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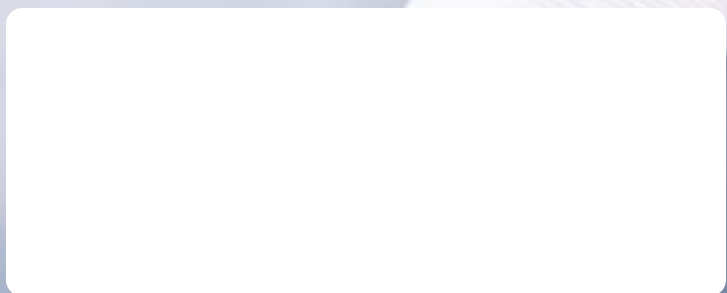
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by David Conforti, RealManage Illinois

The Power of Connection: Why Relationship-Building is Essential for Successful Property Management

Successful property management is much more than coordinating maintenance, collecting assessments, or preparing financials.

Property management is a relationship driven profession. Property managers serve as the center of communication and trust among homeowners, boards, vendors and professional partners. Those who intentionally cultivate strong relationships are consistently more effective, more respected, and more likely to grow in their careers, and so are the companies they represent.

The following article explores why relationship building is central to the work of a property manager, how these connections benefit operations and career growth, and why

contributing to industry organizations such as CAI (Community Associations Institute) and MCD Media strengthens your influence and reputation even further.

Property management consists of service and governance within each community's governing documents. A property manager must understand physical buildings, financial compliance, people and their behavior, legal obligations, and political dynamics. Unlike many jobs that can be performed from behind a desk, property management relies heavily on trust, communication, and building positive

relationships. When people understand you, trust you, and believe that you genuinely care about the success of the community, everything becomes clearer, HOA meetings run much smoother and you have less conflict.

1. Relationship with Vendors:

Landscapers, HVAC techs, roofers, plumbers, pool companies, janitors, and countless other contractors provide for a huge chemical make-up of the management team. When a property manager has a good relationship with vendors, response times improve, pricing becomes more consistent and competitive (with a better chance for negotiations), emergencies are handled more quickly and communication is smoother. Vendors that have a great working relationship with property managers



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“WHEN THE BOARD-MANAGER RELATIONSHIP IS STRONG, THE ENTIRE ASSOCIATION BENEFITS FROM CONSISTENT RULE ENFORCEMENT AND HARMONY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.”

are more likely to prioritize the manager’s needs; they know you value the partnership. A most reliable network of trusted vendors is one of the most essential tools a manager can have. Manager-vendor positive relationship boosts residents and board satisfaction for all projects.

2. Board Members:

HOA and condominium boards rely on managers for professional guidance, but the relationship is most effective when there’s teamwork between the two. Strong relationships with board members allow managers to provide recommendations that are heard, respected, and

put into action. It tends to allow the property manager to navigate conflict more effectively and maintain smoother, more efficient meetings that stay on point. When the board-manager relationship is strong, the entire association benefits from consistent rule enforcement and harmony within the community.

3. Homeowners:

Ultimately, the community exists for its residents. Building relationships with homeowners creates higher satisfaction and fewer complaints, more willingness to follow rules, greater understanding of budget decisions and

assessments and increased community involvement. A property manager with effective communication can master conflict resolution and can often avoid large owner to owner or owner to board member disagreements. Homeowners who feel heard and respected instead of simply dismissed, even during difficult conversations, tend to be more cooperative and patient. Communication where a property manager can show empathy is one of the most valuable skills a property manager can possess.

4. Attorneys:

Community associations frequently rely on attorneys for collection of past due assessments, rule violation concerns and contract reviews. Positive relationships with association attorneys ensure faster response times, clearer, more precise direction and it reduces the legal risk to the association. Having an attorney attend an HOA meeting at least annually offers a great educational opportunity for the board to ask questions and learn more about protecting their community and assets. A trusted attorney who a property manager bonds with and that understands the community’s history

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5. Bankers and Financial Institutions:

Property managers work with banks for lockbox services, reserve accounts, CDs, payments, and loan financing. Strong relationships with bankers allow for smoother financial transactions, better terms during loan negotiations and more confidence for board members. Given that associations often have millions of dollars in collective assets, having a trustworthy and effective banker is important and a strong relationship can help maintain the association's financial stability and maybe even provide a plan for healthy financial growth.

6. Engineers:

Whether assessing structural issues, conducting reserve studies, or overseeing major projects, engineers play a large role in planning and risk management. Strong relationships with engineering partners provide an opportunity for more accurate and timely assessments, honest recommendations based on trust and overall better project management. The better the property manager communicates with the engineer, boards and contractors, the better chance the manager has at getting the association's capital projects to the finish line with great success!

7. City and Local Government:

City officials are also a huge asset to a property manager. From code enforcement to public works and local police departments; there will often be times when a manager needs assistance, and/or vice versa. At times, a property manager may have to contact one of these departments, or many others not listed, for the benefit of the community's safety. I can tell you about a current matter at a condominium association I have been managing for 12 years. It's a real long story that is pending today regarding a homeowner that has created much chaos in the community for the last 11 months. Without going into too much detail, I want to just divulge that through the process I have been in contact with the local police department, including the community service officer, as well as the county health department's mobile crises response team to assist in keeping the community safe. The most success came from being in touch with the community service officer for years; it's a wonderful tool for you to carry in your property management career. Not only can building relationships

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described above benefit the manager but building relationships with the city planning and zoning departments may help you obtain permits and inspections faster. It's essential for the property manager to build relationships with as many local government departments as possible. You never know when you may be in a pinch and need quicker action than normal.

How Relationship-Building Helps Property Managers Excel

Building strong relationships has a long-term impact on a manager's career, performance, and reputation within the industry. Being able to communicate effectively and build strong relationships with everyone a manager encounters will provide the manager with increased credibility, trust and value to a community. Managers that work continuously on building positive relationships will be viewed as competent, dependable, professional, ethical, knowledgeable and influential. This credibility allows the manager to guide boards more effectively and it also creates a great basis for homeowners to gain confidence in the manager, which in turn allows for the manager

to better lead difficult conversations and get the board to make often difficult decisions.

Professional Growth and Industry Opportunities

Relationships open doors such as new job opportunities, promotions, mentorships and partnerships. Managers who are actively connected within the industry are more visible and more respected. A property manager that continues to work on effective communication, building relationships and surrounding themselves with a group of trusted professionals will often have it easier completing so many tasks than a property manager that does not foster positive relationships within the industry.

How Relationship-Building Helps Attract New Business

Strong relationships are one of the most powerful business development tools available. Word of mouth and reputation is everything in the property management industry, and people do business with those they trust. You might ask, "How do strong relationships lead to getting new contracts?"

For one, happy board members share positive experiences with neighboring communities. Positive relationships also lead to vendors referring your company to other associations, and attorney and/or engineers' referrals are often a huge push for you to gain business. When you are viewed as having strong industry relationships, peers view your company as capable and reputable. In addition, homeowners who serve on other boards will often advocate for or recommend your services. A good reputation grows your business by the pure fact that people like doing business with good people.

The Value of Industry Involvement:

Property managers who volunteer, attend events, write articles, speak on panels, and support organizations like CAI and MCD Media offer tremendous added value to the industry.

These efforts benefit both the manager and their company in many ways. It can expand the manager's or management company's professional network. Many wonderful and fun industry events bring the



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vendors, managers, attorneys, bankers, engineers and association leaders together. Socializing with so many other essential components in the same industry gives you the opportunity to learn from other professionals, while sometimes having fun. Managers who volunteer, present, or participate publicly demonstrate leadership, expertise and dedication to the industry and/or growth to their professional career. It also shows the manager's commitment to industry standards. Associations often look for these characteristics when searching for a management company. A management company that has property managers who contribute to the industry often develop a reputation for professionalism, leadership, quality service and long-term commitment, which makes a company more attractive to boards that are searching for the right fit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, property management is a career for someone that enjoys being around and talking to people on a daily basis, from handling finances and violations to putting out fires on a daily basis. Strong relationships with

"POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH ASSOCIATION ATTORNEYS ENSURE FASTER RESPONSE TIMES, CLEARER, MORE PRECISE DIRECTION AND IT REDUCES THE LEGAL RISK TO THE ASSOCIATION."

vendors, board members, homeowners, attorneys, bankers, auditors, engineers, and local government create a powerful network of support that makes the manager's job easier, more efficient, and more fulfilling. Relationship building also strengthens a manager's professional reputation, increases career opportunities, and helps management companies grow through referrals.

Finally, involvement with industry organizations such as MCD Media and CAI enhances both personal and professional development and it allows the manager to build and grow

necessary relationships that are needed to excel in the industry. Property managers that constantly work on building relationships are likely to be very successful. By investing in people and creating a huge trustworthy network, property managers create stronger communities, stronger careers and a stronger future for the industry. ■

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by Pamela Dittmer McKuen

LESSONS FROM 'THE GREEDY PYTHON': How community associations boards can protect property values-and why they should

You might know the children's book, "The Greedy Python," a humorous yet cautionary tale about a big, voracious snake who ate every creature he encountered.

Then one day, he mistakes his own tail for a tasty meal, and he eats that, too, ultimately swallowing himself and disappearing. Written by Richard Buckley and illustrated by Eric Carle, the book is a classic first published in 1985.

"The Greedy Python" was a metaphor guiding an educational session for board members at the recent 44th Annual Illinois Condo-HOA Conference and Expo sponsored by the Illinois Chapter of the Community Associations Institute. The session, titled "Have Your Cake and Eat It Too: How to Protect Home Values," was presented by Kevin Hirzel of Hirzel Law, Sheila Malchiodi of Associa Chicagoland and Dan Wells of TRG Construction.

"A lot of times, the life cycle of a community association is like the Greedy Python," association attorney Hirzel said. "We will talk about the 'bites' that apply to property values. A lot of bites taste pretty good."

The Four Bites are: The Developer Dilemma, Poor Planning, Kick the Can, and Consequences. Let's dish them up.

Bite #1: The Developer Dilemma

The first bite refers to what happens after the first board takes over from the developer, whose priority is to sell units.

"Developers typically lowball the assessments," Hirzel said. "The budget is not an accurate representation of what it costs to operate

the property. A lot of times, developers don't read their own governing documents. They don't read the Illinois Condominium Property Act, and they don't make the financial contributions they promised to make."

The new board keeps up the status quo and doesn't do anything to change it. Why? Low assessments taste great!

"It's really important that you evaluate immediately after turnover, so this doesn't continue for 5, 10, 15 years down the road," Hirzel said. "Unfortunately, we also see history repeating itself. The next board comes along and raises assessments, and they get voted out because they tried to do the right thing."

Within the industry, cases of associations getting off on the wrong foot abound. Malchiodi recalls one board operating on a deficit budget. Another had approved a budget for nine months only.



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"I always say it takes a village," said Sheila Malchiodi. "Turn it over to your professionals. There are so many resources at your disposal. If you have a professional management company, that's great. Hire an attorney and an accountant. We are all here because we have one common goal: We want our communities to be successful."

"You won't believe how many times people call me to come out and look at some structural issues," said Dan Wells. "I give them some numbers to do some repairs, and they say, 'We have no money.' They have no reserve study, and they have no savings. They have not planned for the future. They don't even know what to look for to determine if a building is failing or what needs to be repaired. Therefore, the decay continues."

Maintaining a property and protecting property values is a constant balancing act. Whether you are a turnover board or one newly installed and starting over after years of neglect, you need a clear picture of the condition of your buildings, common areas and all their various components. You also need knowledge of the association's financial state.

"The more you know, the more effective you can be," Wells said. "Gathering as much informa-



tion as you can allows you to have educated conversations with fellow board members and creatively and confidently make decisions."

He offered several suggestions: Study budgets from previous years to learn what money has been spent on what repairs. Review past warranty issues and work order history to see if there are common or repeat issues. Speak with past board members about their experiences and recollections. Walk the property and take notes on anything you think could be repaired.

"Most of all, talk to the property manager," he said. "They have tons of training, years of experience and many resources. If needed, retain the services of an architect or engineer to investigate and evaluate any structural defects that

require immediate attention."

"Too many communities come to me 10 or 15 years later to say the roof wasn't put on right or they have construction issues," Hirzel said. "It's really too far down the road to do anything at that point, and now that impacts your property values."

Bite #2: Poor Planning

Not raising assessments is a tempting treat, but it doesn't serve the community.

"In fact you're actually hurting yourself by not contributing to the reserves and increasing the budget," Malchiodi said. "We all know the economy we are living in. Prices go up on everything, and you're not going to have the money to

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“WHEN A LARGE EXPENDITURE COMES UP, WHICH IT WILL, AND YOU DON’T HAVE MONEY IN RESERVES, YOUR CHOICES ARE NARROW. YOU WILL HAVE TO RAISE ASSESSMENTS AND PROBABLY PASS AN EXTREMELY UNPOPULAR SPECIAL ASSESSMENT. YOU MAY OR MAY NOT QUALIFY FOR A BANK LOAN. LENDERS INSIST YOUR FINANCES ARE IN ORDER, A TASK THAT REQUIRES SOLID PLANNING AND FORESIGHT. THEY EXAMINE AND EVALUATE YOUR BUDGET, DELINQUENCIES, LAWSUITS, SAVINGS AND MUCH MORE. THEY WILL REQUIRE A RESERVE STUDY.”

properly maintain your community.”

When a large expenditure comes up, which it will, and you don’t have money in reserves, your choices are narrow. You will have to raise assessments and probably pass an extremely unpopular special assessment. You may or may not qualify for a bank loan. Lenders insist your finances are in order, a task that requires solid planning and foresight. They examine and eval-

uate your budget, delinquencies, lawsuits, savings and much more. They will require a reserve study.

“Once you get the reserve study, you have to actually start budgeting according to what it says, and that might mean raising assessments,” Hirzel said. “The owners don’t have a fiduciary duty. They are thinking short-term, how will this affect my pocketbook? You have a fiduciary

duty. Your role is to think about the long-term success of the association.”

Although reserve studies are not mandated in Illinois (lawmakers are working on it), the panel emphasizes their importance to financial planning. Hirzel recommends updating a reserve study every three to five years to help boards fine-tune their budgets.

“Otherwise, you’re dragging down the highway at 90 miles an hour without a map, and hopefully you don’t hit anything,” he said. “You are not making good business decisions.”

An association Hirzel’s firm represented in bankruptcy proceedings deferred its maintenance for so long, the cost of reparation was figured at \$150,000 per unit while the unit values were about \$50,000 each.

“That’s a prime candidate for deconversion, but there are a lot of steps to get to that point,” the attorney said.

Bite #3: Kicking the Can

The third bite, Kicking the Can, is served when boards know they have a problem but delay resolving it. Kicking the can is appetizing to board members because they don’t have to be responsible for making hard decisions the

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owners won't like.

"Everything has a life expectancy," Wells said. "In Chicagoland, we have four seasons, and our buildings are exposed to the elements along with normal wear and tear. Day-to-day seasonal maintenance is crucial to maximizing their life span. As buildings age, they require more and more maintenance to function as they are designed until they ultimately need to be replaced."

The cost of maintaining a property becomes greater each year, requiring the budget to increase each year, he added.

"One of the biggest problems boards have is indecision," Hirzel said. "I can tell you right now, it is better to make the wrong decision based on the advice of a professional than not make a decision."

Indecision occurs for various reasons, perhaps because of disagreements about which projects to start or how to spend money or reluctance to raise assessments. Meanwhile, the situation becomes worse and worse.

"If they decide they want to do the siding project instead of the roof, they are still making progress," he said. "If they are acting on the advice of their professionals, they have fulfilled their fiduciary duty and have liability protection."

Malchiodi related the story of a condominium building delaying and deferring so much maintenance that the municipality issued multiple citations. When the delays continued, the municipality grew peeved and issued more citations and restrictions, to the point of requiring a permit just to stripe the parking lot.

"A reserve study is not one and done," Malchiodi said. "It is only useful if you review it annually or maybe twice a year. You have to apply it to your budget and allocate those funds."

Bite #4: Consequences

By now, the snake has eaten itself, and it is very difficult for associations to backtrack. Bite #4 is the least tasty.

Among the consequences that can arise from a steady diet of Bites 1, 2 and 3 are bankruptcy, litigation, municipal citations, mass evictions, sky-high insurance premiums or outright cancellations, loan denials, and mortgage lender black-listings. Deflated property values are a given at this point.

All of these consequences are expensive, requiring money that could have been better spent fixing the problems that led to the dire situation in the first place.

"Everybody thinks the condo they bought will last forever, but they don't plan for it," Hirzel said. "The first, second and third bites are really tasty. They kept the assessments low, but by the time they get to the fourth bite, they can't get out of it. Then the condo gets deconverted, and when a buyer comes along and scavenges up the units, they are not paying top dollar."

Actually, deconversion is the best outcome at the fourth bite. The worst scenario is when life-safety is compromised, as with the shocking 2021 collapse of 12-story Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida. The building unexpectedly crumbled in the middle of the night, resulting in 98 deaths and total loss of the 136-unit condominium. The board had kicked the can for too long to avoid making known repairs and did not have enough insurance to cover the losses.

"When you act correctly, you have less legal exposure, your insurance premiums are more affordable, your emergencies and claims decrease, your property values remain strong and resilient, and your residents stay safer and happier," Malchiodi said.

"Failing to plan is planning to fail," Hirzel concluded. ■

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by Kris Kasten, Bartzen Rosenlund Kasten LLC

What Would Happen if Community Associations Could Not Collect Assessments?

In Illinois, approximately 3,900,000 people live in more than 20,000 community associations, which include condominiums, homeowner's associations, and residential housing cooperatives.

It is estimated that the members of those associations pay approximately \$8 billion a year to operate and maintain their communities. [Sources: Community Associations Fact Book 2024, Foundation for Community Association Research, foundation.caionline.org.] The funds to pay for the expenses to operate and maintain those communities primarily come from the assessments that are paid by the members/owners of those associations. It has

been said many times, but it is true, assessments are the lifeblood of community associations.

The importance of the timely payment of assessments cannot be emphasized enough. That money is necessary for the financial well-being of the association. Without it, associations cannot pay for insurance, water utilities, refuse collection, management services, and accounting or other services vital to the operation of the association. Also, without adequate

funds, associations cannot perform maintenance, repairs, or replacement of the common area or association owned property, which, among other things, protects property values. When members fail or refuse to pay assessments, it not only jeopardizes the association's ability to pay its bills, it also places an unfair financial burden on other members of the association. Responsible members may have to pay more through special or increased assessments to cover the non-paying members. It is a universal rule among community association boards and members to keep assessments as low as possible. Therefore, it is imperative that the association boards take prompt action to enforce the collection of assessments.

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Given the importance of assessments to the financial wellbeing of associations, one would think that legislators would be reluctant to interfere with an association's ability to collect assessments. Especially when the association performs services for the community that are typically municipality provided services, thereby saving the municipality money. Unfortunately, there has been a growing trend since around 2020 where state legislators are introducing bills that make it more difficult for associations to collect assessments from non-paying members. Fortunately, to date, no such legislation has passed in Illinois. However, the concerning trends related to collection of assessments cannot be ignored. Illinois legislators do look at what other states have done when similar issues arise in Illinois.

States including Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington have passed some type of legislation imposing restrictions or limitations on an association's ability to collect assessments. There are several other states that have introduced but not passed such legislation. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive review of all legislation that has been enacted into law. However, we will take a brief look at a few.

In Colorado, multiple bills were enacted into law imposing different restrictions and limitations. Under the new laws, associations must offer a minimum 18-month payment plan and owners have the right to determine the amount of the monthly payment, subject to a statutory minimum. The new laws also require that delinquency notices be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, plus at least two additional ways of contacting the member, such as by telephone, email, or text message. Additionally, the attorneys' fees that the association can recover are limited to fifty percent of the assessments owed or \$5,000, whichever is less.

In Tennessee, a bill passed in 2024 prohibits a homeowners' association from foreclosing against a property when the unpaid assessments are a special assessment for a nonessential amenity.

In Texas, a bill passed in 2023 requires an association to provide multiple notices of delinquency, which are sent by specific methods, before the association can file an assessment lien. Also, that assessment lien cannot be filed until ninety days after the second notice of delinquency was sent.

In Virginia, a bill passed in 2024 prohibits

"Unfortunately, there has been a growing trend since around 2020 where state legislators are introducing bills that make it more difficult for associations to collect assessments from non-paying members."

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community association from foreclosing on delinquent assessments until the balance exceeds \$5,000, excluding attorneys' fees and costs.

In Washington, a bill passed in 2025 imposes a "meet and confer" and mediation process before an association can take certain collection actions. An owner may request a meeting with the association to resolve the assessment delinquency. During the meet and confer process, the association cannot charge

legal fees to the owner. If that informal process does not result in a resolution, the owner can be referred to mediation. The statute requires the parties to participate in the mediation in good faith. The statute also requires, among other things, that the association and the owner submit certain information to the mediator prior to the mediation.

Although no legislation has been enacted into law in Illinois that falls within the growing trend of laws making it more difficult to collect

assessments, there have been bills introduced. In the past we have seen bills that would have made it more difficult for associations to recover legal fees incurred in connection with assessment collection. We have also seen bills that would impose strict requirements that a board must follow before it could take action to collect assessments. The most recent legislation addressing assessment collection is a bill introduced in 2026, which is Senate Bill 3527.

Senate Bill 3527 amends the Common Interest Community Association Act and the Condominium Property Act, making similar changes to both. The Bill provides that an association cannot take legal action to collect assessments unless the association has adopted a written collection policy and has followed that policy. The Bill sets forth certain minimum requirements that the policy must include. For example, the policy must state the date on which assessments are due and the date on which assessments are considered delinquent, as well as stating late fees, interest, and returned-check charges that the association has a right to charge. The policy must also state when a delinquent account is sent to an attorney for legal action, which could be an accrued amount or a time duration (e.g., 60 days). The policy must state how payments will be applied to the delinquent account. Additionally, the policy must state the legal remedies available to the association to collect assessments. The Bill also expressly provides that a copy of the collection policy must be provided to prospective purchasers.

Is Senate Bill 3527 good or bad legislation? The answer depends on one's perspective and experience. Responsible boards who have encountered an obstinate member who simply refuses to pay will be concerned that the Bill may interfere with their ability to collect assessments. However, an owner who encounters a board that does not follow requirements set forth in the applicable statute and the governing documents may find the Bill necessary to force the board to act properly. Some owners may feel the Bill does not go far enough to address "bad" boards. The Bill may have the greatest impact on uninformed self-managed associations. If a board of such an association does not adopt the mandated policy and tries to collect unpaid assessments, they will be very surprised and frustrated when they learn they cannot collect those assessments because they didn't adopt a collection policy. Whether one believes Senate Bill 3527 to be good or bad legislation, the Bill makes it

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clear that Illinois is not exempt from the growing trend of legislation intended to restrict or limit and association's ability to collect assessments.

At the time of writing this article, Senate Bill 3527 remains in committee. It cannot move to the Senate floor for a vote until it passes out of committee. However, the Senate's session lasts into May. Things can move very quickly in the General Assembly when legislators are motivated. Thus, it is too soon to tell what will ultimately happen with Senate Bill 3527.

Of course, painting a dystopian future of destitute and dilapidated associations caused by overzealous legislators is a bit hyperbolic. However, the concern of not being able to effectively and efficiently collect assessments is real. If associations cannot collect assessments, the entire community will suffer. Financial instability and deferred maintenance, repair and replacement of the property will adversely affect property values in the community. A diligent board making sure it follows proper procedures, including but not limited to, adopting budgets, imposing fines and charging late fees, and regularly communicating with owners will

"Whether one believes Senate Bill 3527 to be good or bad legislation, the Bill makes it clear that Illinois is not exempt from the growing trend of legislation intended to restrict or limit and association's ability to collect assessments."

help stave off concerning legislation. The fewer unhappy owners, the fewer "horror" stories legislators will hear prompting the introduction of legislation. Although there are at least two sides to every story, legislators often do not hear the other side until after the bill has been introduced. Aside from good governance practices within individual associations, participating in the legislative process is important. Illinois legislators do listen to constituents. Boards can reach out to their legislators just the same as individual owners and let the legislators know

how bills may impact the board's ability to operate and administer the association. Legislators may even come to visit the community when invited. Generally, legislators want to pass laws that make community association living better, fairer, and more equitable. When it comes to assessment collection, being able to explain how the ability to collect assessments falls within those principles will go a long way toward preventing overly burdensome legislation. ■



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INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

Reserve Advisors & Waldman Engineering Consultants

Reserve Advisors, a leading provider of reserve studies announced the acquisition of Waldman Engineering Consultants, Inc. (WEC), an Illinois-based architectural and engineering evaluation and design services firm serving community associations throughout the Greater Chicagoland area.

Founded in 2007 and headquartered in Lisle, Illinois, WEC delivers full-service engineering solutions to residential and commercial properties. The firm has supported more than 5,000 clients through engineering and construction oversight services, including moisture and forensic investigations, specification development, and building envelope and structural inspections.

Todd Walter, Regional Executive Director of Reserve Advisors, highlighted the strategic alignment between the two organizations, noting their shared commitment to a client-first approach. "As community associations face increased scrutiny around building safety, structural integrity, and long-term capital planning, access to trusted engineering and reserve planning expertise has never been more important," said Walter. "By bringing Waldman Engineering Consultants into Reserve Advisors, we are expanding our ability to support condo boards and property managers with a broader, more integrated set of services that deliver clarity, confidence, and peace of mind."

The acquisition strengthens both firms' ability to serve

clients by combining WEC's engineering-focused expertise with Reserve Advisors' national leadership in reserve studies and capital planning. Together, the firms will offer a more seamless client experience through an expanded suite of reserve study, forensic engineering, and insurance appraisal services.

Mark Waldman, founder of Waldman Engineering Consultants, emphasized the complementary nature of the two firms. "Reserve Advisors and WEC share a common philosophy centered on supporting community associations with reliable expertise and practical guidance," Waldman said. "This partnership allows us to enhance the services available to our clients while continuing to deliver the same high-quality engineering solutions they expect. We see this as a meaningful step forward for both our team and the communities we serve."

About the Companies:

Founded in 1991, Reserve Advisors provides reserve study and capital planning consulting services for more than 19,000 community associations nationwide. The firm's services encompass reserve studies, property insurance appraisals, and energy consulting services. Reserve Advisors is headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a Chicago office in the Ravenswood neighborhood, employing over 85 professionals across 14 states.

Waldman Engineering Consultants provides full-service engineering and consulting solutions and will continue serving clients from its Lisle, Illinois location, with leadership continuity supported by Mark Waldman and Todd Walter, Regional Director at Reserve Advisors.

MCD Golf & Bocce Invitational

The 30th annual MCD Golf & Bocce Invitational will be held on **July 17, 2026** at **Eaglewood Resort in Itasca**. Last year, over 200 participants played golf or bocce and enjoyed industry networking at a special reception. For more information visit www.condolifestyles.net or call 630-932-5551. To view photos from past mcd media events, visit [Facebook.com/MCD Media](https://Facebook.com/MCDMedia).



MCD's Industry Recognition & History Event

The annual MCD Media Industry Recognition & History event will be held on **Thursday, August 27, 2026** at Rivers Casino, Des Plaines. The program features a seated luncheon as well as an industry networking reception, live music, River Casino dealer school lessons, door prizes and contests. For more information, call 630-932-5551 or visit www.condolifestyles.net.



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INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

Property Specialists, Inc.

Property Specialists, Inc. (PSI), a locally owned community association management firm serving Northern Illinois, announced a strategic leadership transition as the company marks its 50th anniversary.

Founded in 1975 by industry pioneer **Tracy Hill**, PSI has built its reputation on relationship-driven service, local expertise, and long-term stability. Following Hill's passing, longtime PSI leader **Cathy Ryan** purchased the company in 2014 to preserve its legacy while implementing a thoughtful succession plan focused on continuity and sustainable growth.

"This transition has been carefully planned to ensure our communities continue receiving consistent, knowledgeable, and trusted service," said Ryan. Ryan will begin stepping away from day-to-day operations while continuing to serve as Chief Executive Officer, maintaining strategic oversight and mentorship.

Brittany (Ryan) Kojzarek has been named President and Chief Operating Officer, assuming responsibility for daily operations and long-term strategic initiatives. Kojzarek joined PSI in 2005 and advanced through accounting, operations, and community association management roles before earning her CMCA, AMS, and PCAM designations.

While working full-time, Kojzarek earned her bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in history from the University of Illinois Chicago. She is actively involved in advancing professional education, governance, and

leadership within the community association industry through her long-standing service with CAI-Illinois and her engagement with MCD Media initiatives. Her leadership has been recognized by industry peers, including being named the 2025 recipient of the Condo Lifestyles Outstanding Leadership Award and Property Manager of the Year Award.

"Professional education and industry engagement strengthen how we serve our communities," said Kojzarek. "Our leadership philosophy is rooted in continuous learning, ethical governance, and long-term partnership."

PSI also confirmed the continued leadership of **Ashley Ryan** as Chief Financial Officer. Ryan holds a degree in Business Administration from the University of Illinois with double majors in International Business and Information Systems and Information Technology (ISIT). Her expertise has been instrumental in enhancing PSI's financial systems and operational efficiency.

Additionally, **Sarah Tasic** has been promoted to Executive Vice President of New Construction. Tasic, who holds CMCA, AMS, and PCAM designations, has led PSI's new construction and developer services for more than a decade, supporting communities from early development through homeowner transition and long-term success.

With 50 years of experience and a strong leadership foundation, Property Specialists, Inc. continues its mission as a trusted, locally owned partner to community associations throughout Northern Illinois.

Hillcrest Property Management

Kevin Marcus was recently named President of Lombard based Hillcrest Property Management. As President of Hillcrest, Mr. Marcus will lead a team of exceptional managers and support staff that are responsible for over 130 properties,

totaling almost 10,000 units. "I'm excited to be part of this amazing team. My goal is to build on a great culture at Hillcrest, engage the community, and provide exceptional service to our clients," states Mr. Marcus.

Mr. Marcus has over 20 years as a professional Community Association Manager (CAM). Kevin is active in the Community Associations Institute and has been a long-time member of MCD Media's Condo Lifestyles State of the Industry committee and Advisory Board.



➤ Kevin Marcus



➤ Shown above (from L to R) are Ashley Ryan, Cathy Ryan, Brittany Kojzarek and Sarah Tasic

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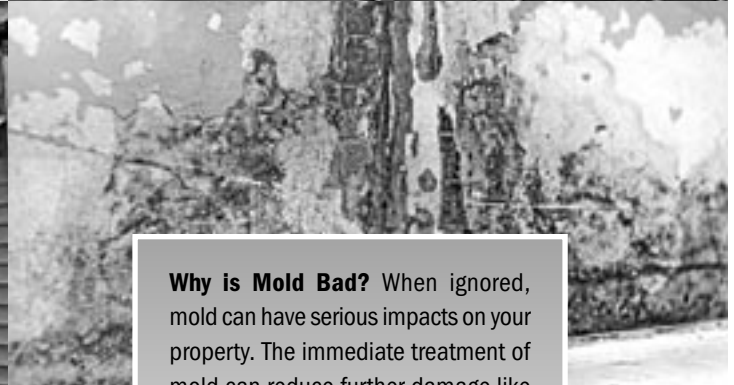
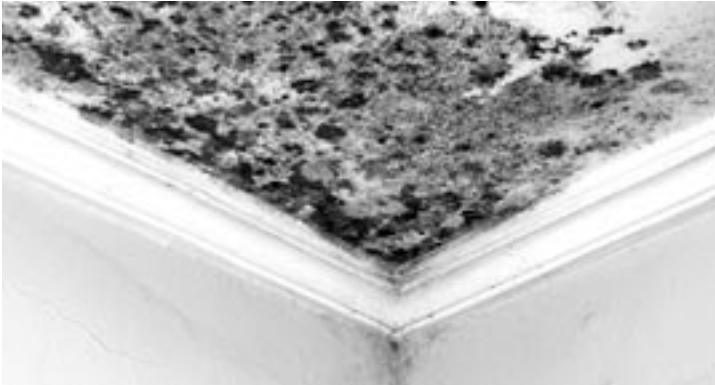
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APRIL 2026 | VOLUME 30 | NUMBER 1

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Condo Lifestyles Magazine is published quarterly by MCD Media, a wholly owned subsidiary MCD Marketing Associates, Inc. For editorial, advertising and subscription information contact: 935 Curtiss Street, Suite 1A, Downers Grove, IL 60515. 630-932-5551 or 630-202-3006.

Circulation: *Condo Lifestyles* is available for a single issue price of \$8.95 or at a \$30.00 annual subscription. Distribution is direct mailing and delivery direct through authorized distributors to over 7,000 officers and directors of Common Interest Communities, 1,400 property managers, 400 realtors, 400 developers and 400 public officials. Total Circulation is 9,500.

Condo Lifestyles attempts to provide its readership with a wide range of information on community associations, and when appropriate, differing opinions on community association issues.

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From the Editor

While this Spring has been generally mild, we have some cold spells and plenty of windy storm events. Hopefully, we can soon enjoy some warm and calm stretches of weather in coming months so that service providers can perform exterior maintenance, repair, and restoration projects. We also hope that the several serious Geo-Political situations will calm down soon and bring our world more peaceful times.

Economic conditions have remained reasonably good so far this year despite plenty of challenging factors. Locally, a building collapse in Morton Grove has many industry experts discussing the legislative fall-out that may occur as a result. Much is yet to be learned about what happened and why the collapse occurred.

Our cover story is on relationship building and how it is essential for successful property management. Of course, all of us can benefit from good relationship building skills and activities. In a society so heavily influenced by technology, relationships and interpersonal communication are sometimes lost or set aside. This article reinforces how and why relationships still matter.

An article in our Engineering Insights column explains Building Information Modeling (BIM) which is a comprehensive digital model of a building or project area that integrates not only a third dimension of geometry and space, but can also include detailed information about materials, phasing, and even the relationships among systems like electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and structural components. BIM is helping building managers rethink how they execute certain capital projects.

Our Board Basics column offers a great article on how boards can protect their property values and why they should. This article offers insight on setting appropriate assessment levels, executing proper maintenance programs, budgeting and planning so that you can avoid challenges such as a special assessment, litigation, municipal citations, mass evictions, sky-high insurance premiums/cancellations, loan denials or being blacklisted by mortgage lenders.

Another board basics article provides some excellent tips for first time board members, and we have two articles that deal with the unpleasant but very necessary subject of collecting delinquent assessments. Our industry happenings column and event highlights can also be found in this issue.

Upcoming MCD Media Events

We are pleased to offer upcoming MCD special events including our annual golf & bocce outing, which will be held on July 17 at Eaglewood Resort in Itasca and our MCD Media Industry Recognition & History event at Rivers Casino on August 27th. You can find out more information on these events by contacting our office.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to make your association and your community all it can be. If you have an idea that would benefit other Community Associations, a story to share, or some advice on how to avoid a problem or failure, please call our office at 630-932-5551 or send us an e-mail (mdavids@condolifestyles.net). ❖

Michael C. Davids
Editor and Publisher



➤ Mike Davids

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by Salvatore Sciacca - Chicago Property Services

Top 10 Tips for First Time Board Members

All associations require volunteer board members. Some associations only need three directors, and some larger associations can have as many as nine directors or more. Regardless of the size of the association, there must be a board of directors for the association to properly function.

And the board of directors of each community association have a vast amount of decision-making authority. Furthermore, a homeowner's community living experience is mostly dictated by the actions of the board of directors. As a result, it is ideal that the homeowners that volunteer have some prior experience serving on a community association board and have a fair amount of business management experience. However, it is not always the case that volunteers have previous experience serving on an organization's board or working in business.

In some cases, associations have veteran board members. These are homeowners that have lived in the association for 10 to 20 years and have served

on the board for the entire time or have served off and on the board for several terms during their time as a homeowner of the association. Eventually, the veteran board members move out or simply do not want to volunteer anymore. What happens in that situation? Whatever the reason is, it is often the case that the only homeowners willing to fill open positions and serve on the board are first time board members.

When homeowners serve on the board for the first time, it is imperative that they are aware of certain actions that are critical for their success as a volunteer board member. Here are the top tips for all first-time board members:

10. Review the management agreement. This should be the first action taken by a board member and especially by board members that do not have experience serving on the board. In addition, make sure to write down all the questions after reviewing the agreement. Lastly, make sure you make note of the cancellation terms of the agreement. This is probably one of the most important sections of the management agreement.

9. Setup a board training session with the management company and create a good working environment between the board and management. Welcome to the board of directors. If you have never served on the board, you will need to learn your duties and responsibilities rather quickly. One way is to setup a training session with your management company. Another way to learn about your role is to read as many articles as you can from community association industry organizations such as MCD Media, Community Associations Institute or other sources that your manager may provide, or

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you find online. It is very important that you understand your role as the President, Secretary, Treasurer or Member at Large and fulfill those duties to the best of your ability.

8. Give management the benefit of the doubt. If you are new to the board, I encourage you to give the management company the benefit of the doubt if something goes wrong. In some cases, what you think is wrong might not be wrong. In other cases, it might be wrong but not the fault of the management company. There are cases where the management company will be at fault but make sure to not assume that right off the bat.

7. Review the capital plan and/or reserve study.

One of the most important actions to take as a new board member is to investigate whether or not the association has a reserve study and/or a capital plan. If so, make sure to read and familiarize yourself with this important information. If the association does not have any of these items, make sure to recommend that the board obtain these items.

6. Confirm dates for the upcoming board meetings and the subsequent annual meeting.

How does the association conduct business? All board business ideally takes place through a board meeting. There are some circumstances where that is impractical like where there is an emergency flood or leak, and a plumber needs to be called out. Regardless, all board members need to be aware of the upcoming board meetings, and

their attendance should be considered mandatory. Furthermore, make sure to understand your duties and responsibilities at the board meetings before you show up at the next board meeting.

5. Review service provider contracts. What vendors does the association have? Are you happy with these vendors? Make sure to set reasonable expectations before simply saying the vendors need to be replaced. What are the terms of the agreements? Meet with the vendors if there are any service issues and make sure the vendors are aware of your "reasonable" expectations before making any sudden rash decisions on vendor changes.

4. Review the operations plan. The day to day 12-month operations plan is very important for the association. This is the plan that indicates what services are going to take place and when. For example, is the association going to have carpet cleaning and window washing this year? If yes, what month will these services take place? What about dryer vent cleaning or hydro jetting of the main plumbing line?

3. Review the rules and regulations. First, check to ensure your association has rules and regulations. There are associations that do not have any. If you do not have any, you need to adopt them soon. If you do have them, review them, and compare them to industry best practices and modify your rules at an upcoming board meeting. This is extremely important to avoid future headaches.


2. Review the last 12 months of financial statements. One of you first acts as a board member should be to read the financial statements. If you have any questions, make a list and check with the other board members and then go back to the management company and ask them to review the statements with you and also review all your questions.

1. Switch management companies if you are unhappy after a 6 month "trial" period. Are you still unhappy with the management company after the 6-month "trial period"? Maybe it is time to switch companies. Make sure you keep in touch with the other board members and see their thoughts on the situation. You will need a consensus, but it is better to switch than to stay unhappy and remain afraid of changing simply because you want to avoid the fear of change.


SUMMARY

Serving on the board is critical to the success of your association's health and wellbeing. Some homeowners enjoy serving many terms while others like to serve one term and stop. Regardless of whether you are a veteran board member or a first-time board member, there are certain actions and behaviors that are essential to ensure you fulfill your fiduciary duty. Follow these essential tips and you will avoid many headaches over the long haul, and you will create a much more enjoyable community living environment for all of your fellow homeowners. ❧

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by Brian Feldman - Hirzel Law, PLC

When Condo Owners Stop Paying: How Illinois Associations Can Legally Collect Assessments

Assessments are the primary source of income for condominium associations. If an association fails to collect assessments, its ability to maintain common areas, pay insurance premiums, fund reserves, and provide other services to homeowners can be significantly affected.

Delinquencies can also hurt property values. If an association has a high number of delinquent accounts, it may even make it harder for potential buyers to obtain financing.

Board members should treat all unit owners equally and consistently to reduce the risk of discrimination or selective enforcement claims. It is recommended that all condominium associations adopt a written collection policy that explains when late fees apply, when notices will be sent, and when accounts will be

turned over to legal counsel. A clear policy helps ensure that all owners are treated the same and that the board has a roadmap to follow when owners are delinquent.

Despite an association's best efforts to collect assessments, there will be times when a unit owner's account becomes delinquent, and additional legal action becomes necessary. For those situations, it is important for associations to understand how the legal process in Illinois works for collecting unpaid assessments.

The Condominium Collections Process

Once a unit owner's account is turned over for collections, the association's attorney will need to confirm the current owner of record and ensure that the unit owner has not filed for bankruptcy (which would automatically stay collection proceedings). Assuming no bankruptcy case has been filed, most associations elect to have their attorney send a delinquent unit owner an initial demand letter giving the unit owner 30 days to pay the past-due amount or dispute the debt. Many attorneys add a five-business-day mailing buffer to account for postal delays and to help comply with state and federal debt collection laws, as the post office has indicated that the mail is not always postmarked on the day that it is mailed. If the delinquency remains unresolved after issuing the initial demand letter, the next step would be to serve the delinquent unit owner

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with a Statutory 30-Day Notice and Demand for Possession. This notice also gives the delinquent unit owner 30 days to pay the past-due amount or dispute the debt. Most unit owners resolve their delinquencies or enter into payment plans upon receiving the initial demand letter or Statutory 30-Day Notice and Demand for Possession.

However, for those delinquent unit owners who still do not pay or enter into a payment plan, the most common next step is to initiate the eviction process under the Illinois Eviction Act (formerly known as the Forcible Entry and Detainer Act). Although condominium associations may pursue foreclosure, the eviction process is generally faster and more cost-effective. The eviction process begins when the association's attorney prepares and files a Complaint for Possession and Unpaid Assessments against the delinquent unit owner, any known occupants, and any unknown occupants in circuit court. Once service has been effectuated, the association's attorney will appear in court to obtain a default judgment if the owner fails to respond. If the unit owner appears and contests the action, the case will likely proceed to trial unless the parties reach a settlement. If the

association is successful, the court will enter a judgment for the unpaid assessments, court costs, and attorneys' fees (at the judge's discretion if the association's governing documents permit the recovery of attorneys' fees), and a judgment for possession of the unit. The judgment for possession is automatically stayed for 60 days (the judge has discretion to extend the automatic stay beyond 60 days). After the automatic stay has been lifted, the condominium association may proceed to have the sheriff enforce the eviction.

There are limited situations in which an association may not be able to recover all past-due assessments. For example, if a mortgage lender forecloses on a unit or accepts a deed-in-lieu of foreclosure, the lender is typically not responsible for unpaid assessments incurred before it acquires title. Under the Illinois Condominium Property Act, the lender is obligated to pay assessments only from the month following confirmation of the foreclosure sale or recording of the deed. Moreover, if a third party (not the bank) buys the unit at a foreclosure sale, they must pay the unit's share of common expenses for the six months immediately preceding the association's collection

action under the Illinois Condominium Property Act. Furthermore, if the unit owner files for bankruptcy, the association may be barred from collecting some or all pre-bankruptcy debt, depending on the type of bankruptcy (Chapter 7 vs. Chapter 13), whether a discharge is granted, and how the unit is treated in the bankruptcy estate. However, the condominium association should file a Proof of Claim in the bankruptcy proceedings to protect its interest.

Key Takeaways for Condominium Collections

In summary, condominium boards should:

- Review governing documents to confirm they allow recovery of attorneys' fees and collection costs and amend them if they are unclear or outdated.
- Adopt and consistently follow a written collection policy.
- Act quickly when owners become delinquent and involve legal counsel when serious delinquencies, foreclosure actions, or bankruptcy filings arise.

By taking these steps, associations can better protect their finances and improve their ability to collect unpaid assessments and related costs. ■



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by Adam Sanders & Jesse Langille –
Elara Engineering

Blueprints to BIM

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With ever-tightening budgets, aging infrastructure, and complex retrofit needs, building owners are facing increasing pressure to make their capital improvement dollars go further. Yet many owners still rely on decades-old tools and processes—chief among them, traditional 2D blueprints.

In today's world, there's a better way to navigate construction projects, especially those that take place within existing buildings. It's called Building Information Modeling (BIM), and it has been transforming the way the built environment is designed, coordinated, and constructed. Unfortunately, while BIM has become commonplace in many other construction sectors, it remains underutilized in existing multifamily buildings undertaking retrofit projects, particularly those focused on building infrastructure with limited architectural scope.

**Retrofit Projects Are Complex—
Modern Tools Help Simplify Them**

Retrofitting an existing building is rarely simple. This is particularly the case with decades-old vintage properties where the original documentation is often incomplete or outdated, utilities are packed tightly into constrained spaces, and unforeseen conditions are the norm rather than the exception. These challenges can lead to cost overruns, delays, and frustrating surprises once construction begins. BIM can't magically solve these challenges, but it is a tool that can help to mitigate these issues prior to construction.

What Is BIM?

To understand BIM, it helps first to recognize the limitations of traditional 2D drawings. Blueprints are flat representations of complex, three-dimensional systems. While they provide valuable information and have been the industry norm for over 100 years, they leave much to interpretation. Any assumptions made in the bidding process can lead to change orders, miscommunication, and costly rework during construction.



Building



Information



Modeling

To break down the acronym in simple terms:

BUILDING

The design software is focused on the built environment and the systems that make a building function.

INFORMATION

Integrated data embedded within the model (materials, equipment sizes, performance specs, etc.)

MODELING

A reasonably accurate 3D digital representation of the building or project area.



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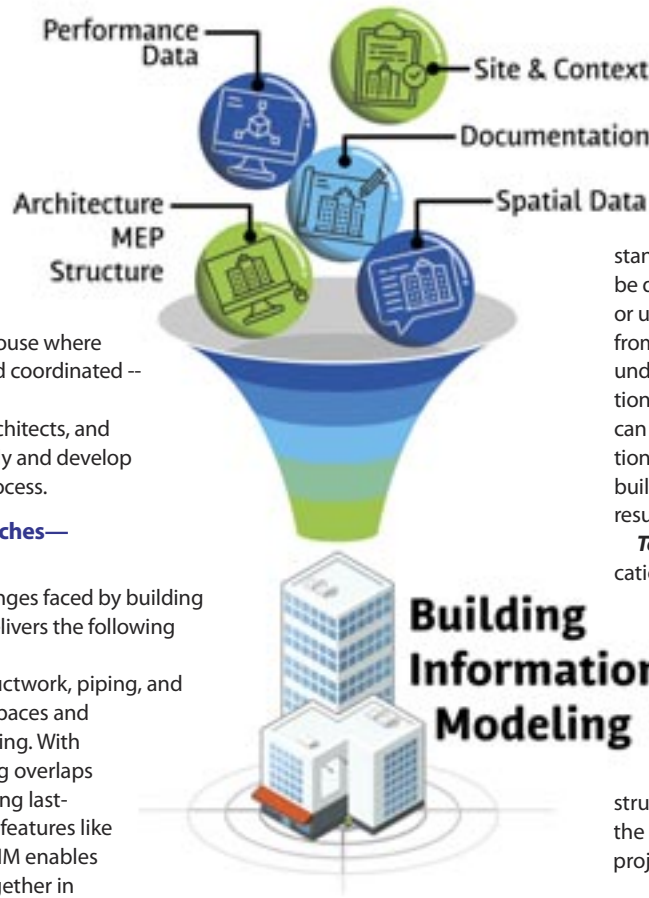
BIM, on the other hand, is a comprehensive digital model of the building or project area that integrates not only a third dimension of geometry and space, but can also include detailed information about materials, phasing, and even the relationships among systems like electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and structural components. Imagine it as a digital dollhouse where everything can be examined, rotated, and coordinated -- all before construction even begins.

This digital model allows engineers, architects, and contractors to collaborate more effectively and develop smarter solutions earlier in the design process.

Common Condo Construction Headaches—Addressed Before They Start

By directly addressing common challenges faced by building owners undertaking retrofit work, BIM delivers the following benefits:

Fewer Surprises: In older buildings, ductwork, piping, and conduit are often routed through tight spaces and represented by a single line in a 2D drawing. With these traditional drawings, actual existing overlaps aren't caught until construction—requiring last-minute changes and compromises. With features like clash detection and 3D walk-throughs, BIM enables designers to verify that systems work together in



harmony during the design phase. This means fewer change orders and unexpected costs during construction—helping keep your project on time and within budget

Improved Visualization: Understanding spatial layouts from 2D drawings can be difficult, especially in tight mechanical rooms or utility chases. BIM gives all stakeholders—from building owners to contractors—a clearer understanding of how systems will fit and function in the real world. Additionally, contractors can use MEP BIM models to plan their installations more effectively, leading to higher-quality builds and fewer issues down the line. This can result in a greater value for your investment.

Team Integration: BIM enhances communication among all parties involved. Building owners can see a more representative illustration of the work to be done, and contractors can better understand design intent to provide bids with greater confidence. For project teams, BIM acts as a centralized platform for all disciplines—architecture, structure, and MEP. The more effort placed into the model upfront, the smoother the rest of the project proceeds.

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3D Scanning for Existing Conditions: When appropriate, project teams can use advanced scanning tools to digitally document a building's current condition. This enables the creation of more accurate models that form the foundation of the design. While 3D scanning may not always be practical due to cost and project scope, tools like 360-degree cameras offer a more accessible way to improve design quality and accuracy.

Why Isn't BIM the Norm across all Projects?

Despite its clear advantages, BIM has not yet become standard practice in the retrofit market, in particular, multifamily infrastructure projects. One reason is that the full benefits of BIM are more immediately visible in new construction or major redevelopment projects where occupied spaces are being visually transformed and aesthetics play a larger role. Retrofit projects often are viewed as too small or too constrained to justify the perceived extra effort.

However, engineers and designers who have experience in various project types and with BIM have experienced the value it brings and many, including Elara Engineering, have now standardized BIM procedures and utilize the technology on nearly all project types.

With the increasing complexity of building systems, tighter construction schedules, and rising construction costs, more building owners are starting to recognize the benefit BIM provides—even for small and mid-scale retrofits and infrastructure projects. BIM attempts to move problem-solving from the construction site to the design office, where issues are cheaper and faster to resolve.

The Bottom Line: Better Design Tools Can Bring Better Results

Practical, well-coordinated designs are the foundation of a successful project. BIM enhances that philosophy, giving the designer tools to deliver:

- Fewer surprises during construction
- Better utilization of tight spaces
- Improved communication with contractors and stakeholders
- Higher quality results with less waste

Building owners are encouraged to ask more from their design partners. What tools and processes are being used? Is BIM part of the design conversation?

Investing more effort during the design phase may feel like an added upfront cost—but designers established and experienced in using BIM typically do not increase their fees for BIM projects knowing that its use often leads to reduced overall expenses, enhanced project delivery, a more collaborative project team, and further owner satisfaction.

Thoughtful, modern design with BIM adds real value to your building—and to your bottom line. ❖

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Property Specialists, Inc. once again led the way in Special Olympics donations, and many attendees contributed generously throughout the event.

A big thank you to the outstanding planning committee led by Brittany Kojzarek, Chairperson. We also appreciate the many volunteers who helped make the tournaments and games a success, including Head Scorekeeper Joe Schutzius and Lead Judges, Key Volunteers and significant Special Olympics Donors: Tairre Dever-Sutton, Richie Music, David Conforti, Meredith Conforti, Karen Pontoriero, Tom Skweres, Jeannette Catellier, Mandy Manalli, Ron Muldoon, Rob Traub Jr., Jenny Ruth, Jack Mancione, Greg Semmer, Bob Jacobs, Dave Gaydos, Ryan Knoll, and Mary Knoll.

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by Laura L. Marinelli – Levenfeld Pearlstein, LLC

5 Tips for Updating and Adopting Changes to Association Rules

As warmer temperatures arrive, we find ourselves wanting to organize our spaces, check off those to do list items, and get ready to tackle the rest of the year. This seasonal sentiment also applies to condominium associations. A clean, concise, and updated set of rules is a key tool to running an orderly and efficient association and can make the enforcement process much smoother. Below you will find five simple tips for managers and board members when updating or adopting changes to your condominium association's rules:

1. Keep it Simple.

The most common mistake when adopting or updating rules is making the rules too complex or adopting too many rules. There is no need to restate the provisions of the declaration, bylaws or the Illinois Condominium Property Act ("Act") in your rules. Many boards mistakenly believe that it will be easier if they

adopt a rule for every situation and provide very specific detailed procedures. In my experience, the more complex and lengthier your rules are, the more likely owners are not going to read them thoroughly or understand them. And we often find boards and managers running afoul of their own rules when they adopt too many rules or make them too complicated. (Ouch – nothing like violating your own rules!) But keeping the rules straightforward and concise helps ensure that everyone knows the rules and understands them. So keep it simple and don't adopt rules that are excessive or that you do not intend to enforce.

2. Avoid Strict Fine Schedules and Enforcement Procedures That are Too Restrictive.

Condominium boards are often tempted to adopt a strict fine schedule for clarity and

consistency, but not all violations are created equal. Illinois law requires that fines be reasonable in relation to the violation. Establishing a set fine schedule does not allow the board to exercise its discretion and impose a fine that is appropriate for the violation. This can result in a fine that is excessive for the violation and thus unreasonable. Or in many instances it can tie a board's hands when trying to address a serious violation by limiting the board to a set fine amount. If boards want guidelines around fine amounts, the recommended course of action is to adopt non-binding ranges for fine amounts with language that allows the board to adjust the fine amount based on the severity of the violation.

On the same note, avoid enforcement procedures that impose inflexible or unnecessary deadlines for the board to respond to complaints, schedule hearings or issue notices

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of determination. Complex violations that could result in serious consequences if not addressed quickly may need to be scheduled for hearing more quickly than other violations. Alternatively, coordinating schedules of volunteer board members can be challenging and may require that a fine hearing be delayed. And because boards must vote in an open meeting to impose a fine, the rules should allow time for the board to properly call a meeting and vote on the outcome of any hearing.

3. Rules Cannot Override or Change the Declaration.

In the hierarchy of governing documents, rules are at the bottom of the food chain. The Act and your association's declaration and by-laws will always override an association's rules. This means the board cannot adopt a rule that conflicts with the Act or your declaration or by-laws. Illinois courts have already come down on associations who try to modify provisions in their declaration and by-laws through a rule. Finally, please keep in mind that the Act prohibits adoption of any rules that impair an owner or resident's First Amendment right to free speech or the free exercise of religion. This means that you cannot adopt rules which prohibit religiously mandated items to the front door area of a condominium unit, for example.

4. Follow the Process.

While rule changes do not require a vote of ownership, there is a specific process that must be followed in order to adopt a rule change. For general rule changes, the process is as follows. First, prepare a draft of the proposed changes or new rules. Next, you must call a meeting of the owners to allow for comment on the proposed change. The notice of meeting must include the exact language of the proposed rule change and state the purpose of the meeting. That notice must be provided 10 to 30 days prior to the meeting. There is no quorum requirement for the unit owner meeting, unless the declaration provides otherwise, and the owners do not get to vote on the rule change. But owners do get the chance to comment on the rule change at the owners' meeting. Once these things occur, the board can adopt the proposed change via vote at an open board meeting. That meeting can occur at any time, though at least 48 hours' notice is required for an open board meeting.

Please note two additional scenarios that will impact the general process explained above. First, making changes to the proposed rule change after it is circulated to ownership requires that you start the process over. Meaning, if the board decides to modify the

proposed changes after the draft rule has been circulated to owners, it must recirculate the revised version of the proposed change and start the process over. Second, adoption of rules relating to direct/absentee balloting or electronic voting have additional requirements and allow unit owners to veto adoption of these rules if they are able to obtain sufficient owner support.

5. Consult with Your Attorney.

Before adopting major rule changes (e.g., anything beyond minor corrections), consult with your attorney. They can confirm whether your rules conflict with your governing documents or otherwise run afoul of the Act. They can also make sure you follow the proper process for adoption of changes or new rules. Spotting potential missteps before they are made is less costly than fixing them after the fact.

Running an association is hard work and updating rules often gets overlooked or pushed to the bottom of the to do list. But keeping them up to date and concise can be helpful to managers and boards, so take the time to review your rules and make any necessary updates before violations or issues arise. Happy spring cleaning! ❧



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by Scott Nielsen, Fleck's Landscaping

Behind the Scenes of Exceptional Flower Care in Community Landscapes

Some of the most memorable landscapes are not defined by a single moment of color, but by how they quietly evolve throughout the year.

In condominium, townhome, and HOA communities, exceptional flower displays are rarely accidental. They are the result of planning, seasonal awareness, and disciplined care carried out behind the scenes.

Flower Care Is a Year Round Commitment

Successful flower programs begin well before spring arrives. Winter months are used to evaluate the previous season, refine layouts, select plant material, and plan rotations. This preparation allows annuals, perennials, bulbs, wild grasses, and roses to work together as a complete system rather than as isolated plantings.

Winter Planning and Protection

During winter, shallow rooted perennials and mums are monitored for frost heaving, and protective mulch is maintained to guard against freeze thaw cycles. Roses and vulnerable beds remain protected until conditions stabilize. These steps help ensure plants emerge strong rather than stressed when spring arrives.

Early Spring Sets the Tone

As temperatures begin to moderate, early spring work becomes critical. Winter coverings are removed gradually, ornamental and wild

grasses are cut back, and beds are redefined with clean edges. Bulb foliage is allowed to remain long enough to recharge energy for the following year. These details influence how long flower displays perform through the season.

Late Spring Installation and Establishment

Annual flowers are installed only after frost risk has passed and soil conditions are ready. Proper spacing, soil preparation, and early watering establish healthy root systems. Perennials are divided where needed to prevent overcrowding, and mulch is restored to regulate moisture and soil temperature.

Summer Care and Discipline

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ones. Regular deadheading, selective pruning, targeted fertilization, and proper watering keep displays balanced and resilient. Ornamental and wild grasses add texture and movement, softening beds and providing visual continuity during periods of heat.

Fall Transitions and Preparation

As summer flowers decline, fall introduces a new phase. Mums are timed intentionally, bulbs are planted with next spring in mind, and perennials are cleaned selectively.

Roses are gradually prepared for dormancy, and beds are mulched after hard frost. Thoughtful fall work reduces surprises the following spring.

Why This Matters for Community Associations

Well cared for flower displays enhance curb appeal, strengthen community pride, and positively influence how properties are perceived. Consistent professional care contributes to overall property value and resale appeal, while poorly maintained common areas can have the opposite effect. In shared living environments, landscapes send a clear signal about how well a community is managed.

Lasting Impressions Are Built Quietly

The most admired landscapes appear effortless. Behind the scenes, they reflect planning, experience, and disciplined execution carried out month by month. When communities invest in that level of flower care, the results are unmistakable and remembered long after the season ends. ■



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