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Building:

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Project Windows & Doors:

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Project Coordinator:

Woodland Windows & Doors

Project Manager:

Phillip Mariotti & Matthew Mariotti

Management:

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BY KIMBERLY MAY // WESTWARD360

BEYOND 4 WALLS: HOW MODERN CONDO OWNERS ARE REDEFINING COMMUNITY LIVING

A decade ago, many Association owners knew little more than the names on the mailboxes next door. Life inside a residential community was often defined by convenience: secure entryways, maintained common areas, and the comfort of ownership without the full burden of exterior upkeep. People came home, closed their doors, and largely kept to themselves.

Today, that picture is changing. It doesn't matter if you live in a condo, townhome, HOA, large-scale, midrise, high-rise or a co-op community, residents are looking for more than efficient living and attractive amenities. They want connection. They want to know their neighbors, feel invested in their community, and participate in a shared lifestyle that offers both privacy and belonging. In response, boards, community managers, and residents themselves are finding new ways to turn shared buildings into genuine communities.

This evolution reflects a broader cultural shift. People increasingly recognize that where they live shapes how they live. A well-run community is no longer judged solely by its architecture, location, or maintenance standards, but also by the quality of the resident experience. The most successful communities are those where people transform common spaces into places of interaction, support, and shared identity. In modern association living, community has become one of the most valuable amenities of all.

From Shared Walls to Shared Experiences

In the early years of association and co-op development, the appeal was clear and practical. Buyers were drawn to the idea of ownership paired with simplicity. Exterior maintenance, landscaping, and shared facilities were handled collectively, allowing residents to enjoy a more streamlined lifestyle. Social interaction, while possible, was usually incidental. A quick greeting in the elevator or a brief conversation in the parking area might be the extent of neighborly engagement.

That model still appeals to many residents, but expectations have expanded. Today's homeowners often place real value on living in a place that encourages interaction and connection. They are not necessarily looking for



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constant social interaction, but they do want opportunities to participate when they choose. This can take many forms, from casual seasonal gatherings to more organized resident-led activities.

Holiday socials, summer barbecues, book clubs, walking groups, and volunteer projects are increasingly common in communities that understand the importance of belonging. These activities do more than fill a calendar. They create familiarity, trust, and a strong sense that residents are part of something larger than their individual unit.

This shift is especially meaningful for new residents, retirees, remote workers, and busy professionals who may otherwise find it difficult to build local relationships. A community that creates space for shared experiences can ease transitions and reduce feelings of isolation. Even modest efforts can have a lasting effect on how people view their home environment.

The key takeaway is simple: people increasingly choose related living communities that offer both independence and connection. Privacy still matters, but so does the opportunity to engage. The modern condo experience is no longer just about shared walls. It is about

shared experiences that make daily life richer and more rewarding.

Amenities Are Becoming Community Builders

Amenities have long been central to the marketing of condos, but their role is changing. In the past amenities were often treated as attractive extras designed to boost property appeal. Today, many of these same features are viewed through a different lens: not just as convenience, but as tools for building up neighborly relationships.

A fitness center, for example, is more than a room filled with equipment. It can become a place where neighbors see one another regularly and strike up conversations. Community gardens give residents a shared project and a reason to collaborate. Co-working spaces bring remote workers out of isolation and into light daily interaction with others. Outdoor gathering areas, whether they include grilling stations, fire pits, or simple seating, encourage spontaneous connection in a way that private balconies cannot. A rooftop lounge may host resident mixers, sunset gatherings, or my personal favorite - MMM which means Monthly

Morning with the Manager where residents can interact with the manager and staff and ask any questions they want (the number of benefits on this topic we can discuss in a separate article).

These spaces matter because they lower the barrier to engagement. Not every resident will join a committee or attend a formal event, but many will participate in community life when opportunities are built naturally into the environment. A well-designed amenity creates a reason to linger, interact, and feel part of the rhythm of the property.

Amenities also play an important role in helping new residents integrate. Walking into a social lounge, joining a yoga class in the common room, or meeting neighbors in a shared garden can make a large building feel more welcoming. Over time, those repeated interactions help strengthen pride in ownership and deepen attachment to the community.

Technology Is Connecting Neighbors in New Ways

Technology has become an essential part of modern condo living, especially when it comes to communication. In many varieties of



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neighborhoods, digital platforms now serve as the community bulletin board, event calendar, and communication hub all at once. Residents can receive maintenance updates, RSVP to events, share recommendations, and stay informed without relying on paper notices in the lobby.

Community apps, digital bulletin boards, email newsletters, and resident portals have made communication faster and more efficient. They allow boards and community managers to distribute information quickly, while giving residents easier access to meeting notices, amenity schedules, and community announcements. This improved flow of information often leads to greater participation and a stronger sense of transparency.

Technology can also help bring neighbors together in practical ways. Residents may use online platforms to organize donation drives, advertise club meetings, coordinate volunteer efforts, or welcome new owners to the building. In larger communities, where it can be difficult to know everyone personally, digital tools help bridge that gap.

Still, technology works best when it supports real human connection rather than

replacing it. A resident app may make communication seamless, but it cannot fully substitute for face-to-face interaction. The challenge for condo communities is to strike the right balance. Digital tools should make it easier for people to engage in person, not retreat further into isolation.

Used thoughtfully, technology strengthens the social fabric of a community by making communication more accessible, timely, and inclusive. It creates a digital network that fosters stronger connections within the broader community.

The Critical Role of Leadership in Building Community

The sense of community does not happen by accident. Behind most thriving shared environments is a group of people committed to creating conditions for connection. That leadership often comes from board members, community managers, volunteer committees, and engaged residents who understand that healthy communities require intention.

Board members set the tone by defining priorities and supporting initiatives that improve resident life. A board that values com-

munity-building may allocate resources for social programming, improve common spaces, or encourage more open communication between residents and leadership. Community managers help turn those goals into action through organization, coordination, and day-to-day responsiveness. Volunteer committees often bring energy and creativity, while resident champions help build momentum from within the community itself.

As I put it, "A strong community is built one relationship at a time." That perspective captures an important truth. Policies and budgets matter, but relationships are what make a blank building into a thriving community.

Consider a simple but effective example: a board notices that many residents feel disconnected after a period of limited in-person activity. In response, it partners with management and volunteers to launch a seasonal community event series. The first event is a modest courtyard barbecue. Attendance exceeds expectations. Residents who had never spoken begin introducing themselves, long-time owners reconnect, and new residents feel welcomed. Encouraged by that success, the community adds a holiday reception, a spring cleanup day,



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and a monthly coffee social. None of these initiatives is especially expensive, but together they change the atmosphere of the property.

Leadership also involves navigating challenges. Not every resident will participate, and not every initiative will succeed immediately. Boards must balance social goals with budget realities, resident preferences, and operational responsibilities. Some communities struggle with empathy, scheduling conflicts, or differing expectations among generations of residents. Strong leaders acknowledge those realities without losing sight of the larger mission.

The most effective leaders understand that their role is not to manufacture community from the top down, but to create a framework in which it can grow. They open channels of communication, support inclusive activities, and listen carefully to residents' feedback. In the end, leadership builds the structure, but residents create the culture.

Why Community Matters More Than Ever

The growing emphasis on community is not just a lifestyle trend. It reflects a deeper understanding of what people need from the

places they call home. In an era when many people work remotely, relocate frequently, or experience social disconnection, strong residential communities can provide an important source of stability and belonging.

The emotional benefits are significant. Living in a place where neighbors know one another can reduce isolation and improve overall well-being. Familiar faces in the hallway, casual conversations in shared spaces, and the knowledge that others are nearby and engaged can create a stronger sense of comfort and security. For older adults, new residents, and individuals living alone, these everyday interactions can be especially meaningful.

There are practical benefits as well. Communities with stronger social ties tend to communicate more effectively and respond more quickly to shared concerns. Residents are often more willing to volunteer, participate in meetings, and contribute to solutions when they feel personally invested. Whether the issue is a maintenance project, a rules update, or an emergency response effort, a connected community is usually better positioned to handle it constructively.

Community also benefits the property

itself. Resident satisfaction tends to rise when people feel heard, informed, and included. A positive reputation can make a building more attractive to prospective buyers. Over time, a strong sense of community may also support long-term property value by enhancing owner pride and encouraging responsible stewardship of shared spaces.

Management professionals and community association leaders often observe the same pattern: buildings that foster engagement tend to function more smoothly. The reason is straightforward. When people feel connected, they are more likely to care - not only about their own unit, but about the larger community around them.

Looking Ahead - The Future of Association Living

The future of condo living will likely be shaped by a broader and more intentional approach to resident experience. Amenities will continue to matter, but their design and purpose will increasingly reflect changing lifestyle priorities. Wellness-focused features, sustainability initiatives, intergenerational programming, smart-building technology, and flexible com-



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mon spaces are all likely to play a larger role.

Wellness may include meditation rooms, walking paths, or programming centered on physical and mental health. Sustainability efforts could bring residents together through recycling campaigns, energy-saving initiatives, or community gardens. Intergenerational activities may help bridge the needs and interests of younger professionals, families, and older adults living in the same property. Flexible spaces that can shift from work areas to social venues to meeting rooms will become especially valuable as lifestyles continue to evolve.

Communities will increasingly compete not only with location, finishes, or square footage, but with the quality of life they create for residents. Buyers and owners alike will pay closer attention to whether a property feels connected, responsive, and welcoming.

The ones that stand out in the years ahead will be those that understand a simple principle: people are not only buying into a building. They are buying into an experience of home.

Beyond the Building

Association living has evolved far beyond the traditional promise of convenience and ownership. While maintenance-free living and desirable amenities still matter, they are no longer the whole story. Today's most successful condominium communities create opportunities for residents to connect, contribute, and feel that they belong.

That transformation depends on many people working together. Residents bring personality and participation. Boards provide direction and support. Community managers help sustain communication and execution. Shared spaces, both physical and digital, become meaningful when they are used to strengthen relationships rather than simply serve routine functions.

In the end, the strongest condominium communities are built not from concrete and steel, but from trust, familiarity, and shared experience. As condo living continues to evolve, the true measure of a community may not be found within its walls at all, but in the connections that grow beyond them. ■

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BY ADAM SANDERS // ELARA ENGINEERING

Ritchie Court Condo... A Case Study in Detailed Retrofit Design

Ritchie Court Condominium Association is a 27-story building with 192 condominium units located in Chicago's historic Gold Coast neighborhood and constructed in 1963.

As is frequently the case for buildings of this type and vintage, Ownership was faced with resolving critical needs: a complete replacement of the domestic water piping system while simultaneously addressing aging waste and vent pipes. Prior to the project, the 62-years old building with much of the original piping remaining, experienced frequent leaks, backups, unpleasant odors, and inconsistent availability of hot water. All these issues disrupted residents' daily lives and heralded increased maintenance costs.

Rather than jumping straight into construction, the Condominium Association partnered with Elara Engineering to develop a detailed

and transparent design process that emphasized clear objective planning, stakeholder communication, and of course, a project completed within schedule and on budget.

Judging Success

To develop a constructive process, project metrics of success must be identified and understood by all participants. Though the engineering and construction aspects of this type of project can be very complex, Condominium Boards, Property Managers, and stakeholders within the building are often most concerned with and define the success of a project as:

- Effective Communication at all levels of ownership, including Unit Owners, The Board, Committees, and Maintenance Staff.
- Establishing, Managing, and Completing the project within or under budget.
- Smooth Design and Construction Phases within the agreed upon schedule.
- A completed project that operates per code and functions as intended long term.

The above metrics were met for 1313 N. Ritchie Court and Elara's unique approach to each is discussed below and demonstrated in the completed project.

Communication is King

The design process began with a series of monthly meetings among key stakeholders and project consultants as a means for the Condominium Association to fully understand the objectives behind the project. These meet-

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ings allowed the Association to plan financing, logistics, and impacts to daily life in a coordinated manner with specific project requirements reflected in the design documentation.

The design team and the project manager worked with key stakeholders to conduct multiple town hall meetings with Unit Owners. Throughout the project additional information was solidified and provided in these meetings for transparent communication. While sometimes frustrating for unit owners, not all information can be available early in the schedule of a project and is provided when quantified and agreed upon by the project team. Despite their necessity, pipe replacements of this nature will undoubtedly impact every occupant, making communication key to understanding the level of impact for each unit. Town hall meetings provided a setting for the project manager to set expectations directly with unit owners in a timely manner.

Many consulting engineers struggle to educate their clients about the complexity of projects happening in their building in terms that are understandable, and they often don't have a full understanding of the relationships among the entities operating in a condominium build-



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ing. Experience in the community association market shows that regular meetings are critical so various stakeholders can be positioned to make educated decisions. Ultimately, the Condominium Association needs to select the appropriate team for their project, including a Project Manager and contractors, and these efforts give them the tools to make informed decisions when evaluating their options.

A Budget You Can Plan Around

These types of projects touch nearly every part of a building and developing a proper budget can be particularly challenging given the numerous factors that have a large impact on cost. For many retrofit projects, Condominium Associations can turn to reserve studies to plan financial forecasts to maintain appropriate reserves. In the case of an extensive pipe replacement such as the one for Ritchie Court, reserve studies often don't consider all the various costs that need to be represented or the unique conditions of the specific building. Current code requirements or the desire to add plumbing related amenities such as in-unit washers/dryers can have further significant impacts to project budgets. To develop

a proper understanding of the project scope and develop an accurate budget, one of the first steps is to identify existing conditions, perform a code review, and conduct interviews with the key stakeholders. For Ritchie Court, a critical area related to code was identified: the domestic water system, previously a single pressure zone, needed to be replaced with a modern two-zone system compliant with current City of Chicago Building Code.

Construction sequencing and duration also have a significant impact on the project construction cost as well. Condominium Boards need to make decisions about prioritizing problem areas and whether there is an opportunity to reduce occupant impact, including financial, with an extended schedule -- both are decisions that directly impact cost. Similarly, a differentiation between unit owner and Association costs is necessary for all parties to plan accordingly. Condominium Associations should be informed upfront that the Association's attorney will need to be engaged for this purpose.

It is also important to proactively recognize any hard to identify conditions where possible, even engaging contractors to assist with documenting conditions that may be buried or

located in inaccessible areas of the building. As part of the assessment for Ritchie Court, a detailed waste and vent pipe condition review was performed. Historic functional issues, video scoping of the interior of piping, and a review of the existing piping installation identified the overall health of the piping systems as well as how each area of the piping should be addressed. This was particularly beneficial as a single solution is often not warranted to address all waste and vent piping issues. Ultimately, by applying the appropriate scope of work to each portion of the waste and vent system in collaboration with the Condominium Association, the Condominium Association at 1313 Ritchie saved over \$600,000.

The design for 1313 Ritchie provided a recommended sequence of construction activities to maintain daily water service and minimize inconvenience to residents. The result was a project completed in less than seven months, on time, and under budget. The entire piping project was completed while maintaining occupancy throughout the building and restoring water daily to all building occupants.

At the heart of it, the key to accurate budgets is knowledge and experience completing

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these types of projects. These are significant efforts and owners should seek out highly qualified designers and consultants. The value spent upfront planning and engineering pays dividends in the project's implementation. It's easy to preclude this effort because it's a relatively small cost compared to the entire project cost and it's also the least tangible deliverable. However, it is essential that it be done due to the positive (and negative, if not properly completed) impacts the design can have on the project cost, construction, and final operation.

Smooth Operating

For large retrofit projects similar to Ritchie Court, buildings need to plan for the long term. A concrete example of smart, long-term decision-making would be consideration for interior pipe-lining in lieu of replacement for waste and vent piping. While avoiding the cost and inconvenience associated with pipe replacement can be tempting, interior pipe-lining utilizes a newer and proprietary technology that may only be suitable, or even code compliant, for certain piping systems. In line with this, for Ritchie Court, new copper piping for domestic

service was installed and waste / vent / storm piping was cleaned, scoped, and lined with sections replaced where lining was not feasible.

After completion of a major replacement project, regular maintenance will always be required and represents a consistent, long-term cost. When all stakeholders are considered, details like access doors or even rerouted pipe for greater accessibility by building maintenance staff can easily be incorporated into these projects. If the system is more easily maintained, it is likely that it will be operational longer in most cases. On this project additional clean outs were installed in waste piping to help facilitate future rodding and jetting efforts to maintain proper functionality.

Reaping the Rewards

The benefits of investing in a detailed design approach like the above were clear for Ritchie Court Condominium Association.

Active participation in the design process assisted the Condominium Association in selecting a contractor suited to their specific project needs. This included accurate and competitive bids, within 0.5% of one another.

With a detailed code review, the project

team was able to obtain a permit in a timely manner with no permit comments from the Authority Having Jurisdiction which avoided inflationary costs due to permit delays.

Construction proceeded efficiently with minimal disruption due to prior found conditions, including early scope determinations in design that are often left until construction. The entirety of the project was completed in less than seven months, and daily water use was restored in the evening for all occupants.

Beyond immediate savings, the detailed design process provided greater accessibility for future maintenance and repairs, giving the Condominium Association long-term value and confidence in their infrastructure.

The Ritchie Court project demonstrates that a thorough, collaborative, and detailed design phase is not a luxury, it's an invaluable first step of the project. By anticipating challenges, working with stakeholders, and engaging in proactive communication, building owners can make smarter decisions, secure tighter bids, and ensure projects are completed in a fashion they can be satisfied with for many years to come. ■

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BY SALVATORE SCIACCA // CHICAGO PROPERTY SERVICES

TOP 10 TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME BOARD MEMBERS

Thinking about serving on your condo, townhome, or HOA board? It is a worthwhile role, but it comes with real responsibility. Board members deal with finances, maintenance, vendors, rules, records, and long-term planning. Those decisions affect the entire community. After 25 years of working with Chicago-area associations, I believe these are 10 of the most important things a first-time board member should understand.

10. REVIEW THE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT

This should be the first step for every new board member. The management agreement explains exactly what the management company is responsible for and what the board must handle.

It also outlines communication procedures, fees, reporting, and termination terms. If you have not read it, you are not in a strong position to evaluate performance or ask informed questions.

9. SCHEDULE A BOARD TRAINING SESSION

A board orientation is one of the fastest ways to get organized. New directors should understand officer roles, meeting procedures, governing documents, financial processes, and current priorities.

This is not just helpful for new members. It often helps the entire board work from the same set of expectations. When legal questions arise, the board should rely on qualified legal counsel.

8. SEEK THE FULL PICTURE BEFORE ASSIGNING BLAME

When a repair is delayed or a resident issue escalates, resist the urge to react too quickly. In many Chicago buildings, the real problem is more layered than it first appears.

Review the timeline, the records, and the steps already taken. Facts matter. Boards make better decisions when they understand the full story before assigning responsibility.

7. REVIEW THE RESERVE STUDY AND CAPITAL PLAN

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That is why your reserve study and capital plan should reflect the property's actual condition, current costs, and realistic timing. If these documents are outdated, the board should address that. Delaying major planning decisions often leads to larger financial problems later.

6. CONFIRM MEETING DATES AND PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Board meetings work best when members arrive prepared. You should know the meeting schedule, read the agenda, and review the supporting materials before the discussion begins.

Preparation leads to better questions, clearer decisions, and less wasted time. It also helps the board create a reliable record of its work.

5. REVIEW SERVICE PROVIDER CONTRACTS

Before recommending that a vendor be replaced, review the contract carefully. You need to understand the scope of work, pricing, insurance requirements, and termination provisions.

Sometimes the vendor is underperforming. Other times, the board expects services that were never included. The contract usually makes that clear.

4. REVIEW THE ANNUAL OPERATIONS PLAN

An annual operations plan gives the board a practical roadmap for recurring maintenance and seasonal work. It should identify what needs to be done, when it should happen, and who is responsible.

This matters more than many first-time board members realize. Routine work that is not planned tends to become emergency work.

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3. REVIEW THE RULES AND REGULATIONS

New board members should read the rules, bylaws, policies, and related documents early. These materials shape how the community operates day to day.

Good rules should be clear, consistent, and enforceable. Poorly written or unevenly enforced rules create unnecessary conflict and confusion.



2. REVIEW THE LAST 12 MONTHS OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Financial oversight is one of the board's core responsibilities. Start with the budget, then review the last 12 months of financial statements for trends, reserve activity, delinquencies, and unusual expenses.

You do not need to be an accountant to serve effectively. You do need to pay attention to the numbers and ask for clarification when something does not make sense.

1. EVALUATE THE MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP AFTER A REASONABLE PERIOD

A new board should give itself enough time to fairly evaluate the management relationship. In many cases, six months is a reasonable period to assess communication, follow-through, reporting, and coordination.

At the same time, boards should not remain with an underperforming management company simply because change feels difficult. If concerns are real and documented, they should be addressed thoughtfully and based on long-term interests—not on one frustrating incident.

SUMMARY

First-time board members do not need to know everything immediately. They do need to read the right documents, understand the numbers, prepare for meetings, and focus on facts.

Board service is practical work. When it is done with consistency and sound judgment, it helps keep your community stable, functional, and well managed. ■

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BY KAREN PONTORIERO, CMCA, AMS // FIRSTSERVICE RESIDENTIAL

Preventing Disruptive Owners From Taking Over Board Meetings

Association board meetings are meant to serve a clear purpose: governance, transparency and decision-making for the benefit of the entire community. Yet many boards face the recurring challenge of disruptive owners in attendance who derail meetings and dominate the discussions, which can undermine the business the board is there to accomplish.

Handled poorly, these situations can escalate into hostility, legal exposure and a breakdown of trust within the community. If handled well, it can reinforce professionalism, fairness and order. The difference lies in preparation, structure and leadership. While boards should remain open and responsive, they are not obligated to allow meetings to become unmanageable. A board meeting is not a

free-for-all for owners to bring all their concerns to the board. It is a formal proceeding with a defined purpose of conducting necessary business of the association. Owners have the right to observe, but not to disrupt.

The most effective way to prevent disruption is to set expectations and establish rules at the beginning of the meeting. Every board should adopt basic meeting protocols. These rules should be communicated clearly and applied

uniformly. When expectations are known up front, enforcement feels less personal and more procedural.

Although owners often interrupt board business as it is happening to ask questions, many disruptions occur during the open forum portion of the meeting. Without structure, these can quickly spiral. Managers and boards should consider a sign-up sheet before the meeting for owners who wish to bring concerns to the floor. Set a 2 to 3 minute time limit per speaker, and enforce it. State ahead of time that the board will listen to each comment and will consider action, but will not necessarily comment in the open meeting. This preserves the owners' right to be heard while preventing prolonged or repetitive exchanges. Keep in mind that not

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every kind of association requires an open forum for owners to speak. Always verify with the association's legal representative if the need to omit this section of the meeting becomes necessary.

In many cases, owners are vocal about issues they don't fully understand, so providing concise information is an important part of keeping meetings in order. Use the agenda to control the meeting and keep it on track. When discussions drift or become heated, the board can redirect by referring back to the agenda. This approach keeps the focus on the process and reduces the likelihood of confrontation. Always keep the meeting moving through the agenda instead of getting pulled into conflict. A clear message must be sent that disruption will not influence the outcomes of board decisions and will not be tolerated.

If an owner repeatedly disrupts meetings despite warnings, the board may need to take stronger action. Depending on the community's governing documents, options may include adjourning the meeting if order cannot be restored or having the individual removed from the meeting. In severe cases, a Community Service Officer or the association's legal repre-

EVERY BOARD SHOULD ADOPT BASIC MEETING PROTOCOLS. THESE RULES SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED CLEARLY AND APPLIED UNIFORMLY. WHEN EXPECTATIONS ARE KNOWN UP FRONT, ENFORCEMENT FEELS LESS PERSONAL AND MORE PROCEDURAL.

sentative can be invited to the meeting to oversee behavior and interject, if needed.

While maintaining control is essential, boards must also ensure they are not perceived as silencing dissent. Transparency, responsiveness and follow up outside the meeting can go a long way in reducing tension. When owners feel heard, even if they don't get their way, they are less likely to act out during meetings. Inviting them to convey their issue to management for handling will make them feel the board has interest in solving the issues they present.

Disruptive owners can test even the most

experienced boards. But with clear rules, strong leadership and consistent enforcement, meetings can remain productive and professional. A well-run meeting doesn't just get through the agenda and the business at hand, it builds confidence in the board's ability to govern effectively. And in the long run, that kind of stability and professionalism benefits everyone in the community. ■■



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2026 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY SEMINAR

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Registration
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- SCHEDULE / AGENDA -

» 11:00 am – Registration & Visit Information Tables

» 11:15 am – 12:00 pm - Lunch Buffet

» 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Announcements & Legal Updates

• Introduce MCD Media
Advisory Board Members

• Community Association
Legal & Case Study Update

(New State & Local Laws and Court Cases, Challenging Issues
of the Future, Difficult Board Members & Owners & more)

FEATURED SPEAKER:

Gabriella Comstock - Keough & Moody, P.C.

» 1:15 pm – 3:00 pm Hot Topics, Trends & Challenges:

- Shifting Skillset of Today's Ideal Manager (Technology & Interpersonal Communication Needs)
- Long Time Resident Owners Priced Out of their Building/Property
- New Technology Trends (Artificial Intelligence, Drones & more)
- Time Management for CAM's (Role of A.I.)
- Inflation, Supply-Chain Delays, and Higher Construction Costs Stressing Assessments, Capital Projects Budgets & Reserve Funding.
- Social Media Issues for Community Associations
- Difficult/Unreasonable Unit Owners.
- Risk Management Strategies & Insurance Issues (Paying Direct/Not Submitting Smaller Claims, Increased Deductibles. Factors of Wiring, Roofs and Reserves are Important to Insurance Cost.)
- E-bike and E-scooter Hazards (Life Safety, Storage Concerns)
- MANAGING & FUNDING CAPITAL PROJECTS:- Riser Replacements, Elevator Modernization, Mechanical Systems, Energy Efficiency, Fire Pump Replacement, Fan Coil Unit Replacements, Windows & Roofing
- EV Car Charging Stations
- Property Tax Appeals, Property Values & Assessments

MODERATOR:

Brian Butler - FirstService Residential

Panel Discussion Participants:

Tairre Dever Sutton - Tairre Management
Michael J. Locigno, Jr. - Kellermeyer Godfry Hart, P.C.
Adam Kahn - Levensfeld Pearlstein, LLC.
Matt Panush - Worssek & Vihon, LLP Tax Attorneys
Thomas Flynn - Klein & Hoffman
Adam Sanders - Elara Engineering
Derek White - Wintrust Community Advantage
Martin Stone - Community Specialists

The Chicago Cultural Center is located at
78 East Washington. An MCD registration table will
be located outside the Washington & Garland rooms
on the fifth floor. Use elevators in South lobby.

Table Discussion Topics & Information Tables include:

- » **Chicago Police Department**
William Townsell
- » **Chicago Fire Department**
- » **Bulk TV, Internet Technology & Community Associations**
Javier Jugo - Xfinity Communities
- » **Emergency Restoration & Technology**
Ron Muldoon - ServPro of South Chicago
- » **Exterior Building Restoration & Maintenance**
Jarrell Johnson - Kellermeyer Godfry Hart, P.C.
- » **Fire Alarm and Sprinkler Contractor FAQ's**
Rocco Bartucci - Contech The Fire Alarm Company
- » **Fire Safety & Protection, Automatic Fire Sprinklers**
Erik Hoffer - Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board
- » **Property Tax Appeals**
Ed Wittenstein - Worssek & Vihon, LLP
- » **HVAC Technology, Building Automation & Energy Audits**
Adam Webb - Temperature Service Company
- » **Rebuilding & Restoring After Fire or Water Damage**
Mandy Manalli - Celtic Restoration Group
- » **EV Car Charging Stations**
- » **Fire Protection & Plumbing FAQ's**
- » **High Rise Energy Solutions**
- » **HVAC Audits & Plumbing System Insights**

Hand-Outs & Resources will be provided on the following topics:

**Renters, Pets & Parking, Board Training, Security,
Waste Management, Green Building Technologies,
Budgeting & Financial Management, Reserve &
Transition Studies, and Managing Capital Improvements**
Additional topics may be added.

2026 State-of-the-Industry Committee

Eric Staszczak - Westward360
David Conforti - RealManage
Tairre Dever-Sutton - Tairre Management
Simon Fox - Associa ChicagoLand
Tricia Conway - The Habitat Company
Marla Jackson & Randy Grimes - FirstService Residential
Nicole Palmer - NS Management
Kristin Ward & Marguerite Batau - Community Specialists
William Townsell - Chicago Police Dept.

Who Should Attend?

- » Community Association Board & Committee Members
- » Property Managers
- » Developers
- » Realtors & Realty Professionals
- » Colleagues & Contractors
- » Government Officials & Employees

Timing -Structure

This event is intended to be structured to accommodate various levels of expertise as well as different types of interests in community associations. It is also intended to be flexible to meet time and schedule concerns. We are pleased to accommodate you in this regard. Contact our office to make customized arrangements.

Why Should You Attend?

- » To gain valuable, practical insight on how to deal with special issues of Community Associations
- » Identify resources needed to help your association(s) solve current challenges that your association(s) is facing
- » Meet and greet Condo Lifestyles Advisory Board members and other industry experts
- » To better understand government regulations regarding community associations
- » To contribute and share your ideas and input in an effort to improve standards in the field of community associations

What Should you bring?

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INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

Associa Chicagoland

Associa Chicagoland recently held a Client Appreciation and Educational Event for Associa Chicagoland Board Members on August 20th at the East Bank Club, Chicago. Appetizers and cocktails were provided for a networking session before and after an educational seminar program. **Rose Rogic**, MBA, CMCA Vice President of Associa Chicagoland-city division, opened the program by welcoming guests and thanking the event sponsors. Topics covered in the presentations included Condominium Law Updates and Fannie Freddie by **Omar Malik**, The Physical and Financial Health of Community Associations by **Todd Walter** and Financing for Condominium Associations by **Tim Haviland**. Event sponsors were Reserve Advisors, Republic Bank, Unilux, Celtic Restoration Group, Weathershield LLC, Smart Elevators, and Kovitz, Shifrin, and Nesbit (KSN).



➤ Pictured above (from L to R) Omar Malik, Todd Walter, Mandy Manalli, Michele Trina, Rose Rogic, Tim Haviland, Gary Cwik, Derek Wilkinson and Vince Ciraulo.

FirstService Residential - IGC Expo

FirstService Residential Illinois' **In Good Company (IGC)** program brought together its management teams, industry partners, and vendors this summer for the **14th annual IGC Vendor Expo**, celebrating the relationships that strengthen Chicagoland communities while raising **\$65,000 for Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago**.

This year's IGC Vendor Expo welcomed IGC partners, sister companies, and industry organizations, giving FirstService Residential community managers and building professionals an opportunity to connect directly with trusted industry resources, exchange knowledge, and strengthen relationships ahead of another busy budget and planning season.

More than a traditional trade show, the IGC Vendor Expo reflects the broader mission of the In Good Company program: creating meaningful partnerships between FirstService Residential teams and leading service providers to drive value directly to managed clients and their communities while also making a positive impact beyond the properties they serve.

Through the support and participation of the IGC community, this year's event generated a \$65,000 donation to Lurie Children's Hospital, continuing a longstanding commitment to supporting the hospital and the children and families it serves. Since 2017, the collective efforts surrounding the IGC Vendor Expo have contributed more than \$375,000 to Lurie Children's.



➤ Shown here is Emily Ashner from Lurie Children's Hospital (3rd from left) with representatives from FirstService Residential (from L to R) Bob Meyer, Brian Butler, Jen Yang and Lida Evans presenting a check to Lurie Children's Hospital.

The success of the 2026 Expo demonstrates what In Good Company is designed to accomplish — bringing people, expertise, and resources together in ways that benefit FirstService Residential communities, industry partners and professionals, and the greater Chicagoland community.

For IGC, partnership is about the value to our communities of doing business together. It's also about the value of doing good.

Condo Lifestyles State of the Industry



The 31st annual Condo Lifestyles State of the Industry program is planned for Thursday November 19, 2026 at the Chicago Cultural Center. The event features a luncheon, educational seminar, and information tables. A legal update presentation will be provided by **Gabriella Comstock** of Keough & Moody and a panel discussion with a Q & A session as well as information tables featuring industry experts will also be provided. Topics to be discussed include how inflation is impacting associations, changing skill sets necessary for today's managers, artificial intelligence, EV Charging Stations, Managing, Funding & Financing Capital Projects, Dealing with Difficult Residents/Boards, Property Tax Appeals, Property Values & Assessments, and capital projects of all types including plumbing riser pipes and fan coil replacements, elevator modernization and more. For more information, call 630-932-5551.

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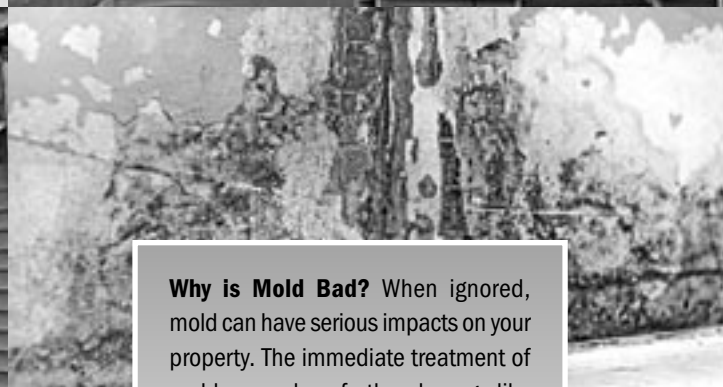
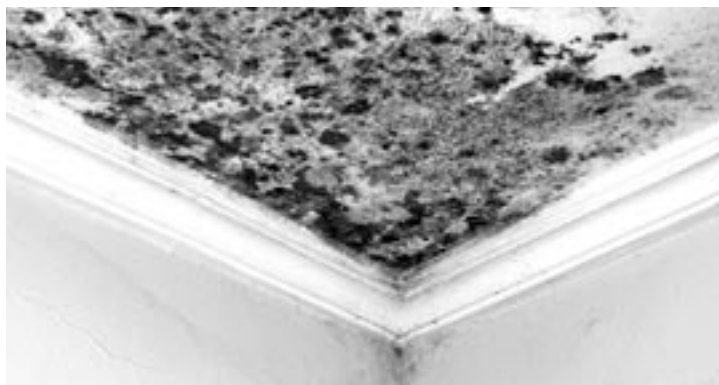
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Condo Lifestyles attempts to provide its readership with a wide range of information on community associations, and when appropriate, differing opinions on community association issues.

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From the Editor

While general economic conditions have remained reasonably good, many of the things we purchase regularly cost noticeably more than they have in the past. Inflation and supply chain issues have been spiking again recently causing most of us including managers and association boards much concern and significant challenges.



Mike Davids

As part of a broader cultural shift, more residents of community associations today want to feel connected. People increasingly recognize that where they live shapes how they live. Many want to know that their neighbors also feel invested in their community. As a result, boards, community managers, and residents themselves are finding new ways to turn shared buildings into a community that offers a sense of belonging. Our cover story in this issue provides an overview of how modern condo owners are redefining community living,

Ritchie Court Condominium Association was faced with a complete replacement of the domestic water piping system while simultaneously addressing aging waste and vent pipes. Prior to the project, the building experienced frequent leaks, backups, unpleasant odors, and inconsistent availability of hot water. An article profiling this property's project shows how the Association worked with professionals to develop a detailed and transparent design process that emphasized clear objective planning, stakeholder communication, and a project that was ultimately completed within schedule and under budget.

Difficult issues and bad behavior by residents can test the best of us. While it's important to hold those accountable for mistakes, violations of governing documents or contract disputes, it is equally important to exercise caution when making a negative statement about wrong doers. An article in this edition provides some great insight on how anything that you say can and likely will be used against you.

Effective meetings are an essential component of a successful community association, so we offer an article about preventing disruptive owners from taking over board meetings in this issue. Another article in our Board Basics column provides some excellent tips for first time board members. Communicating with residents is also an essential part of community management so we have an article on how to keep offsite association owners informed and engaged.

Our Maintenance Memos column features an article on making plans and taking steps to achieve beautiful spring color in your landscape before the flowers bloom. In our Engineering Insights column, a very helpful article on how having a good contract can serve as a risk-control tool on capital projects appears. Our regular Industry Happenings and event highlights can also be found in this issue.

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY PROGRAM ON NOVEMBER 19

Taking time to review important issues and identify those that will require significant attention in the coming year is the main purpose of our annual Condo Lifestyles State of the Industry program. Most of the issues we have covered in this issue along with other legislation & legal updates will dominate our presentations, discussions and resources that are made available on November 19th at the Chicago Cultural Center. We will also discuss the topics of how inflation is impacting associations, changing skill sets necessary for today's managers, artificial intelligence, and capital projects of all types including plumbing riser pipes and fan coil replacements. We also recognize members of our magazine advisory boards at this program.

We 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 overcome a challenge, please call our office at 630-932-5551 or send us an e-mail (mdavids@condolifestyles.net). ■

Warm Regards,
Mike

Michael C. Davids, Editor & Publisher

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BY ADAM T. KAHN, ESQ. // LEVENFELD PEARLSTEIN, LLC

Keeping Offsite Condominium Unit Owners Informed and Engaged

Whether across town or across the globe, many condominium unit owners reside offsite. There are many reasons why a condominium unit owner may reside elsewhere, including using the unit as a second home or “pied-à-terre”, renting out their unit as an investment property, temporarily relocating for work, etc.

While living offsite may cause these unit owners to feel less involved in the day-to-day operations of the condominium association, offsite owners are entitled to participate in the affairs of the condominium association just like their onsite counterparts. Similarly, owners who reside elsewhere may at times be more difficult to reach than owners who are physically present and residing at the building.

With intentional planning and communication, condominium boards and management (if the condominium association is

professionally managed) can help “bridge the gap” and keep offsite unit owners informed and engaged in the association’s affairs without having to make regular visits to the property. Recommended best practices and considerations for efficiently and effectively engaging with offsite unit owners are discussed below.

1. Maintain Up-To-Date Unit Owner Contact Information

Communication is key. Having current contact information, including their offsite

address, is essential to be able to effectively and efficiently communicate with offsite owners. Having up-to-date contact information for offsite owners is particularly important for handling time-sensitive matters such as required access, leaks, etc. where delays in reaching an owner can have dire consequences. It is also helpful to know an offsite owner’s preferred method of contact, local contacts (if any) in the event of an emergency, and any other relevant information to be able to reach any unit owners living offsite.

> **PRO TIP** Consider implementing an annual contact information verification process to ensure records remain current. This simple step can significantly improve the timeliness and effectiveness of communications.

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2. Leverage Technology for Virtual Participation in Board and Unit Owner Meetings

One of the silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic is the widespread adoption of virtual meeting platforms (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) by condominium associations to conduct meetings. These platforms allow unit owners to virtually attend open Board and Unit Owner meetings, which is particularly helpful for offsite unit owners who live out of state and thus are not able to “pop by” to attend a meeting in person. “Hybrid” meetings, which allow unit owners the option to attend in-person or virtually, are relatively popular and allow for maximum flexibility.

- > **PRO TIP** Be sure to test the virtual platform and any equipment to ensure all is functioning properly and to mitigate the risk of any technical glitches that can delay or derail the virtual meeting.
- > **NOTE:** In Illinois, unit owners are generally entitled to inspect certain condominium association records, including minutes from the past seven years’ worth of Board

and Unit Owner meetings. The minutes reflect matters that were voted on at the meeting and thus will provide a summary record of the meeting to owners who are unable to attend the meeting, either in-person or virtually.

3. Offer Electronic Notices (i.e. Go “Paperless”)

Savvy condominium associations are implementing an option for unit owners to receive notices electronically via email. Emailed notices are particularly appealing to owners who reside offsite because they are instantaneous and not dependent on a physical mailing address. Emailed notices are also more cost efficient than their paper counterparts because there is no paper, printing or postage costs.

The Illinois Condominium Property Act requires a two-step process to allow unit owners to “go paperless” and receive official notices electronically without a paper copy. First, the Association must adopt an electronic communication rule governing electronic delivery of official notices via the formal rule

adoption process. Second, unit owners must affirmatively opt-in to receive official notices from the condominium association electronically. Importantly, if a unit owner does not opt-in to receive notices electronically, the association must provide notices to the owner the “old fashioned” way (i.e., delivery of paper notices).

- > **NOTE:** The above steps are not required to provide a courtesy copy of an official notice to an owner via email in addition to physical delivery of the official notice on paper. These steps must be taken for the emailed notice to count as the official notice such that no physical delivery of the notice on paper is required.

4. Modernize Board Election Procedures

Condominium board elections are a vital opportunity for unit owners to make their voices heard and weigh in the future of their condominium association. Updating the procedures for condominium board elections, including implementing absentee balloting and/or electronic voting, will help ensure that

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offsite owners are able to easily participate.

In Illinois, condominium unit owners automatically have the ability to register their vote in board elections without attending the meeting and casting a ballot in person by using proxies. Proxies permit a unit owner to appoint a proxyholder to cast a ballot on their behalf in person at the meeting. Registering a vote via proxy is different from casting an absentee ballot and requires a two-step process. First, the unit owner must submit a valid proxy form naming a proxyholder. Second, the named proxyholder needs to attend the annual meeting in person to cast the actual ballot on behalf the unit owner who submitted the proxy form.

This process is somewhat onerous and confusing, which leads many condominium associations to modernize voting procedures for board elections.

Adopt Absentee Balloting

Absentee balloting (i.e., “mail-in” ballots) allows a unit owner to submit their ballots absentee without attending the annual meeting and board election. Unlike with proxies

where the proxyholder must show up in person to cast a ballot on behalf of unit owners, with an absentee ballot, there is no need for anyone to show up in person to register their vote.

To adopt absentee balloting, an Illinois condominium association must adopt an absentee balloting rule at least 120 days before the election (or if the declaration or by-laws expressly allow for mail-in balloting). Once absentee balloting is adopted and in effect, proxies can no longer be used in Illinois condominium board elections.

Adopt Electronic Voting

Another option to modernize board election procedures is electronic voting i.e., vote using platforms offered by various vendors for completing and submitting a ballot on your device). Like with absentee balloting, Illinois condominiums must adopt a rule to implement an electronic voting option at least 120 days in advance of the election and the electronic voting option, once implemented, does away with the use of proxies in board elections. Unlike with absentee balloting, a unit

owner must affirmatively opt-in to vote electronically (similar to opting in to receive electronic notices).

> **PRO TIP** It is recommended that the condominium association's legal counsel prepare any rules for absentee balloting, electronic communications, and/or electronic voting to avoid any potential issues and ensure that the rules in compliance with the law.

Conclusion

Physical distance may pose a challenge for condominium unit owners who reside off-site, including difficulty in communicating with the owner and/or decreased participation in the affairs of the association (e.g., attending meetings and voting in board elections). By maintaining updated contact information, embracing virtual tools, offering paperless communication, and modernizing election procedures, condominium associations can better serve all owners and “bridge the gap” to make offsite owners feel more “local”—even from across the globe. ■

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BY TREY WALDMAN // WALDMAN ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS

Contracts as a Risk-Control Tool for Capital Projects

Major repair and replacement projects put condominium, townhome, and homeowners associations under significant financial and operational pressure. Roof replacements, façade repairs, balcony reconstruction, waterproofing, and similar work can involve substantial owner funds, resident disruption, multiple contractors, and technical decisions that affect the property for decades.

A well-written contract is more than a legal formality. It is a risk-control tool connecting scope, price, schedule, quality expectations, decision-making, and documentation. The strongest contracts, however, begin long before a contractor agreement is signed. Each phase of the project should create clear documentation that protects the next.

Site Evaluation and Development of the Project Scope

The first step is defining what the association is actually buying. Too often, a board asks contractors to “fix the leaks,” “replace the roof,” or “repair the masonry” before the root cause and extent of the problem have been established. The result is often several contractors pricing several different solutions.

A qualified design professional should first evaluate existing conditions and identify likely

causes, priorities, and limits of work. Depending on the project, this may include visual observations, measurements, testing, exploratory openings, scanning, or review of how roofs, walls, drainage, flashing, and other assemblies interact.

That evaluation should lead to an owner-aligned bid package. Drawings and specifications should establish repair locations, materials, installation requirements, details, performance standards, alternates, allowances, unit prices, and known exclusions or assumptions. Practical conditions such as resident access, working hours, protection of property, permits, testing, mockups, and required inspections should also be addressed.

The distinction matters: a contractor proposal represents one contractor’s interpretation of the work. An owner-prepared scope defines



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the work the association wants every contractor to price.

Bidding: Create an Apples-to-Apples Comparison

Once the scope is defined, each qualified bidder should receive the same drawings, specifications, bid form, alternates, allowances, and addenda. A pre-bid meeting can help contractors understand site conditions, access, logistics, and technical requirements before submitting a price.

A structured bid form is especially important. Phrases such as "tuckpoint as necessary" or "repair as needed" leave quantity, location, repair standard, and final cost open to interpretation. Measurable bid items and unit prices give the association a stronger basis for comparing proposals and handling variable quantities during construction.

The lowest number should not automatically determine the award. The board and manager should understand exclusions, substitutions, schedule assumptions, qualifications, proposed materials, insurance, bonding requirements when applicable, and whether

each contractor has priced the complete scope. Bid leveling by the design professional can identify where apparent price differences are actually scope differences.

Before signing, association counsel should review the contractor agreement. The contract should incorporate the final drawings, specifications, bid form, addenda, and accepted proposal so the project is governed by one consistent set of requirements.

Construction Monitoring and Administration: Control Decisions, Cost, and Documentation

Once construction begins, the contract becomes the roadmap for administration. It should clearly define the roles of the property manager, board, design professional, and contractor. Managers should coordinate access, communication, resident expectations, and board decisions, but they should not become the default engineer, quality-control inspector, or general contractor.

The contractor remains responsible for means and methods, safety, labor, materials,

scheduling, and execution. The engineer or architect should interpret the design documents, review submittals and requests for information, observe work at appropriate intervals, evaluate pay applications, document significant field conditions, and prepare punch-list items.

Cost controls should be established before the first invoice. A schedule of values breaks the contract amount into measurable components so payments can be compared with work completed. Pay applications should account for prior payments, approved change orders, stored materials when permitted, retainage, and required lien waivers.

Unforeseen conditions are common in repair work, but change orders should be documented before their impact on cost and schedule becomes unclear. The contract should state who may authorize changes, what supporting information is required, and how time and price adjustments are calculated.

Regular site reports, photographs, meeting notes, RFI logs, submittal records, and change-order documentation create a defensible project history. The goal is to catch issues while they



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are still small, documented, and correctable.

Project Closeout: Protect the Association's Final Leverage

A capital project is not complete simply because the crew leaves. Final payment and retainage release are often the association's strongest remaining leverage to obtain corrections and documentation.

Before final payment, the punch list should be complete and the final pay application should reconcile the original contract, approved change orders, retainage, and prior payments. The association should also receive final lien waivers and affidavits, required inspection approvals or completion certificates, and surety consent when applicable.

The closeout file should include the executed contract and change orders, pay applications, warranties, approved submittals, product data, maintenance instructions, record drawings or as-builts when required, inspection and field reports, construction photographs, and documentation showing punch-list completion.

Warranty records deserve special attention.



A warranty is only useful if the association can show what was installed, when coverage began, what maintenance is required, and what conditions could void coverage. Those requirements should be understood at closeout and incorporated into future maintenance planning.

The Bottom Line

Property managers and board members should not rely on a contractor proposal alone for a major repair or replacement project. Strong project controls begin with a technically sound,

owner-aligned scope; continue through comparable bidding and a clearly written contract; and remain in place through construction administration, payment review, and closeout.

When each phase produces the documentation needed for the next, the association is better positioned to control cost, reduce disputes, protect quality, and preserve the records it will need long after construction is complete. ■



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BY JONATHAN WASSEL // KEOUGH & MOODY, P.C.

Anything You Say Can and Will be Used Against You

Avoiding unnecessary headaches and (potential) legal actions based on association representative comments

We've all been there, whether it be in our personal or professional lives; said something that we wish we could take back. Understandably, and as the common saying goes, nobody is perfect. Yet, it is also an important reminder that in the association setting, especially at open meetings of the board, comments or statements made by board members or the property manager will be held not only against the individual making the remarks, but also against the association. As we often say, you are running a corporation, a business. Therefore, the board and its representatives should act professionally in doing so to the best of their abilities.

What does this entail as it relates to comments and statements from association representatives? The best advice we can give is to treat everyone with respect. Avoid name-calling, foul language, or otherwise disparaging comments about owners, contractors or any other person or entity, whether in writing or verbally. While the board or manager may not agree with someone or otherwise disapprove of comments they have made or actions they have taken, avoiding such statements and comments not only avoids creating a heated and hostile environment, but will also help to avoid bringing the association into potentially unnecessary litigation. In fact, there have been instances over the last few years where the

association, individual board members and/or managers have had lawsuits filed against them due in large part to comments or statements made by them against someone.

For example, *Kiss v. Old Renwick Trail Homeowners Association, Inc.*, 2022 IL App (3d) 210115-U, involved a case where the former manager and attorney of the association filed a lawsuit against the association for comments made by members of the board about the former attorney/manager. Specifically, the board members stated at an open meeting, which was recorded, that "a person" managing the association was coming to meetings drunk. Because of these comments, the attorney/manager filed a defamation lawsuit, among other

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claims. While the association ultimately prevailed, these comments by the board unnecessarily brought the association into the lawsuit. A lawsuit that could have easily been avoided.

Another example was a case ruled on in January 2023 by the First District Appellate Court. In the case, the court ultimately affirmed a trial court's ruling dismissing an owner's lawsuit against an association's managing agent for comments made about the owner.

Specifically, in the case, Reverend Patricia A. Carey v. Phillip Pritzker, David Barnhart and The Habitat Company of Illinois LLC, the owner was referred to by management as "bringing a certain religious zeal to her opinions," and also referenced the exorcist. While management did prevail in the lawsuit and the owner's claims were ultimately dismissed by the court, this, again, is a prime example of needless and unnecessary commentary being made that unnecessarily brought management into a lawsuit that could have easily been avoided.

While we all know that an association or its representatives can be sued for any reason or no reason at all, there are certain best practices that can be taken to help avoid needless and often costly lawsuits, even those where the association or its representatives may ultimately prevail, as in the examples discussed above. Board members, managers, and any other representative of the association should remain objective and stick to the facts. Avoid unnecessary commentary or comments about individuals or entities, and always remember that anything you say can and will be used against not only you, but also against the association.

Avoiding these pitfalls will not only help smoothly administer and run the association's business, but also limit or altogether avoid bringing you or the association into a lawsuit. After all, it is difficult enough to run the association's business. Why place the association needlessly in the crosshairs based on a comment or comments that could have been easily avoided?

If there are any questions about what can or cannot be said, or otherwise should or should not be said as it relates to the association and association business, it is best to contact your legal representative. After all, anything you say can and will be used against you and the association. ■

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BY SCOTT NIELSEN // FLECK'S LANDSCAPE & SNOW MANAGEMENT

Before the Flowers Bloom

How Spring Color Comes to Life Across a Community Landscape

When people hear “spring color,” they often picture beds of newly installed annual flowers. Those flowers may deliver the brightest finishing touch, but the spring experience begins much earlier and extends much farther across a community landscape.

Fresh turf, emerging bulbs, flowering trees and shrubs, new foliage, clean bed lines, ornamental grasses, groundcover, and mulch all contribute to the color residents see after winter.

For community boards and managers, fall and winter provide an important opportunity to evaluate priorities and begin planning the color residents will experience the following spring.

The transformation can feel sudden. In reality, it is carefully staged. The strongest spring landscapes are built through a sequence

of decisions made before, during, and after the first bloom appears.

Spring Color Starts Before Spring

A successful display often begins with observations from the previous growing season. Which entrances attracted attention? Where did color fade too quickly? Did mature shrubs hide smaller flowers? Were certain beds too shady, wet, dry, or difficult to water? Those answers guide plant selection, quantities, placement, and the areas deserving the greatest visual emphasis.

Fall-planted bulbs are another part of the advance work. Their spring appearance depends on choices made months earlier, including location, bloom sequence, and how the fading foliage will blend into the next layer of the landscape. Spring color should be treated as a progression rather than a one-day installation.

The First Improvement May Not Be a Flower

Before a bed can showcase color, winter must be cleared away. Leaves, branches, litter, and matted plant material can dull an otherwise healthy landscape. Once conditions allow crews to work without damaging wet soil or turf, cleanup begins to reveal the property's structure again.

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improves the appearance of exposed soil and helps restore definition around plants. Fresh mulch, when applied at an appropriate depth and kept away from trunks and plant crowns, creates a darker background that makes green foliage and flower color appear more pronounced. These details do not bloom, yet they strongly influence what residents perceive.

Existing Plants Carry Much of the Color

A community does not need to rely entirely on annual flowers to create impact. Spring bulbs can begin the display, followed by flowering trees and shrubs, emerging perennials, groundcover, and fresh foliage in different shades of green, gold, burgundy, blue-green, and variegated white. Evergreens provide the backdrop that helps lighter spring growth stand out.

Pruning must be timed with the plant in mind. Many spring-flowering shrubs form their flower buds on older growth, so pruning them too early can remove the very blooms the community is waiting to see. Your landscape professional should consider bloom timing, plant form, visibility, and long-term health before shaping or reducing plant material.

Timing Protects the Investment

In Northern Illinois, successful spring installations depend on conditions—not simply a date on the calendar. A warm stretch can tempt communities to rush tender annuals into beds, only to have cold temperatures return. Cool-season flowers may provide an earlier opportunity, while warm-season selections perform best after frost risk and soil conditions become favorable.

Installation is only the beginning. Proper spacing, root-zone preparation, watering responsibility, weed control, and follow-up care determine whether a display fills in evenly or struggles. Bulb foliage also needs time to remain green after flowering so the plant can store energy for the following year. What looks like a delay in cleanup may actually be sound horticultural care.

Color Should Guide People Through the Property

The most effective community color programs are not spread equally everywhere. They concentrate attention where it matters most: entrance monuments, clubhouses, leasing or management offices, courtyards, pedestrian

approaches, and other highly visible gathering areas. Repetition of selected colors can connect these separate spaces and give the property a more unified appearance.

Boards and community managers can help by identifying priority views, resident expectations, watering limitations, and the impression they want the landscape to create. They should also ask how early-, mid-, and late-spring color will transition into summer, which existing landscape assets can be featured, and what care is included after installation.

Making the Magic Happen

Spring color is not a single product or planting date. It is the combined result of observation, cleanup, horticultural timing, plant knowledge, design restraint, and consistent care. The annual flowers may receive the most attention, but the supporting work across the entire landscape is what allows them—and everything around them—to look their best.

That is how you make the magic happen: not with one dramatic moment, but through many well-timed details that bring the whole community landscape back to life. ■



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Over 200 guests gathered on August 27th at the MCD Industry Recognition & History event held at the private event center of Rivers Casino in Des Plaines, IL. Many industry leaders, current MCD clients as well as Advisory Board members of MCD publications enjoyed lunch with various entertainment including music by FiddleRock (sponsored by IOC Construction) and Gaming Lessons from Rivers Casino Dealer Instructors. Xfinity Communities was the Premier sponsor of the event.

A Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to **Kara Cermak** of RealManage while **Stephanie Skelley** of Associa and **Joe Schutzius** of Celtic Restoration Group were presented with Condo Lifestyles Outstanding Leadership Awards. **Marguerite Batau** of Community Specialists and **Lillian Blankenburg** (Retired Rowell) were recognized for their distinguished service to the condo industry (over 50 years of service). Reserve Advisors (35th) and the CAI Illinois Chapter (50th) were recognized for their anniversaries this year. Photos of the event can be viewed at Facebook/MCD Media.

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