

Dissidents

It is the thing dreaded by most Boards, the dissident or dissident group. The loud, generally uninformed ranting of a dissident owner or group about a problem or problems in the Association that disrupt a meeting or otherwise calm discussion with members of the community. At one time or another, we've all had it happen. These individuals or groups will sometimes grumble about what the Association's Board is not doing or will criticize how badly they are doing it. They complain, yet when they are asked for constructive solutions, have nothing to offer. Leaders, both board members and managers must realize that facing these groups or individuals, at one time or another, is inevitable.

With many annual meetings coming up now and through the beginning of the year we offer some suggestions in handling those with concerns or complaints. Annual meetings are the meetings of the members, which gives them the right to discuss (and we would hope calmly) any issues that they may have. One of the most important aspects the board should explore is just how big the group is. Do they or an individual represent only themselves, a small handful of people in the community or does it represent the views of a majority of your membership?

Through a variety of means such as prior communication or a posting on your website, you can realistically determine whether such individuals or groups represent a minority or a majority of owners. Disclosure or directly addressing the information showing most of the owners have spoken and found that the issue or issues are of little interest to the majority of the owners. With some substantiated facts, let them know that no further action is warranted by the board on this issue. If in fact the issue is a legitimate one, let them know how, when and what action will be taken by the Board.

It is important to remember when handling difficult circumstances, you should not make personal judgments of people nor allow their criticism of you to become personal as this will only hinder the board's effectiveness as well as that of the manager. A complainer should not always be dismissed as simply a "complainer"; it may be a legitimate grievance. On the other hand, don't change your efforts in response to every complaint you receive. It is not always a responsible act on the board's part to try and address and resolve every complaint when it is rendered at a meeting either. It is appropriate to let the person know that the board appreciates their input and it will be taken under advisement. This doesn't mean you are simply placating them, it actually requires the effort to see if the complaint is legitimate and what actions might be required to resolve it, especially if it is a majority of the residents that are complaining. The board should draft a list of actions that have been taken on the issue or that will be taken on the issue and communicate that through a posting on the website or in a community newsletter. Communication back to the residents is extremely important. Many times the dissidents are dissident because there is NO communication.

Many times other owners who are aware of the boards accomplishments will support the board against unjust criticism. Another list that can be presented is a list of plans or goals. Each year at the beginning of the year, the board and manager should have a "planning meeting" to determine the priority of the projects that were determined when the new year's budget was put together.

Many times routine maintenance can be scheduled for a specific quarter of the year, maybe not date specific that early on, but at least the members will have an idea of what is planned and when it is being considered. Many of the complaints regarding simple things like pressure washing or mulching or tree trimming or pool openings or closings, etc., can be eliminated if such information is communicated. Board's gain credibility when they accomplish their planned goals timely. At the same time, they lose credibility for not doing what they say they will do. By providing a list of accomplishments and goals, you are COMMUNICATING a clear picture to your members of completed tasks and the plans you have for future projects.

Finally, remember: You are only one element in an effective meeting. When a meeting goes well, it is due to a team effort in planning for its effectiveness. Take pride in your accomplishment. It is only natural when dealing with so many different personalities, not everyone will agree. Try not to take it personally. You can't make everyone happy 100% of the time and there's always the next meeting.

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