

Community Association Communication

Remember the famous line from that great Paul Newman movie Cool Hand Luke when the warden states, "What we have here is a failure to communicate."? As true as it may have been, it's not something we want our community to be thinking. Open communication to and from the members is an invaluable tool that Boards and managers can use to share progress that has been made or issues the Association may be facing.

The type of communication practiced can form the basis for either clear understanding and agreement or chaos and conflict. One of the community association Board's greatest challenges is to communicate to the members effectively. There are various methods of community association communication:

E-mail. In terms of speed, efficiency and cost, e-mail can be a great boon to the Board if used properly. E-mail allows group discussion and transfer of information. But e-mail requires a high degree of skill. There are significant differences between a face-to-face and an e-mail to e-mail exchange. In person, facial expressions and tone of voice can make all the difference to meaning. Small misunderstandings can be instantly corrected as the conversation progresses. With e-mail, the words stand alone and are subject to interpretation of the receiver. A casual comment made by a sender can be received and perceived as incendiary by the recipient. Therefore, your choice of words is extremely important, as is the presentation of those words. The use of all caps, for instance, could be misinterpreted as being over emphasized or using a raised voice in normal conversation. Since the dynamics of group communication can be complicated, it is best to stick to factual information.

Newsletters. All community associations should produce at least quarterly newsletters to keep the members abreast of financial issues, important rules or changes thereto, design standards, current contact information and updates on projects that may be underway. They can be used to remind residents to not leave their trash cans out after a specified time, that pets need to be on leashes when outside or even changes in schedules for facilities and coming events. While pictures and graphics may provide splash, content is key.

Website. Providing critical need-to-know information to members and prospective buyers is an extremely important association function. This phenomenal form of communication has made contact virtually instantaneous. The use of community websites to provide copies of documents, ARC guidelines and forms, Rules and Regulations, contact information, calendars of events, committee information, utility providers, etc. Members can generally provide their information to an Owner Directory, which makes contact easier among neighbors. The website for an Association is an excellent tool to provide information to new owners as well making moving in and getting acquainted with the community a little easier.

Whatever form the communication takes, it will enhance the relationship between the Board and the membership and provide for a better community.