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Residents Band Together at Elite Village

By Rachel Nielsen

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A pile of garbage and snow appeared in front of the home of a resident who had stopped paying fees.

At an elite gated community in the Moscow region called Angelovo, some residents believe that they are overcharged, some want to form a committee and three of them walk a kilometer from the gate to their house because the family's relations with management are so frayed.

Though most of the scores of families renting or owning homes at Angelovo haven't gone into revolt — and some criticize and praise it in the same conversation — there is enough discomfort that Angelovo homeowners met and voted this Sunday on forming a council of property owners.

The results won't be tallied for several days, but the upshot could be a group empowered to negotiate on behalf of homeowners with the management company, which controls the services and owns the land inside Angelovo.

Located west of Moscow, Angelovo is near the Rosinka luxury complex and is developed by the same firm, Rosinka International Group. Angelovo's management company is a subsidiary of

Rosinka.

Angelovo residents pay a service fee of roughly $1,000 per month that covers trash pickup, staffed entrances, landscaping and snow shoveling, residents said in interviews. It doesn't include gas, electricity or Internet hookups or use of the pool at Rosinka. Angelovo doesn't have its own pool, kindergarten or grade school, as is common at such complexes.

A handful of residents have tried to learn more about the use of the fee income but haven't received answers. One Westerner who lives at Angelovo with his wife and two children said he "can't understand where the money is going," and he expects more for the amount he pays.

The man, who asked that his name be withheld because he worried about damaging his relationship with management, said that when residents ask for breakdowns of the cost, "We don't get any answers."

Another resident interviewed for this article, a Russian executive who lives in a spacious house with his wife and three children, said he had a similar experience when he sought fee details.

Angelovo general director Denis Kuzin said by telephone that fee details aren't publicly disclosed, saying Angelovo competes with other high-end housing. Kuzin is also an executive director of Rosinka.

A handful of families at Angelovo have stopped paying their monthly service fees in protest, according to residents. Kuzin said, however, that those families are renegotiating their fees following renovations.

The Russian executive said he and his wife worry that their children could be banned from attending kindergarten at Rosinka. "We are scared that it could happen," he said.

Out of all of the residents who have had disagreements with management, "our situation was probably the most extreme," said another resident, a CIS national who runs the Russian division of a tech company. He declined to be named because he didn't want his job linked to his Angelovo complaints.

His last service contract expired in October 2010, and he hasn't had one since then — or paid the monthly fee since November 2010 because he found it exorbitant, he said.

He is now seeking compensation for water damage in his house that he spent $15,000 to fix — repairs that should be covered by the house's warranty, he said — and for construction work that has been continuing for more than two years in front of his house — in a spot where his contract stipulates a lawn and pond, he said.

If Angelovo management offers some compensation, "we're prepared to pay them part of the money that we haven't paid them for the past 1 1/2 years" and the monthly fees in the future, he said.

On Monday, he delivered his latest negotiation terms to management by e-mail — because he is no longer allowed to enter the reception area.

Since mid-April, Angelovo has banned him from driving his car on the premises, both he and Kuzin confirmed. Instead, he parks overnight outside the gate and walks home. His wife's car is also forbidden.

Meanwhile, security guards are preventing him, his wife and their 11-year-old daughter from using an entrance near their house, instead making them hike about a kilometer.

Kuzin said by e-mail that the couple isn't allowed to drive in Angelovo "because they don't pay for the upkeep of the roads." He also confirmed that they can't use the closer entrance.

The ban on the tech executive's car might have been helpful earlier this year: This past winter, a mountain of snow and garbage appeared in front of his house where he parked his car.

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