



Building Better Communities

A Guide to Effective Association Governance

By Zuly Maribona / Published September 2025



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The effective operation of community associations protects property values and creates a harmonious living environment for all owners. The keys to achieving this are understanding effective communication: sound board practices; the board's fiduciary relationship to owners; and how to cultivate an excellent working relationship between the board, its management team, and professional partners. A community association is at its core a business, and it demands the same level of strategic thinking and disciplined execution as any successful enterprise.

When board members approach their roles with subjective, personal opinions and agendas, meetings can quickly devolve into a "he said/she said" scenario, undermining the collective success. Instead, adopting a business-like approach with the right structures and processes in place will safeguard the community's assets and ensure its smooth operation. While the management team is integral, the board's role is to govern the overall operation and develop the right partnerships that extend beyond just management. It's

important to recognize that management companies, while experts in many areas, may not have expertise in every field.

It is perfectly acceptable to seek professional guidance from a network of trusted partners, such as legal counsel, landscaping or elevator vendors, and engineers for structural or infrastructure concerns. By leveraging these subject matter experts, the board avoids the burden of having to run the entire operation themselves. This collaborative approach empowers the board to make informed decisions, ensuring compliance and the highest standards of maintenance all while fulfilling their core governance responsibilities.

Upholding The Board's Fiduciary Relationship To Owners: Trust and Diligence

The success of a community association hinges on its board members' commitment to their fiduciary relationship to owners. In Florida, new legislation emerges every year to guide associations, complementing existing governing documents specific to each community. Board members are governed by both state laws and their association's unique documents, which outline the rules, positions, and responsibilities of each board member. Much like any governing body, ethics and objective decision-making are essential. The management team is there to protect everyone's interests and manage day-to-day operations based on the policies outlined in the governing documents.

The intent of each board position is clearly defined. For example, the treasurer's role is to safeguard the financial health of the association, rather than individually controlling finances or spending at will. The president, often seen as the "captain of the ship," presides over the association, wielding a quasi-decision-making power to keep the organization afloat and running smoothly. The management team operates under the board's collective direction. It is integral to ensure all members participate as they each have equal votes and contribute to a unified vision.

Establishing A Sound Organizational Structure and Process

An association's sound organizational structure and clear process means the board should have oversight of all procedural aspects from policy development and procedural plans to meeting cadence. Breakdowns often occur due to a lack of proper communication and transparency regarding the board's mission and purpose.

Effective communication must be an integral part of this structure. This includes the following:

Routine Board Meetings—Membership should be regularly informed of meeting schedules, whether monthly or quarterly.

Workshops Before Contentious Decisions—Hosting a workshop before the official meeting where the vote occurs allows residents to speak up and management to explain the rationale behind proposed actions.

“Coffee and Conversations”—Informal gatherings like these can be incredibly helpful in diffusing negative chatter.

Comprehensive Newsletters and Updates—Consistent newsletters that include dedicated sections from the president, board, and management team along with general community updates ensure residents feel “in the know.”

Transparency is key. While boards are elected to be decision-makers and must understand what information should and shouldn’t be shared with membership, it is equally important to educate the community about the board’s role. Board orientations are vital, especially around election time or when new members are appointed. These orientations should cover financial reviews, organizational overviews and legal or financial workshops. They provide new board members with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively serve the community.

Leveraging Technology For Impactful Conversations

In today’s fast-paced world, technology enables efficient communication and operations. For volunteer board members it can streamline mundane tasks, freeing up valuable time for more impactful conversations and direct engagement with residents. Tools that facilitate electronic voting and the easy dissemination of important documents enhance transparency and accessibility. When residents and board members can get up to speed more efficiently, it opens the door to more productive discussions and collaborative problem-solving. Having the right systems and resources in place isn’t just about efficiency; it’s about building a more informed and engaged community.

Beyond the practicalities, boards must embrace transparency and understand their governing documents and state statutes. While board members are not expected to be legal experts, they must comprehend policies that guide processes like board meetings. This often involves fine-tuning anything that might feel like a gray area, such as developing clear policies around ethics.

A fundamental aspect of effective board practice is ensuring all members and vendor partners abide by respectful behavior. Instances of name-calling at meetings or mistreating

vendors can erode trust and productivity. A clear code of conduct is a powerful guideline for creating a healthy and productive environment. It should emphasize that directors, officers, management, and employees will work together in a cooperative spirit in the best interest of all members of the association.

Setting Clear Priorities and Vision

One of the most critical challenges facing many boards is the tendency to try and tackle everything at once, leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed and with little actual progress. To be truly effective, a board must prioritize. This means developing both a short-term plan and a long-term vision for the association and clearly communicating these priorities so everyone knows what's happening.

A goal-setting retreat can be invaluable for this purpose, allowing the board to collaboratively define the following:

- The roles and boundaries between the management company and the board.
- Policies on records management and financial goals, including reserve funding.
- Review and enforcement of rules and regulations.
- Communication strategies, including agendas, minutes, newsletters, and surveys.
- Meeting schedules and structures.
- The function of various committees.

By setting clear, attainable goals, a board can avoid member exhaustion and instead channel its energy into strategic initiatives that truly benefit the community.

A strong community association thrives on a foundation of mutual respect, clear communication, shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, and a steadfast commitment to the board's fiduciary relationship to owners. When board members and management work in tandem, guided by a collective vision and supported by the right professional partnerships and technological tools, they transform the challenging task of community governance into a rewarding journey of collective progress.