

Barrington Place

BANNER

FEB. 2022

BPHOA LOOKS FORWARD TO 2022 AND LEAVES BEHIND 2021

2021 was an interesting year presenting many challenges above and beyond what is normally expected in overseeing an HOA. In addition to the usual maintenance tasks in caring for the clubhouse, pool, subdivision entrances, and Section 3 Park playground and common areas, Covid 19 and winter weather affected us all.

Winter storm Uri came to our area during February 13-17, 2021. Many homes in the subdivision lost power, leading to frozen pipes, and with the eventual thaw, saw sheetrock damage, wet carpet, and ruined furniture. Lots of established trees, shrubs and vegetation died from the hours of sub-freezing temperatures and were damaged from the weight of sheet ice. The exterior pipes at the pool and clubhouse were winterized and came through OK, but the clubhouse interior pipes froze and burst like many others in the subdivision, when the power was lost. The pumps at the pool lost power but fortunately the large amount of water in the pool and in the pipes helped keep the pipes and pumps at the pool from being damaged. However, every entrance lost knock out roses, and other decorative vegetation was killed, and this had to be removed and replaced.

The unsettled policies and ever-changing recommended social distancing practices in addressing the Covid 19 pandemic led to changes in many long-standing practices in Barrington Place.

There was no Easter Egg Hunt, Weenie Roast, National Night Out, and Christmas gatherings as social distancing guidelines kept Santa and the Easter Bunny from the usual meet and greet, and picture taking with residents. Stringent food preparation regulations made it uneconomical to individually wrap and prepare food in advance of these events. Hopefully in 2022, these events can resume.

The pool was open for use in the summer of 2021 but Covid 19 practices also altered normal pool practices. The pool furniture was put away for the season as it would have to be cleaned and sanitized after each use. Rather than shutting down the pool during swim hours to take the time to clean the pool furniture, pool users were asked to bring their own furniture for personal use which worked best. Lifeguards

were scarce to come by, but for the most part a full and safe season was had and the new splashpad and pool improvements were positively received. A chlorine shortage also made chlorine tablets hard to come by and expensive. Plans are underway to open the pool for 2022.

Rental use of the clubhouse was suspended. Every time it looked like the HOA could open the clubhouse for use, we saw a rise in infection rates in the area and new variants (Delta and Omicron) meaning increased cleaning protocols and expense in opening the clubhouse to regular use. In person attendance Board meetings became virtual for the members, who could call in by phone and listen to the meeting and ask questions when appropriate. Hopes are high to open the clubhouse for rental and to resume in person Board meetings in 2022.

The Covid 19 pandemic also delayed the Alston Road Lightweight Concrete Fence installation. This project has long been desired by community residents to improve the visual appeal of wood fence on the South side of Alston Road which consists of nonuniform styles and materials that are in varying states of repair and condition. An opportunity presented itself in February 2020 to replace the unsightly existing wood fence and to build and install a uniform Lightweight Concrete Wall with the City of Sugar Land 4B Corporation reimbursing 50% of the approximate \$132,000.00 cost for the project. The timeline for the completion of this project was planned for the end of 2020 and early 2021 but its implementation was derailed by the Covid 19 pandemic and was delayed even further when Winter storm Uri exacerbated material shortages and contributed to labor problems. At this time the project received City Approval on December 21, 2021 and actual work on the Lightweight Concrete Wall should commence in the next 30 days. A more detailed Article on the Alton Road Lightweight Concrete Wall is included in this publication with detailed plans that can be viewed online at barringtonplace.net

The Annual Meeting is scheduled in May and 2 Board positions are up for election. Those wishing to run should contact MASC Austin Properties so that their candidacies can
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BPHOA LOOKS FORWARD... (CONTINUED)

be forwarded to the Nominating Committee. The Board has several methods in which to convey information to its members. There is the HOA website "barringtonplace.net" which can be accessed 24 hours a day. There is the TownSq App which one can sign up for to receive information. There are newsletters that are periodically published and mailed to members. There are entrance signs that post information and the bulletin board at the Clubhouse.

Information sharing is not one way. By using the TownSq App, messages and questions can be sent by the homeowner to the HOA. Phone calls can be made to MASC Austin Properties at 713-776-1771 and emails can be sent to aconnell@mascapi.com. **At this point approximately 362 home owners out of 1021** in the HOA have signed up to receive notifications through the TownSq App. Again all owners are encouraged to participate in meetings, join committees, and volunteer to make our community a better place to live. The more input and participation we have from the Owners, the better we can address issues in the subdivision.

Help Wanted: Bilingual HOA Member who can help translate basic HOA forms into other languages



Barrington Place HOA is a very diverse community. It enriches us to see the various cultures share their unique heritage with the community. However, at times, it makes communication difficult on very basic matters. Every homeowner who wants to make an improvement to their home needs to complete and send to the management company a Request For Home Improvements Approval Form "RFHIA" before starting work on their projects.

Recently a homeowner of Vietnamese heritage contacted the HOA about submitting a RFHIA form. The form is in English and the homeowner did their best to fill in the form but that understanding took time and repeated efforts since English was a 2nd language to the homeowner. The homeowner was able to make his improvement but the process showed the Board that there is a problem. Maybe with the help of the community we can solve that problem. There are many other languages, besides English, that are spoken/read in the HOA in numerous households. Some of the many languages in our homes include Spanish speaking/reading individuals, others are fluent with many Chinese dialects, and still others use different languages. Again, Barrington Place is a very diverse community.

So, we are asking for your help. We see a problem and we want to solve that problem. Barrington Place belongs to every homeowner regardless of what language they speak or read. The Board does not want any group to feel isolated or neglected. If persons are willing to help and we find success, we can see if other items such as the newsletter and website can be adjusted to be more effective and helpful in communicating with the many and varied residents of Barrington Place HOA.

BARRINGTON PLACE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Managed By:
MASC Austin Properties, Inc.
945 Eldridge Road
Sugar Land, TX 77478
(713) 776-1771
www.mascapi.com

Angela Connell,
Property Manager
aconnell@mascapi.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President
Ken Langer

Vice-President
James Lucas

Secretary
Lynn Johnson

Treasurer
Al Lockwood

At Large
Melanie Cockrell



COMMUNITY WEBSITE:
WWW.BARRINGTONPLACE.NET

HOA ANNUAL MEETING

On Thursday, May 19, 2022, the Barrington Place Homeowners' Association (BPHOA) will hold its Annual Meeting at the clubhouse at 13318 Rosstown, at 7:30 p.m. On that date the membership will elect two (2) Board of Director positions currently set to expire on May 19, 2022. The two Board position terms are for two (2) years. Al Lockwood and Kenneth Langer will be running for re-election for positions 4 & 5 respectively. Those wishing to run for a Board position should contact the management company, MASC Austin Properties, at 945 Eldridge Road, Sugar Land, Texas 77478, as soon as possible.



The candidate may submit a candidate profile for publication in the April Banner and for display on the HOA website. Candidates are requested to keep profiles to 400 words or less due to space allocation in the Banner. Should a candidate wish to submit a longer candidate profile, a notation will be made in the Banner that a more extensive profile is posted on the Barrington Place website. Candidate Profiles will be published in the Banner one time during April. All timely submitted profiles shall be kept on the Barrington Place website from the date first published on the website until May 20, 2022, after which they will be removed. Changes to a candidate profile on the BP website may be made by a candidate as long as changes are timely made. All candidates are requested to avoid vulgarisms and profanity in their profiles. Due to printing deadlines and the uncertainty of United States Postal delivery, and cost saving measures limiting the monthly printing of Banner issues to the month of April, it is questionable whether or not that an issue of the Banner printed in May 2022, would reach the membership before May 19, 2022; therefore, no proxy ballots or candidate profiles will be published in any May Banner issue.

MAJOR DATES & DEADLINES FOR MAY 2022 ELECTION

January Website - Announcement of May 19, 2022, Board Election. Management Company to take names of candidates for Board positions and forward same to Nominating Committee for consideration and forward any candidate profiles for publication in future Banner issues to publisher and for posting on barringtonplace.net website.

February Website & Banner - Announcement of May 19, 2022, Board Election. Management Company to take names of candidates for Board positions and forward same to Nominating Committee for consideration and forward any candidate profiles for publication in future Banner issues to publisher and for posting on barringtonplace.net website.

March Website - Announcement of May 19, 2022, Board Election. Management Company to take names of candidates for Board positions and forward same to Nominating Committee for consideration and forward any candidate profiles for publication in future Banner issues to publisher and for posting on barringtonplace.net website.

April Website & Banner - All candidacies, submissions of candidate profiles and listing of candidate's name on proxy ballot for distribution in the April Banner issue must be received by Friday, April 15, by 5:00 pm for Nominating Committee consideration. All candidacies, submissions of candidate profiles and listing of candidate's name on proxy ballot for distribution in the April Banner issue are directed to: MASC Austin Properties, Inc. Phone#: (713) 776-1771, Facsimile#: (713) 776-1777, E-Mail Address: aconnell@mascapi.com.

All candidacies received after the April 15, 2022, 5:00 pm deadline will not be considered by the Nominating Committee and will not be published in the April Banner and will not be posted on the barringtonplace.net website. After the April 15, 2022, 5:00 pm deadline, no further changes will be made to timely submitted candidate profiles or proxy ballots printed in the Banner. Further inquiries about candidacies, submissions of candidate profiles and listing of candidate's name on proxy ballot for timely distribution in the April Banner issue should be directed to: MASC Austin Properties, Inc. Phone#: (713) 776-1771, Facsimile#: (713) 776-1777, E-Mail Address: aconnell@mascapi.com.

Nominating Committee Deadline – April 15, 2022 - All candidate applications must be reduced to writing and signed by the Applicant and submitted on or before 5:00 pm on April 15, 2022 to the Nominating Committee for its consideration. All candidacies submitted to the Nominating Committee should be directed to: MASC Austin Properties, Inc. Phone #: (713) 776-1771, Facsimile #: (713) 776-1777, E-Mail Address: aconnell@mascapi.com. All candidacies received after this April 15, 2022, 5:00 pm deadline will not be considered by the Nominating Committee in making its nominations for Board of Directors.

CLUSTER BOX CHAOS!! WHY IT SHOULD MATTER TO YOU!

Barrington Place has a love/hate relationship with the USPS. Did you know part of Barrington Place still has home curbside delivery of their mail? Yes, those lucky residents to the east of Barrington Place Drive for the most part get Mail the old-fashioned way, delivered to a curbside mailbox. Yet, even those lucky to have home curbside delivery have legitimate complaints that people open their mailboxes and take mail that does not belong to them. The rest of the subdivision, only know the daily chore of going to get their mail from what is known as a “Cluster Box”. The USPS has concluded that Cluster Box delivery saves it both time and money compared to curbside delivery. Many Cluster Box mail recipients have reported that the Cluster Boxes are unsecure and that mail has been stolen from the Cluster Boxes. Getting an accurate report from the USPS on Cluster Boxes and the security of Cluster Boxes is very much like the weather. The responses change depending on who you talk with and when you talk with the Postmaster, the actual mail carriers, and different workers of the Postal System.



Did you know that there are 39 concrete pads scattered about Barrington Place subdivision on which the individual cluster boxes stand? Back in 2019, I went and counted each and every pad and box, taking photos along the way. Some pads have as few as 1 box and some pads have as many as 4 boxes. There are 78 individual Boxes in Barrington Place. Not all Boxes are created equally. Some hold letters, some hold large parcels, and some are a combination of both. Some Boxes are a few years old and in good condition to excellent condition. Many are older models that were installed as each section in the subdivision was initially built out and are wearing out after years of exposure to the elements.

The USPS in its infinite wisdom, cites a regulation 632.11 Responsibilities, from its Postal Operations Manual, taking the position that the HOA's are responsible for the monetary cost for replacement of worn out and broken-down cluster boxes. Ironically a lot of the boxes have metal plaques attached to them reading something along the line of U.S. Mail, PROPERTY OF THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE, APPROVED BY THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, along with a Manufacturer Date, Serial Number and Contract number.

So, even though the HOA does not own the cluster boxes, the USPS is arguing that it is the individual homeowner's and HOA's responsibility to pay for any new cluster boxes. A “law”, Title 19, United States Code, Section 1705, makes it a crime to vandalize mailboxes or to injure or deface them, Violators can be fined up to \$250,000 or imprisoned for, each act of vandalism. This ignorant author thought it was a felony to even tamper with a mailbox, let alone fix or replace it, yet the USPS “regulation” is seemingly the only thing the Postmaster understands.

SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN? CLUSTER BOXES COST MONEY, LOTS & LOTS OF MONEY \$\$\$\$\$.

Prices range from \$1200 to \$2000 for each box right now. That does not include the cost to install, remove and cart off the old Cluster Box. Additionally, many of the concrete pads on which the boxes are installed are not ADA Compliant. Boxes open out toward the Street requiring persons to sometimes stand in the way of oncoming traffic to retrieve their mail. Wheelchairs cannot access the pad in locations. Additionally, the concrete pads are for the most part located in City of Sugar Land Right of Ways adjacent to the streets, so the City has its finger in the pie too and has some say so over the matter. While many Boxes are in good shape for now, others are not and will need replacing. 78 boxes x \$2000 per box equals \$156,000. WOW, that means every Owner has to pay an additional \$156.00 at today's prices to cover the cost to replace the boxes sometime in the future if the Post Office gets its way.

So far the HOA has managed to avoid this problem. When several cluster boxes in the last few years were rusted through on Ryderwood and on Kingsmill, the HOA asked for the Cluster Boxes to be replaced. The USPS told the HOA it was the HOA's problem and responsibility. However, new Cluster Boxes on each occasion, appeared without notice replacing the older worn-out Cluster Boxes. No one told the HOA why, or followed up with an explanation, it just happened. The HOA needs your help. If you know a way around these problems, let the HOA know. If you have connections or contacts with the USPS, let us know. Our protests and questions about Cluster boxes, their replacement, and how to make them and individual mailboxes more secure from theft have fallen on deaf ears. The address for the Postmaster is as follows: SUGAR LAND — Post Office™, 225 MATLAGE WAY SUGAR LAND, TX 77478. Phone number: 281-494-2052.

CHRISTMAS DECORATING CONTEST WINNERS! CONGRATS!



2103 Collingsfield Dr.



13002 Careywood Dr.



2118 Barrington Place Dr.



12822 Newberry Dr.

2022 HOA ASSESSMENT DUE JANUARY 31ST

The last day to make your payment for the 2022 annual assessment was January 31, 2022. All past due accounts will be assessed interest in the amount of 10% per annum. A letter will be mailed after February 15th to all homeowners with past due balances. A certified demand letter, with a minimum \$45 collection fee being assessed to the account, will be sent after March 15th. All past due accounts will be turned over to the association's attorney for collection after April 15th. The collection process will be pursued to the full extent of the law, including foreclosure if necessary.



- Any account which reflects an outstanding balance prior to 2022 that was not paid in full by January 31, 2022, is not eligible to receive the 2022 discount.
- Please write your Barrington Place HOA address or account number on the lower left corner of your check. Your account number is shown on the invoice you received in the mail.
- You can make an online payment using the TownSq app. *Information on registering for TownSq can be found in this newsletter.*

Please make your check payable to Barrington Place HOA, Inc., and mail it in care of MASC Austin Properties, Inc., 945 Eldridge Road, Sugar Land, TX 77478. If you need to make payment arrangements, please contact our accounting department at MASC Austin Properties, Inc. at 713-776-1771 or via email to pmanuso@mascapi.com.

KEEP UP WITH BARRINGTON PLACE ON TOWNSQ

MASC Austin Properties, Inc. would like to remind everyone to make sure they have registered their address on TownSq — a new all-in-one mobile app designed to help you connect, collaborate and stay up-to-date with your association — any time on any device. To register your account, log onto the following website www.barringtonplace.sites.townsq.io, use your account ID (located on the 2022 assessment invoice) and the association zip code (77478). Set your password and account preferences.



2022 Pool ID Card registration and Pool Schedule

Please watch for information on pool ID card registration and the 2022 pool schedule in upcoming newsletters, the HOA website and Townsq app as more information becomes available.

2022 Pool Monitor Positions

If you are interested in applying for a pool monitor position, please contact MASC Austin Properties Inc. at 713-776-1771 for more details.

REMINDERS

Holiday Decorations

Please remove all holiday decorations by the first week in February.

Community Inspections

Community inspections are being conducted monthly, as per usual schedule.

ALSTON ROAD FENCE PROJECT

The Barrington Place Homeowners' Association (BPHOA), filed an application with the Sugar Land 4B Corporation concerning a Joint Participation Project Funding Request involving the construction of a lightweight concrete wall along the south side of Alston Road in February 2020. The purpose of the project is to construct and install a uniform lightweight concrete wall in both style and material and to remove the Hodge podge of different styles of existing wood fence in varying states of repair. The submitted project is budgeted at \$131,704.10 with 50% of the cost to be reimbursed to the BPHOA by the Sugar Land 4B Corporation. The HOA will then be responsible for the maintenance of the constructed lightweight concrete wall into the future.



After the initial submission of the application on February 25, 2020, the application was sidetracked by the Covid Pandemic and the program was suspended indefinitely in March 2020 but came back to life in February 2021.

Notification of the Proposed Project to construct a lightweight concrete wall and Questionnaires asking for Owner information related to the Proposed Project were mailed in April 2021 to owners of the 17 properties bordering on and adjacent to the location where the proposed lightweight concrete wall will be built.

When the paperwork was finally presented to the City of Sugar Land for its consideration and input in April 2021, it required that BPHOA have a survey done of the project site. The survey was done. The City after review of the survey, required BPHOA to obtain necessary consents from easement holders such as CenterPoint Energy and also required BPHOA to also enter into agreements with the City regarding the future upkeep and maintenance of the lightweight concrete wall.

On December 21, 2021, the City Council, after publishing notice, held its regular meeting, and approved the funding (the reimbursement portion) for the project.

A walk thru on site along the length of the existing wood fence on the south side of Alston took place on December 16, 2021 with the contractor DCR Builders, the Management Company and the HOA President.

DCR plans on starting work from Summerfield Drive and working east towards Reddington Road (heading toward the school). The existing wood fence will not come down all at once, it will be taken down in sections. For those yards who have pools they will be installing temporary chain link fencing instead of the usual orange plastic mesh fence used in other non-pool yards. During the walk thru DCR explained how they will pull out existing sections of fence, remove/trim/work around encroaching plants and trees, and there was extensive discussion on how the contractor plans on handling the side fences on the lots (securing them) and their separation from the existing fence that runs adjacent to Alston Road.

Summerfield Park will be used as a staging area. Part of the Park will be fenced off from resident use so that construction materials, a dumpster, a skid steer, a porta potty and other equipment can be located nearby while the project unfolds.

For those wanting more information as to the lightweight concrete wall's construction and technical information about the lightweight concrete wall go to www.barringtonplace.net. You will find email links to Rhino Rock (the manufacturer of the components used in the lightweight concrete wall), brochures from Rhino Rock, Engineering reports, and Frequently asked questions.

Some of the perceived advantages of the concrete wall over wood is that the concrete wall is water resistant (will not swell and shrink), will not catch on fire, eliminates a termite food source, is unaffected by temperature changes, is designed to withstand winds of 100 MPH, will not fade like a wood fence. The concrete wall requires less maintenance than a wood fence. The concrete wall has no splits like a traditional wood picket fence and thereby gives more privacy to the properties adjoining the wall.

The community can also give its input into the color choice of the wall facing Alston. The wall can be stained to change its color. Color choices can be seen online at www.barringtonplace.net.



BARRINGTON PLACE INCOME/EXPENSES - DECEMBER 31, 2021

<u>INCOME</u>		<u>CONTRACT</u>		<u>COMMITTEE</u>	
ASSESSMENTS ACCT ADJ	-\$850.00	911 PHONE	\$495.79	BEAUTIFICATION	\$398.04
BANK INTEREST	\$5.81	CLUBHOUSE CLEANING	\$600.00	TOTAL	\$398.04
CERTIFIED LETTERS	-\$15.00	LAWN CARE	\$2,750.00	<u>MAINTENANCE</u>	
INTEREST-HOMEOWNERS	-\$120.63	MANAGEMENT	\$2,750.00	POOL	\$568.00
LEGAL FEES	\$319.67	NEWSLETTER	\$1,600.00	TOTAL	\$568.00
PAYMENT PLAN FEES	-\$45.00	POOL SERVICE	\$1,250.00		
TOTAL	-\$705.15	SIGN MAINTENANCE	\$90.00	TOTAL EXPENSE	\$17,036.29
		TRASH PICK-UP	\$46.80	TOTAL CASH IN ACCOUNTS	\$750,677.53
		WEBSITE	\$75.00		
<u>ADMINISTRATIVE</u>		TOTAL	\$9,657.59		
BANK CHARGES	\$22.72	<u>UTILITIES</u>			
CERTIFIED LETTERS	\$540.00	ELECTRIC	\$546.68		
LEGAL- CORPORATE	\$367.25	GAS	\$50.62		
LEGAL- INDIVIDUAL	\$319.67	TELEPHONE	\$79.07		
OFFICE EXPENSE	\$1,195.89	WATER/SEWER	\$579.22		
PRINTING	\$1,516.71	TOTAL	\$1,255.59		
POSTAGE	\$857.08				
TAXES-PROPERTY	\$337.75				
TOTAL	\$5,157.07				

TRASH REMINDER:

Please do not put trash out before 6:00 PM on the night before the scheduled pickup day. Trash cans must be stored out of public view.

- Trash days:** MONDAY & THURSDAY
- Recycle day:** MONDAY
- Green Waste day:** MONDAY
- Bulky Waste day:** 1ST MONDAY OF THE MONTH



**PLEASE NOTE THESE DATES
ON YOUR CALENDAR!**

Easter Egg Hunt tentatively scheduled for April 16, 2022. Volunteers needed for course layout and child control on the day of the event!

The Yard of the Month contest starts in April 2022 and ends September 2022.

**CITY OF SUGAR LAND TREE TRIMMING
INSPECTIONS BEGAN JANUARY 18TH**

The City of Sugar Land Public Works Department will be conducting tree trimming inspections beginning January 18th, in Glen Laurel and other neighborhoods.

To ensure public safety in rights-of-way, the City of Sugar Land has tree trimming requirements. A right-of-way is a public space that needs to be maintained free and clear of any obstructions. The City's tree trimming ordinance is designed to improve visibility of stop signs, traffic signals, street name signs and other items related to public safety.



For more information, visit: <https://www.sugarlandtx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3247/Tree-Trimming-Brochure?bidId=>.

For questions, please contact 311 or 281-275-2900.

Barrington Place HOA
c/o MASC Austin Properties
945 Eldridge Road
Sugar Land, TX 77478

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
HOUSTON, TX
PERMIT #8327

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Emergency	911
Police Department	(281) 275-2020
Fire - EMS Department	(281) 275-2873
Officer Reid, Crime Prevention Officer	(281) 275-2578
City of Sugar Land/Information/Complaint/etc	311
Animal Services	(281) 275-2181
Poison Control	(800) 764-7661
Sugar Land Municipal Court	(281) 275-2560
Fort Bend Courthouse	(281) 342-3411
Councilman, Mayor's Office, City Manager	(281) 275-2700
Sugar Land Public Works/Trash Pickup	
Republic Services:	(713) 726-7307
Development Services /	
Ordinance/Code enforcement	(281) 275-2170
Water Operations & Information	(281) 275-2450
Recycling Center	(281) 275-2450
MASC Austin Properties, Inc.	(713) 776-1771

NEWS THAT YOU CAN USE:

Sugar Land Police Department Civilian Police Academy

Applications are being accepted now and close January 27, 2022. Spring class will begin Thursday, February 10, 2022, and concludes with graduation on Thursday, April 28, 2022. The Sugar Land Police Department will follow CDC guidelines to ensure a fun and safe environment for the in-person sessions of the Citizens' Police Academy. Visit <https://www.sugarlandtx.gov/514/Citizens-Police-Academy> for more details.

Now's The Time To Winterize Your Home

Old Man Winter is here and it's time to winterize your home. Here's 4 tips to ensure your home is prepared.

Protect Your Pipes: Protect against frozen pipes by insulating those that could be susceptible to freezing. With severe temperature drops, keep a stream of water running in a few faucets to guard against freezing and bursting.

Install Weather Stripping: Weather stripping or installing storm doors and windows will prevent cold air from entering your home or heat from escaping it, which will reduce your power bills. Door sweeps are also an effective and easy way to keep the cold out.

Check Your Fireplace: Animal nests or creosote buildup in your fireplace can be hazardous. Have an annual inspection before building your first fire of the season. Also, soot and other debris build up in the chimney. Call a chimney sweep to thoroughly clean the chimney before your first winter use. You should also vacuum or sweep out any accumulated ash from the firebox.

Block the Cold: Caulk around windows and use foam outlet protectors to prevent cold air from entering your home. However, the majority of heat loss typically occurs via openings in the attic. Check to make sure that you have enough insulation there as well.