

# TOWN HALL MEETING

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The words “town hall meeting” can conjure up a number of different images. If someone’s reference point comes from television shows, a town hall meeting may seem dramatic and theatrical. Images of people grandstanding and storming in or out of the meeting might come to mind. If someone’s reference point is from experience with local government, it may seem more like a forum to complain, rather than learn. In the context of a homeowners association, town hall meetings can be incredibly productive, but only if everyone understands how they should be conducted and what to expect.

Town hall meetings for homeowners associations are usually designed to tackle a specific issue. Even if there will be more than one issue discussed, there should be a specific objective in mind going into the meeting. Town hall meetings are frequently used to present new proposals to the membership when the proposals will significantly impact the homeowners. The objective is normally

to garner support for a proposal that the members will be asked to vote upon, but it could also be designed to educate the members or get input from the members on a specific issue.

Regardless of the purpose, the directors should have an established objective and an agenda designed to meet that objective. A town hall meeting with no clear purpose can be self-defeating. The notice of the town hall meeting should be clear on that objective. Also, make sure your notice is distributed well in advance of the meeting and that reminders are sent to the membership.

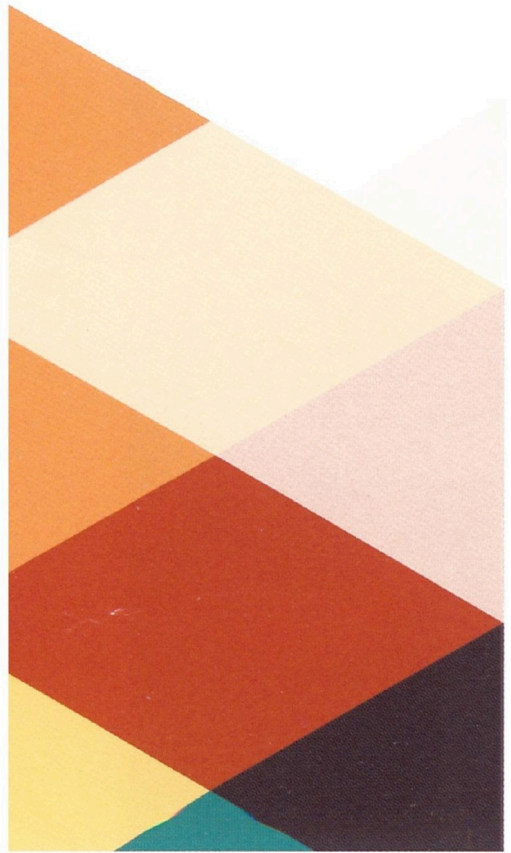
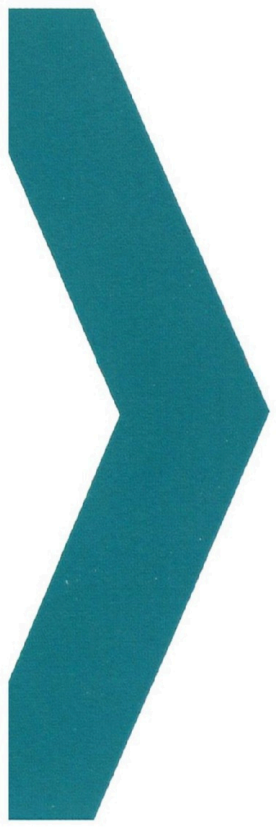
Agendas are important for town hall meetings. The agenda does not need to be detailed, but it should be clear to the attendees when invited speakers will present their information and when homeowners will be able to ask questions or provide comments. Including an end time for the meeting also allows people to set expectations as to how much time people will have to speak. Attendees can also be reminded to listen to each

person’s questions so that questions are not repeated.

It is helpful to introduce the experts and have them present first, followed by comments made by one or two directors. The comments from the directors set the tone for the question and comment portion of the meeting. It is helpful for the directors to remind people in attendance that they are volunteers and will be impacted by the project as well. The directors’ comments should be made calmly and should be rehearsed. Again, building trust among the members is an ideal goal for a town hall meeting. A polished speech by a director can be invaluable.

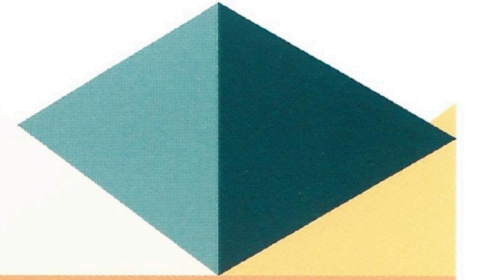
Once the educational portion of the event is complete, it is appropriate to entertain comments and questions. Before starting, the rules of engagement should be provided. If there is a time limit, it should be stated. If there is an opportunity to ask specific questions, that should also be known. However, if the purpose is to obtain input,





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The following are examples of town hall meetings in the context of a homeowners association:

1. Prior to termite fumigation, a town hall could be conducted for the pest control company to go over all of the procedures for preparing the homes. Legally required forms can be distributed and signed. Keys can be handed over to the vendor. Homeowners and tenants can ask their questions so that they are comfortable with the process.
2. Associations undergoing a complete rewrite of their governing documents, in order to build trust in the process, can have the drafting attorney attend a town hall meeting and explain to the homeowners the changes being proposed. Homeowners can bring their questions and have them answered.
3. During a reconstruction process, the contractor, architect or engineer can present information to the owners explaining what will be repaired. Homeowners can learn about the schedule and how they may be impacted by the staging area, noise, inspections, etc. Prior to reconstruction, the same kind of presentation can be provided, but with additional information regarding the member's vote on a loan or special assessment.

the directors should provide a non-threatening and supportive forum to do so. A director should not argue or refute a commentator. Comments should be directed to the board and not to other people providing their opinions. The board should facilitate discussion and education. The board should not put itself in a position to be interrogated. This establishes a wall between the board and the members, rather than creating a team mentality.

Further, it should be pre-determined how people will be given the opportunity to speak. Some directors prefer to have notecards filled out in advance by those with questions and then the notecards are chosen in order or randomly. If it is a small forum, it may only be necessary to put one person in charge of moderating and recognizing the next speakers. In very large forums, it is acceptable to ask people to line up behind a lectern to take their turn speaking. Organization and control over the flow of questions and answers is key.

During the town hall, the members normally ask questions of the expert about the particular issue after all of the presentations have been made. In some town halls, the directors ask for input from the members to determine which direction should be taken regarding the issue.

It is preferable to end a town hall meeting on a high note. Thanking the presenters and the attendees is important. But, perhaps more important, is the call to action. If the objective of the meeting was to get support for a ballot initiative, attendees should be asked to speak to their neighbors about what they heard. If it is to get people to cooperate during an upcoming construction project, tell the attendees how they can provide assistance to make it all go smoothly. The objective here is to send the attendees out the door feeling like they are a part of the solution. ⚙️

