us questions. While being an officer may sound as if it requires a lot of time, it does not. (This from a father of two working full time while finishing up a graduate degree). Please consider stepping up and making Virginia Hills the community that others will want to move to.

With sincerest respect,  
- Ralph Zecca



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## Real Estate Assessments

(continued from Page 1)

the "Values" page of the data using the links on the left. That will give you this year's and last year's assessments. To check, subtract your 2014 assessment from your 2013 assessment. Divide that number by the 2013 assessment. Multiply by 100. That should give you your change.

To learn in-depth how DTA conducts assessments, you can read a detailed article at <http://www.dougoulter.com/policy/assessments1.html>.

For the purposes of determining the change in assessments, there were 59 sales of land with improvements (homes) and 2 foreclosures in 2013. Foreclosures are recorded at the amount of the loan outstanding and are not related to the market value of the home. The 2 foreclosures in Virginia Hills are the same number as in 2012. If the home is re-sold after foreclosure, that sale may be counted. All 10 sales by lenders were not counted as valid sales for the purpose of the assessments.

DTA determined that 35 of the 59 sales were at arms-length fair market value as private party sales.

The Board of Supervisors has advertised a rate of \$1.105 per \$100 of assessed value, an increase of 2 cents again this year. That means that the actual rate that the Board will pass as part of the budget cannot be more than \$1.105. At that rate, and including the 7.4% increase in the assessed value if it stands, most Virginia Hills homeowners can expect to see a real estate tax increase of about \$357 on a house assessed at \$350,000 in 2013.

## Call VDOT to Get Potholes Repaired

The heavy snow and rain combined with frequent freeze-thaw cycles this winter have caused an unusually high number of potholes. The moisture gets into the pavement, and when it freezes breaks up the surface. Driving over the loose surface causes the pavement to crumble and pop out.

VDOT is responsible for repairing potholes. To report one (or several), call 1-800-FOR-ROAD (1-800-367-7623) or do it online at <http://www.virginiadot.org/travel/citizen.asp>.

**Visit the Virginia Hills Web Site  
at  
[www.VirginiaHills.org](http://www.VirginiaHills.org)**

**Join the Virginia Hills Citizens Association  
for the new membership year that began on  
September 1st.**

## 2013-2014 Membership

**Mail to: VHCA, P.O. Box 10837,  
Alexandria, VA 22310**

I'd (We'd) like to join / renew my (our) membership in the Virginia Hills Citizens Association. Enclosed are the annual membership dues of \$7.00 per household. I am also including a contribution in the amount of

\$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Checks for dues may be made payable to VHCA or  
the Virginia Hills Citizens Association.**

## Lee Districts Concerts in the Park for June

June 4	Radio King Orchestra (Big Band)
June 11	The Pietasters (Ska)
June 18	Jon Carroll Band (Pop/Rock/Soul)
June 25	Leroy Justice (Classic Rock)

Concerts take place in the Lee District Park amphitheater at 7:30 PM. Admission is free. If there is a threat of bad weather, call 703-324-7469 after 6:00 PM for cancellation updates.

The concert schedule for the remainder of the summer will appear in the June *Echo*.

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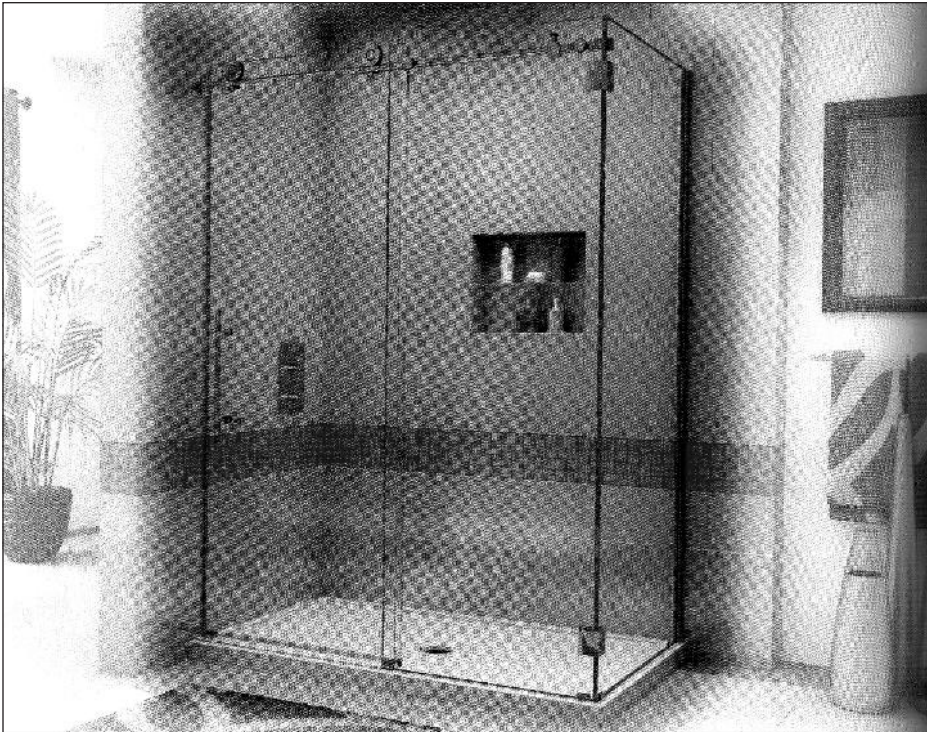
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# **View from the Hills**

## **Doug Boulter's Advice on Home Repair:**

### **Interior Painting**



I've recently discovered a major change in interior painting. Paint stores can now do much better color matches from samples you bring them. This means that, even if your original paint has faded over the years, the paint store's computer can match the faded color. This enables you to touch up spots and large sections of old walls. You can even add new walls that will blend perfectly into the old. The advantage here is that you can often do a series of patches instead of re-painting an entire room. This means much less work, much less expense, and a really good looking job if it's done right.

To get a sample of the color, cut away about a one inch square piece of the paper covering the drywall. That's what you'll take to the home center or paint store for them to match. If the walls aren't in terrible shape, a quart might get a lot of rooms done.

When you bring the paint home, try some on a place where there's good light. When it dries, you shouldn't be able to see a mismatch between the old and the new. If the match is good, make sure you have the formula for your paint. Many places will print you out a label that their computer can scan the next time for the match.

Now go around the room and find all the dings and dents, nail holes and nail pops, and stains on the wall. It's a good idea to make a list of the ones you find. Then go back and do it again, or have someone else do it (fresh eyes). If the places that need to be filled are small, get a small container of spackling compound. If they're larger, get some pre-mixed joint compound (drywall mud). If you're a purist, or really in a hurry, get the 30-90 minute drying joint compound that you mix with water yourself. If you're not skilled at mixing it, however, get the pre-mixed.

Go around and fill all the dents and holes using a putty knife for small ones and a drywall knife for large fixes. Let the joint or spackling compound dry. When it is dry, sand it lightly so the surface of your patch blends in with the existing surface. If you're not sure, it's better to over-sand than under-sand.

Now take your paint and a small brush and, working off your list, paint all of the places you've filled and all the dirty or stained spots. Let the paint dry and see how you've done.

If you have serious stains that would show through the paint (water stains, for example), do a coat or two of either Kilz or Zinsser. These two products are designed for this very purpose and are equally good in my

experience. Then, after this prime coat dries, paint over the spots with your paint that matches the wall.

Be prepared to do a second round as you're likely to find more places you want to fix as you're filling, sanding, and painting.

What if you have a popcorn ceiling that has been cut into? You can get spray popcorn texture in home centers that you can spray on the ceiling to cover any cuts or new drywall patches. This is not easy to do the first time, however. In addition to reading the directions on the can carefully, I recommend also doing the following.

Cover the floor beneath the area you're repairing with a very large drop cloth. You'll get a large amount of the texture on the floor. Shake the can as much as the directions say, then shake it the same amount again. Finally, observe the recommended temperature for application. Don't apply texture if it's too cold or too hot.

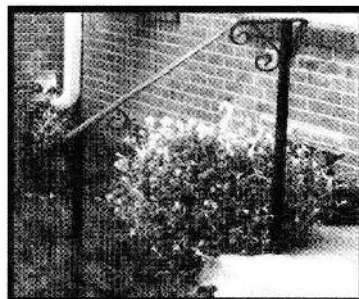
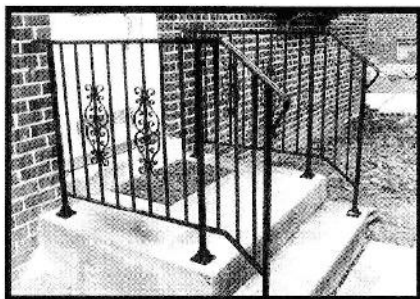
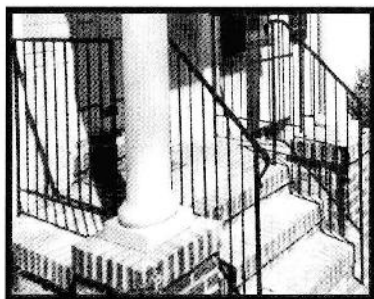
Let it dry twice as long as the directions recommend. You can try painting with a roller, but I'd recommend using a brush, gently. A lot of the old popcorn texture may come down if rolled or brushed hard.

What if your walls or ceiling are textured? Again, you can buy the spray and the spreading knife (like a drywall knife, but with a rubber blade). This too takes a lot of practice. You have to match the existing texture, and it may take you a few tries before you get the technique down. If you don't like what you've done, scrape it off and try again. Experiment with the amount of pressure you put on the rubber blade of the knife.

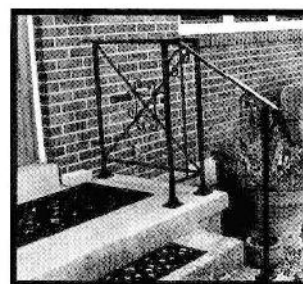
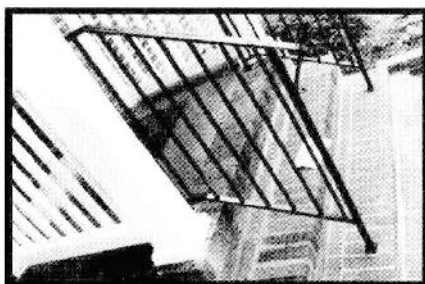
While pros use texture to cover up a lot of problems – and often use it as a substitute for quality joint finishing, if you don't tape over joints in the drywall and finish them pretty well, the joints will show through a thin texture coat. Try to make the joints as flat and smooth as possible before you apply the texture.

Finally, if you're working along the edge where one color meets another, you'll want to make sure that you make a sharp edge. A good painter will use a sash brush to "cut in" the new paint against the old, and that's lots of fun to do if you have a steady hand. But painter's tape is really good these days. It sticks well, but not so well it pulls off the old paint when you take it off. I'd go with that if you're not skilled at cutting in. Just press a bit harder along the tape's edge to prevent paint from bleeding under the tape.

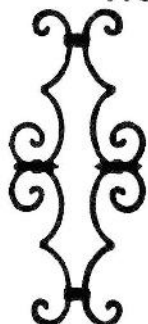




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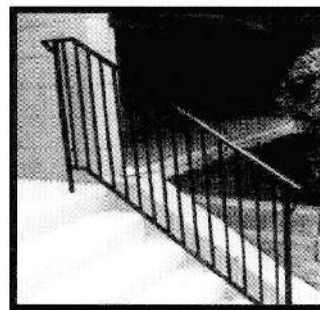
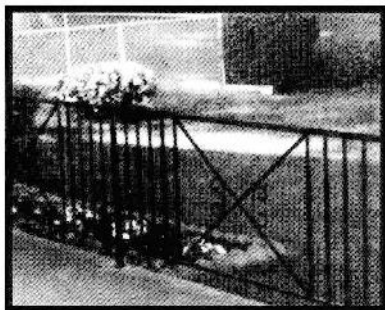
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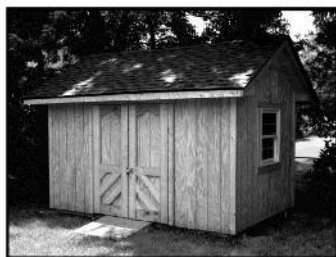
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## Message from Supervisor McKay

The County Executive released his budget on February 25; on March 4, the Board of Supervisors in a bipartisan vote agreed to advertise a property tax cap of two cents. It's a challenge to fund our residents' needs, especially with growing federal and state service cuts so I reluctantly supported this. I don't want to tie our hands by not providing flexibility to fund critical County services. (While the two-cents is the highest that the tax rate can go, the Board can adopt a lower increase.)

Education is our Board's priority and the school transfer will be about 52 percent of the General Fund. We also fund school resource officers, crossing guards, school health aides and nurses, SACC, and FCPS' debt service and dedicate two thirds of our bonding capacity to the schools.

The Board of Supervisors is legally required to adopt a balanced budget and there's no getting around our economic circumstances. Many businesses and households have been affected by the federal fiscal cliff, sequestration, the federal government shutdown, and the lingering effects of the Great Recession. Federal and state funding cuts have affected County services, and to balance our County budget, we've reduced funding to

human services, public safety, parks, libraries, and employee compensation.

We're expected to assume costs beyond our residents' ability to pay and we're burdening our taxpayers—who through real estate and personal property taxes fund close to 80 percent of our General Fund. It's good that our housing market is recovering and that in comparison to other areas of the state, we're financially healthy. It's not good that Fairfax County gets back only 19 cents on every dollar that it sends to Richmond. It's not that we don't pay enough taxes; it's that we don't keep them in Northern Virginia. We're 27 percent of the state's population, generate 40 percent of the state's General Fund and get back only 21 percent.

Please let me know what's important to you. You'll find detailed budget information at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/>.

To testify at a budget public hearing, contact the Office of the Clerk to the Board at 703-324-3151 or online at [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker\\_bos.htm](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker_bos.htm)

Public hearings are in the board auditorium of the Fairfax County Government Center on April 8, 9, and 10.



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### Current Virginia Hills Real Estate Market

Status	Style	Address	BR	FB	HB	List Price	Close Price	Bsmt	Gar
Active	Rambler	3715 Logan Ct	3	1	0	\$359,990		No	0
Active	Rambler	6106 Houston Ct	2	2	1	\$465,000		Yes	0
Active	Rambler	6511 Berkshire Dr	3	2	0	\$400,000		Yes	0
Active	Colonial	6401 Dorset Dr	4	2	0	\$448,900		Yes	0
Cnko	Rambler	3708 Heather Ct	4	3	1	\$499,900		Yes	0
Sold	Colonial	6210 Hillview Ave	4	2	0	\$395,900	\$400,000	Yes	0
Sold	Rambler	3602 Oakwood Ln	4	2	0	\$375,000	\$375,000	Yes	0
Sold	Colonial	3716 Logan Ct	3	1	0	\$319,900	\$319,000	No	0
Sold	Rambler	3718 Logan Ct	3	2	0	\$379,900	\$377,000	No	2
Sold	Rambler	3709 Trigger Ct	3	1	0	\$357,500	\$350,000	No	0

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