



The Right Partner Makes All The Difference...

To reach your goal of shorter, more efficient meetings while still permitting homeowners to air opinions and allow the board to discuss, debate and take action on various issues, we have come up with some tips that might help you are your next meeting.

Start with a Plan

To make the most out of every meeting, try starting off organized and focused. Use introductions. Start every meeting by having board members state their name and board title. Homeowners, when speaking, also begin by saying their name and their address. This helps reduce confusion and allows both board members and homeowners to have a better idea who is speaking.

Set a Businesslike Tone

Set the tone at the beginning. After calling the meeting to order and having the introductions, Remind the board of your goal of a 60-minute meeting and state, in general terms, what are the key issues to be discussed.

Use an Agenda

Use an agenda [[click here for an example](#)] and stick to it. A lot can happen in a month's time. Some issues are nagging, difficult, or even contentious. The president must keep the meeting moving by following the agenda, discouraging off-target and potentially illegal discussions, and encouraging board members to keep their comments or committee reports brief.

Focus on a Main Topic

Have each meeting focus on one main topic. As a board try to go through general business, such as committee reports, fairly quickly; then we devote the bulk of the meeting to one main issue. One month this topic might be security, another month landscaping, and so on. This allows an extended, meaningful discussion—but on one topic, not six. Also, by always having the main topic discussed last, board members are more likely to wrap up in a timely manner.

Use the Pre-Meeting Reports

Emphasize and utilize pre-meeting reports. Encourage board members to read and study the pre-meeting packet of information carefully and write down any questions. If everyone has read the same information, the resulting discussion will then be more focused and more productive.

Priorities in Order

Don't give each topic the same emphasis or the same amount of time. The President must control how much time is spent discussing a topic.

Ownership

Assign ownership immediately. People are great at complaining, making suggestions and generating ideas. The real challenge, however, comes in follow-through. For every action decided on by the board (even if it is to reconsider the issue at a later date), the following must be established:

- What action will be taken?
- Which person or group will carry out the action?
- By when will the action be completed?

If a small group or committee is formed, I strongly recommend that one person be designated "team leader" with ultimate responsibility for the committee's actions.

Focus on Results

Limit process and instead focus on results. The board president should always attempt to move the board to making decisions.

Controlled Homeowner Input

Receiving feedback and suggestions from homeowners is an important part of a board of directors' role. While valuable, however, homeowner comments can go too far, wasting time, energy and goodwill. Allow the homeowner to state his or her problem or complaint. If the owner is upset, let them vent—but just a little. Empathize with them. Empathize means "to understand" and shows the board is concerned about the problem. As quickly as possible or prudent, shift the discussion off the problem and onto the solution.

Ask what action the homeowner suggests should be taken. Many times this will be impossible or extremely difficult. Tell the homeowner this and suggest what the board might be able to do. Then, if appropriate, discuss among the board and state exactly what action the board will take and by when. Thank the homeowner, and then move on nicely but forcefully. Transitions can include:

- "Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We will do (a) and (b). Now, are there other homeowners' comments?"
- "We appreciate your interest in this matter. We all understand how important properly maintained lawns are, and we will pass along your concerns to the gardeners. Now, are there any other landscape issues from homeowners?"

Fun and Enjoyable

A final suggestion we would like to make is this—try to have a little fun to reduce tension and promote camaraderie among board members. Crack a joke, bring a cartoon to share, or encourage funny comments that don't belittle anyone. Humor reduces tension and creates an open, honest atmosphere that will lead to more effective debate and more effective meetings.