



HOW TO MAKE BOARD MEETINGS SHORTER

For many community associations, it is difficult to get the members involved. The time commitment required for serving on the board dissuades many from volunteering. The perceived length and tedium of board meetings keeps members from attending. But what if you could run an organized, fruitful meeting in less time? Here are some tips on how to stay on point and get to the adjournment faster:

Use Motions. If directors keep digressing into banter, gossip and generally unproductive conversations, the meeting can be brought back on track with the use of formal motions. In the most formal board meeting settings, a new item on the agenda starts with a motion, which must be seconded. The discussion on the issue does not occur until after the motion has been seconded and if no one has an interest in making a motion or seconding the motion that has been made, the issue dies with no further time spent on it.

Consent Calendars. A consent calendar is a grouping of non-controversial items that are placed together on the agenda for a bulk approval without discussion. Examples of typical non-controversial issues would be approval of the minutes, scheduling of the next meeting, renewal of service contracts, etc. It is helpful to have the recommended approval set forth on the agenda (e.g., management recommends approval of the September 2019 minutes as written). If someone wants to discuss an item placed on the consent calendar, that director can request that it be removed from the consent calendar for discussion. All other non-removed items can be subject to one motion to accept the manager or president's recommendations.

Read the Board Packet. I have been going to association board meetings for more than twenty years and one thing remains sadly unchanged. At most board meetings at least one director shows up not having read the board packet. The director then proceeds to read it while people are trying to discuss the issues, thus missing the discussion. This behavior is inconsiderate to everyone else in the room.

Ask the Manager About it Before the Meeting. As directors are reading the board packet, questions come up. Rather than slowing down the meeting or blindsiding the manager, directors should send the question to the manager before the meeting so the manager can be properly prepared to answer the question at the meeting.

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Don't Argue with the Members. The best-run meetings also tend to be the ones where everyone is respectful to one another. Members who attend meetings can be the “eyes and ears” of the board, assisting the board in knowing what is happening around the community. The members’ comments and input should be encouraged when it is constructive. Directors should try not to habitually explain why something cannot be done as suggested. Arguing with the members discourages communication and sets a bad tone for the meeting. Instead of debating, try saying “thank you for your comments” and move on.

Help the Members Understand. For members that attend meetings just to raise a singular issue, they may not realize the amount of work that needs to be accomplished at every meeting. Let them know. Start the homeowner forum by explaining what needs to be done at the meeting and then request that the comments be made concise. Discourage people from repeating comments already made. Encourage members to speak to the directors, not others in attendance.

Organize the Comments. If we are talking about one of those rare associations where there is a lot of attendance and a lot of comments, there may be a need for organization. The board can take a cue from city council meetings and ask people to write down their name and the topic they want to discuss. Then the cards can be sorted by topic so that if one speaker intends to provide comments similar to other speakers, the speakers can indicate that the other speakers have addressed their comments and that they don't need to repeat the comment.

Take a Break. Even with the best intentions, a meeting can get out of control. The members can get confused as to when their comments are welcome and when they need to just observe. Having a short recess between homeowner forum and the rest of the agenda items can draw that distinction and help people understand that there has been a shift in what is expected for the remainder of the meeting. Recesses can also be helpful when discussions become so passionate that everyone forgets to listen or treat one another with respect.

Use Committees. Committees can perform a lot of the legwork for the directors when the committee members are given proper instruction. Committees can research issues, review proposals, walk the property and provide reports and recommendations to the board.

Location. A professional, business-like environment is sometimes needed to get things done. Meetings in restaurants or at the pool are frequently interrupted by ambient noises, swimming children, fussy waiters and the like. A quiet space where everyone can hear and can have a table to write can assist in keeping everyone on track and keeping the chatter to a minimum.

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