**KB Home should buy back defective units**

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By BRADENTON HERALD EDITORIAL

On the heels of homeowner horrors over noxious Chinese drywall over the past few years comes another builder whose inferior product endangers condominium buyers in the Willowbrook community. With balconies ruled unsafe by Manatee County building inspectors because of sinking floors and loose rails, and inside water damage and mold on floors and walls, the defective town homes are physical and financial threats to residents.

Weeks into a vocal protest over KB Home’s poor construction and then inferior repairs, residents have just found allies in other KB Home buyers in other states. There is strength in numbers, particularly in consumer objections to poor products.

Bad publicity spreads like wildfire, and potential customers could be scared away from KB Home products. To that end, Willowbrook residents protested outside another company development here, Sterling Lake, earlier this month.

Willowbrook owners are wisely pursuing other pressure tactics, too, filing complaints with state agencies, mounting a national online petition, and linking up with other dissatisfied KB Home buyers elsewhere in Florida as well as in Colorado, California and Texas. The government should be investigating this consumer issue, though neither the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation nor the Federal Trade Commission would confirm or deny any probe.

Residents aired their concerns to Manatee County commissioners on Tuesday, earning the board’s commitment to a building and legal department probe into the matter.

The national multibillion dollar home building company must come to grips with this. KB Home asserts it looks forward to “fully and fairly resolving” homeowner complaints, but that remains up in the air. Residents want the company to buy back their condos, a reasonable request given the gravity of this situation. One balcony was torn down and rebuilt multiple times.

Thirty-two condo balconies have been determined to be hazardous out of the 272 town homes in Willowbrook, but that number has been rising as more inspections are completed. County inspectors have now visited 59 units.

Most owners are denying KB Home contractors access to their condos to execute repairs, insisting on the buy-back. And for good reason. A licensed contractor hired to inspect one of the town homes testified before the American Arbitration Association that the numerous constructions flaws were beyond repair. “I recommended they tear it down,” Mike Hamilton, president of CMM Commercial Contractors Inc., said he told KB Home. “It would be more expensive to fix it than build it.”

That condemnation should compel the company to agree to owner demands. The financial and physical threats to residents should not continue to hang over their heads.

Caught in the middle of all this is the Willowbrook Condo Association, as the owner of balconies. Earlier this month, Manatee County began issuing notices for the association to address the dangerous conditions on specific units, else the county take some sort of action to secure the properties.

The company claims to be “committed to customer satisfaction.” Now’s the time to step up to the plate and purchase the deficient Willowbrook condos.