



TIPS FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Welcome to the board! As a new board member, you're in the exciting role of running a real business, wearing a lot of different hats, and making the key decisions necessary to guide your community into the future. While that responsibility may seem daunting at first, it can also be fun and a great way to meet other neighbors.

Whether you've just been elected, or you're on a board about to take on some new members, here are 10 tips for quickly, productively, and successfully getting up to speed and operating as a new board member:

1. Read Your Governing Documents

The best way to quickly learn how your association works is to read your covenants, by-laws, and other governing documents. You'll quickly find out the things you're required to do, and where you have some flexibility. It's also easier to communicate with neighbors when you know the facts.

2. Understand the Financials

Review the financial statements and don't be afraid to ask for help from your board treasurer or property manager. The board must ensure that budget, cash flow, and reserves are where they need to be. If the new board is not comfortable with the financials, consider scheduling an audit or other financial procedure to verify the community's financial health.

3. Don't Take On Too Much

There's a natural tendency to want to jump in and do everything all at once. Take your time and prioritize so you don't get burned out. You've got plenty of time during your elected term. Also, while your association is a business, don't forget that you're a volunteer. Learn when to say "no" to keep this role from cutting into family time.

4. Learn the Business Before Your Change It

Before you jump in and make a bunch of changes, take the time to understand why things are currently done the way they are. You may be surprised when you see the process and procedures from an insider's perspective.

5. Interact with Vendors Before Your Change Them

Sometimes vendor performance (good or bad) can be linked to a variety of external factors. Board or property manager interaction may impact performance, such as someone failing to give the vendor feedback about a specific issue. Draw your own conclusions before taking on the hassle of a vendor change.

6. Use All Available Resources

In addition to all of your neighbors lining up to give you free advice, there are a number of resources available to help you become a productive and effective board member. Call on prior board members and current committee chairs for ideas and opinions, along with several local law firms and YOUR property management company if they offer educational materials. Many are free or very low cost.

7. Think Long Term

While you're deciding whether to re-carpet the community room or send a delinquent neighbor to the collections attorney, don't lose sight of the big picture. What's your vision of your community and goals to get there? If you're not sure, add that to your next board meeting agenda.

8. Communicate

Transparency is critical to maintaining a positive relationship between the board and the community. Unless required by law (such as communicating about employee performance), keep your community informed about issues, opportunities, ideas, financial results, etc. A little hassle today is far better than a big fight (or lawsuit) later.

9. Be Patient

As a board member, you'll most likely encounter challenges with neighbors, vendors, and even other board members due to reasonable (sometimes unreasonable) differences of opinion. Take your time to work through issues, and remember that no party is ever 100% satisfied in a compromise.

10. Remember that You Are a Fiduciary

This one is last because it's important: even though you're a volunteer, remember that agreeing to serve on your community board means that you take on some level of accountability for the management of your community and its assets. When you make decisions you must make them in the best interest of the corporation, even if those decisions are not in your personal best interest.

Thank you!

Although many neighbors don't always remember to thank you, you're doing your community a great service by volunteering for the board. In order to maintain your enthusiasm, take some time to educate yourself on how the association works, and then temper your level of involvement so you've still got time for family, work, friends, and everything else in your busy schedule.

Oh and don't forget to have fun!