

## Tips for Improving Board Meeting Effectiveness

These are proven strategies for improving the effectiveness of your HOA or Condo Association Board Meeting



**Be Transparent:** All board meetings should be open to the full board and interested owners. Adequate notice of the meeting must be given in accordance with the applicable bylaws or other governing documents. While it may sometimes be more convenient, board members should resist the temptation to conduct board business informally or through private meetings. If such meetings don't comply with the legal requirements for notice or quorums, any decisions made may be subject to legal challenges and could be overturned. Private meetings with 'select' members before or after a board meeting could result in a lack of confidence and trust.

**Stick to the Agenda:** One of the keys to a successful board meeting is a good agenda. A carefully crafted agenda is essential because it not only serves as a roadmap for the meeting, but it can be used to bring the discussion back to the main issues should it veer off track. The agenda should be drafted and disseminated in advance of the meeting, allowing enough time for board members to review it and request changes or additions. Agendas typically take an outline form, although the level of detail may vary based on the issues to be discussed. Efficiently executed agendas will instill confidence in owners as well.

**Follow Established Procedures:** All boards should have established procedures in the association bylaws or governing documents that direct the intent and course of their meetings. Many corporate boards follow a manual of parliamentary procedure, entitled Robert's Rules of Order, or adopt a rules of procedure, creating a "cheat sheet" of the most important concepts for all board members. This can be an effective way to get everyone on the same page and prevent the arduous task of looking up procedural rules during the meeting.

**Keep Records:** Meeting minutes serve as an official and legal record of the meeting and should be taken at every meeting. Meaningful agendas and detailed minutes will serve as a history of previous considerations brought before the board, documenting proposed actions and actions taken. While the format of the minutes may vary, they should list every motion considered by the board, along with the board members voting in favor, against, or abstaining, and whether the motion was approved or denied. In cases where the board believes that a decision may be subject to scrutiny or legal claims, it is advisable for the board to enact a resolution that describes all the facts and circumstances, any legal or other professional advice obtained in connection with the decision, and the reasoning behind the board's ultimate decision. Unless inhibited by the community documents, it's always good to have minutes of each meeting available to all owners and have them ratified by vote at subsequent meetings.

**Encourage Participation:** In many cases, HOAs and Condo Associations are dominated by a few individuals, which can leave other board members and unit owners feeling alienated and frustrated. While the chair of the board is responsible for facilitating an orderly meeting, board deliberations should be free and open, and each board member should have equal opportunity to speak in turn. Unit owners should also be encouraged to participate in board meetings and have a dedicated forum to voice their concerns. This is another area where Robert's Rules of Order or a list of rules to govern meetings will help ensure that everyone is heard.

**Keep Emotions in Check:** Because people's property is involved, HOA and Condo Board meetings can sometimes become contentious. When this occurs, it is important to focus on the issues rather than the emotions associated with them. Of course, it is also imperative to listen to everyone who seeks to be heard and always be respectful. It is wise to consider having a skilled, non-stakeholder present to facilitate conversations around subjects where emotions might run high to mitigate conflict.

**Important Mail-Outs:** It is extremely important to prepare for meetings, especially when they require Statutory Deadlines. Make sure that you set your meeting dates well in advance, to provide a timely mail-out. Calling or scheduling a meeting with inadequate timing is a recipe for failure. Meeting notices need to be prepared, notices need to be reviewed (sometimes require attorney preparation and review), and then a schedule to print the notices, prepare envelopes/proxies and coordinate the mail-out is needed. Compliance is important and timely preparation is essential.

**Kindness and Respect:** Begin at the appointed time and end on time. Attendees may have other places to be. Meetings that drag on without respecting the time of others are doomed to fail. There will always be 'another meeting.' Only plan to discuss those items that will fit in the allotted time. Addressing every agenda item is not the goal. Coming to informed decisions for the collective good based on mutual respect and inclusive input is the goal of the meeting. It's ok to table an issue for later discussion rather than making a bad decision in haste.