



COMMUNITY BUILDER

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Special Assessments: A Guide for Board Members to Foster Homeowner Understanding and Support in Community Associations

The words 'Special Assessment' often strike fear in the hearts of board members and homeowners alike. Many associations and the boards that run them do whatever possible to avoid ever needing a special assessment; however, sometimes this action cannot be avoided. In a world of ever-increasing costs, unprecedented natural disasters, and aging infrastructure – the balancing act between keeping regular assessments affordable and communities well-maintained is more difficult than ever before. As stewards of their communities, board members must take proactive measures to help homeowners comprehend and rally behind special assessments when required. This article explores strategies board members can use to foster homeowner understanding and support for special assessments.



1. Transparent Communication

Effective communication serves as the cornerstone of any successful endeavor. Board members should maintain transparent communication channels with homeowners to ensure they are well informed about the necessity and impact of special assessments. This may include regular updates via newsletters, community meetings, and emails. These channels are one step towards providing a comprehensive understanding of why special assessments are necessary and can also serve as platforms for homeowners to ask questions and express concerns.

2. Homeowner Education

An informed homeowner is more likely to be a supportive one. To this end, board members must prioritize educating homeowners about the purpose and benefits of special assessments. This includes explaining how vital a special assessment can be towards maintaining the community's infrastructure, such as roads, clubhouses, landscaping, and common areas. The Board may also consider coordinating a town hall event where experts, such as engineers or attorneys, attend to answer questions and provide assurances.

3. Highlight Long-Term Benefits

Remind homeowners that special assessments are investments in the community's future. Emphasize these assessments' positive impact on property values, community aesthetics, and overall quality of life. By clearly showing the long-term benefits, board members can help homeowners understand that the lasting improvements outweigh the short-term financial commitment.

4. Provide Comprehensive Documentation

Offer homeowners comprehensive documentation outlining the special assessment's purpose, scope, and projected outcomes. Include detailed financial breakdowns, project timelines, and any relevant legal or regulatory information. By providing homeowners with well-organized and easy-to-understand documentation, board members can help build support and empower homeowners to make informed decisions if they will be asked to vote on passing a special assessment.

5. Utilize Visual Aids

Visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and infographics, can significantly enhance homeowners' understanding of complex financial matters. Break down the assessment process step by step, detailing how funds are allocated, where they will be invested, and the potential benefits. Visual representations simplify information and make it more memorable and engaging for homeowners.

6. Showcase Success Stories

Perhaps one of the best ways to gain support is to share success stories from other communities that have undergone similar special assessments and reaped the benefits. These stories could come from the Community Manager, or other members of Sentry Management. Additionally, personal anecdotes and testimonies from fellow homeowners can humanize the experience, making it relatable and less intimidating. These stories can provide reassurance and motivation to homeowners who may be apprehensive about financial commitment.

7. Offer Payment Flexibility

Special assessments can sometimes place an unexpected financial burden on homeowners. To alleviate some concerns, board members can explore options for payment flexibility. This might include allowing homeowners to pay in installments or collaborating with financial institutions to secure favorable loan terms. Board members can enhance homeowner trust and cooperation by demonstrating a willingness to accommodate different financial situations.

8. Seek Input and Feedback

Board members should actively solicit homeowner input and feedback regarding special assessments. This demonstrates a commitment to shared decision-making and helps board members gauge the level of homeowner understanding and sentiment. Conduct

surveys or hold town hall meetings specifically focused on special assessments, giving homeowners a platform to voice their concerns and suggestions.

9. Address Concerns Empathetically

Anticipate and address homeowners' concerns with empathy and respect. Some homeowners might worry about the financial implications or question the necessity of the assessment. Board members should actively listen to these concerns and respond with factual information, illustrating how the assessment aligns with the community's long-term vision and well-being.

Navigating special assessments in community associations requires a delicate balance of communication, education, and empathy. Board members are responsible for ensuring the financial health of the community and fostering understanding and support among homeowners. Through transparent communication, education, flexibility, and a commitment to addressing concerns, board members can lead their communities through special assessments with unity and cooperation, ultimately enhancing the well-being and prosperity of all homeowners.



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