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THE MEETING PROCESS

Holding Effective Association Meetings



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The Meeting Process

Holding Effective Association Meetings (revised 1997)

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One of the most important elements in the operation of a community association is the meeting process. Most associations hold monthly Board meetings as well as Annual and Committee meetings. From time to time it will also be necessary for the association to hold a Special meeting of the homeowners to decide issues that must be addressed between Annual meetings.

The success of an association is often reflected in the quality and tenor of its meetings. Surprisingly, the meeting process is often ignored or misunderstood in many communities. We have all attended the interminable three-hour Board meeting. Most of us have also been privy to the process of rescheduling an Annual meeting due to the lack of a quorum, or we have been at the occasional Special meeting that nearly erupts into a riot because of some controversial topic being discussed.

There are ways to avoid these scenarios which have been successful throughout the country. In this article we will explore some of the techniques for successful meetings and ways to implement them in an effort to streamline and control the meeting process. To begin, we must examine some basic general assumptions about meetings.

What Is A Meeting?

In a community association a meeting can be defined as two or more people coming together to make decisions regarding physical, financial or administrative operations of the community. The Board is in charge of a corporation whose assets may be in the millions of dollars. A Board meeting is a gathering of the corporate Board to conduct the business of the association. A Board meeting is a business meeting of the corporation Board.

Similarly, the Annual meeting is a business meeting of all the members of the corporation to conduct business and to elect the directors of the corporation. The Annual meeting is yet another a business meeting.

A Special meeting is like an Annual meeting in that it involves all the members of the association. However, the only business which may properly be discussed or conducted at a Special meeting is that which has been posted with the notice of the meeting. No other business may be or topics may be discussed.

Committee meetings are slightly different. They are held to explore ideas and avenues of operations assigned as tasks to the Committee by the Board. By their nature they are generally less formal than the other types of meetings. However, they must be organized and operated in a business-like manner to be successful. Again, these meetings are a manifestation of the multi-million dollar corporation to which the members belong.

The four types of business meetings held by an association then are **Board, Annual, Special and Committee**. How these are conducted will have a dramatic impact on the success of the community and will, more often than not, be responsible for whether members will be willing to serve in leadership positions in the future. Now that we have looked at the four types of meetings and understand their purposes, lets begin to explore the meeting process for each.

To be successful, each type of meeting requires its own unique processes. Many elements enter into the meeting process and we can break these elements into three categories; Preparation, Conduct and Follow-up. No one category is more important than another so lets begin by discussing the preparation required for the Board meeting. For purposes of discussion we will assume that the community holds monthly Board meetings to conduct the business of the association.

Board Meeting Preparation

Time is the most precious asset anyone can possess. The amount of time members spend in a board meeting should be viewed as a gift by them to the association which should not be squandered. To be certain time is not wasted let us assume the meeting is to be used to decide issues. Board meetings should not be viewed as performances for the general membership but as genuine working business meetings. In order to accomplish this, as many issues as possible must be discussed either in writing or verbally, prior to the meeting. It is imperative that the Board avoid surprises at their business meetings. No issue should be raised that is not published on the agenda and the agenda should be in every Board member's hands at least three to five days prior to the meeting. Sounds tough but studies indicate as much as 50% of the time spent in business meetings is used to discuss issues the participants were unaware of prior to the meeting.

When an issue is unexpectedly inserted into a meeting the participants are forced to spend time becoming educated about the issue at that time. There is often no way to check the accuracy of the various reports being presented and often results in an issue being tabled for discussion at the next meeting, or worse, the issue being decided on the basis of limited facts. You can also count on the meeting dragging on

at least a half-hour extra for each unanticipated item that is raised.

Most people find this to be an unacceptable style of meeting. To avoid it, the President should insist that each Board member wanting an issue discussed put that issue on the agenda and supply all pertinent information, in writing, prior to the Agenda's publication date. This will give Board members with an interest in the topic the opportunity to discuss it and raise questions about it prior to the meeting. Once at the meeting, the issue can come up on the agenda, a motion can be made regarding the question, followed by limited pertinent discussion and then the vote.

It is imperative that the Board meeting not be viewed as an opportunity for Board members (or the manager if there is one) to hear themselves talk. Board members are not obligated to speak to each issue that is raised. If they were, meetings would likely last two or three hours.

So far, we have discussed that Board meetings are used for decision making. Preparation begins with a written agenda published at least three to five days prior to the meeting. On the agenda will be a line for committee reports. Again, no committee should report unless they have submitted their report, in writing, prior to the agenda's publication and all the Board members have had an opportunity to become familiar with it. This should become part of the job description for the chair of each committee and be part of each committee charter.

Committee reports do not have to be long documents. They can be a summary of the committee operation but should include any motion being requested by the committee of the Board. If it looks as though the report will present a problem at the Board meeting it should be discussed and resolved by the President and the chair of the committee privately before the meeting so that the committee does not go through the public humiliation of having an idea or motion they have worked diligently to create being blown out of the water by the Board. If the committees are charged properly this will rarely happen and, for the sake of morale, must be avoided as often as possible.

If the association is professionally managed, the management report will also be part of the agenda. Again, this report should be in writing and in the hands of the Board members at least three to five days prior to the meeting. This is especially important because the management report will undoubtedly include items that require action by the Board. If the Board has the report ahead of time they can contact the manager with any questions they might have. The manager should most certainly contact each Board member prior to every meeting to answer any questions that have been raised regarding the report and issue clarifications as

necessary so that when the meeting is called each member is prepared to make responsible decisions based on the information provided. In the event the community is not professionally managed responsibility for the above report will fall to the President and they will need to take the steps outlined above to insure a smooth responsible decision making process.

Board Meeting Preparation Summary:

All reports should be in writing and submitted prior to the meeting. A report not submitted in writing prior to the meeting should not be addressed until the Board has had ample opportunity for review and consideration.

All participants in the meeting should be contacted prior to the meeting to clarify issues and answer any questions they may have regarding the issues to be decided. The agenda and all related reports should be in the hands of the participants at least three to five days prior to the business meeting.

Board Meeting Conduct

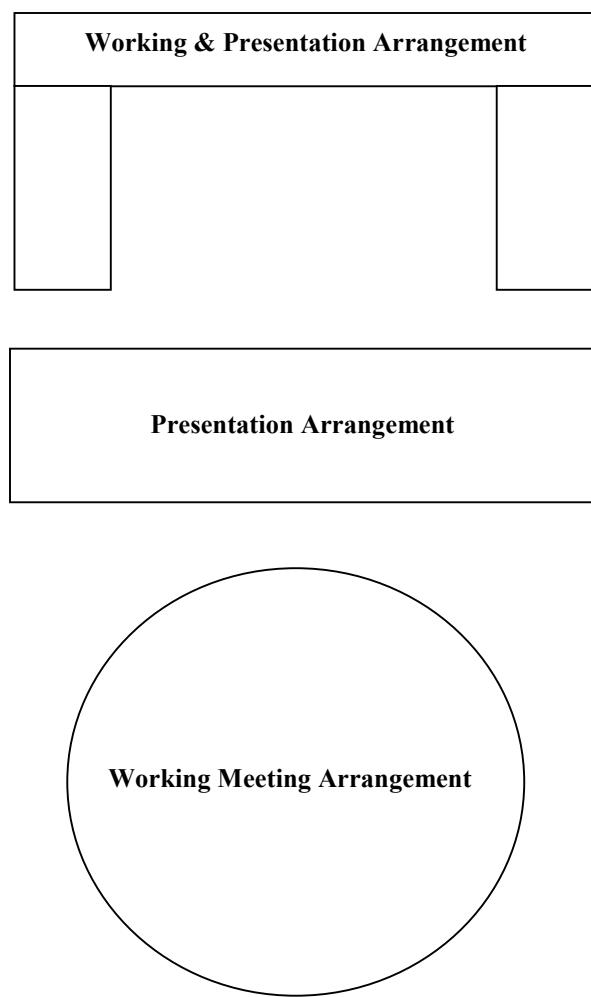
The conduct of the meeting, in conjunction with the preparatory steps outlined above, can make the most dramatic difference in the length and quality of the meeting. Many factors must come together for a successful meeting to take place. Among these are the location and meeting environment, the method of controlling the length and the willingness of the President and Board members to share the responsibility for conducting efficient, businesslike meetings. First let's take a look at the meeting environment.

Nearly everyone involved in business meetings agrees that the best place to conduct a working meeting is in a businesslike environment. To most associations this means having the Board meeting in a meeting room at a table set up for that purpose. But what if the association has no meeting room? As mentioned earlier, many association Boards find themselves meeting in a Board member's unit. This is the least recommended environment to try to have a business meeting. The psychology of someone's home is social, not business. An alternative place can almost always be found. Local schools, churches, hotels and other businesses have been known to donate space for Board meetings. If no alternative can be found and your meetings must be held in a member's unit, meet at the dining room or kitchen table. That is where most business in a home is conducted. Try to set the psychology of a business meeting. Meeting in comfortable chairs in someone's living room should be avoided at all costs. It is practically impossible to

maintain a semblance of professional conduct in a setting normally used to socialize.

If your association is lucky enough to have a room that can be used for Board meetings, then consider the way the room is set up. What is the shape of the table? What is the seating arrangement? Do adversarial members often sit opposite one another? Is the seating arranged for work or for a performance for the homeowners?

Below are some examples of table shapes and seating arrangements found successful in many businesses and communities. Keep in mind that different arrangements can be used effectively in different circumstances. However, for our purposes we are looking for the most successful arrangement for a working Board meeting.



As you can see, the best arrangement for a working meeting seems to be either a round table or oblong tables arranged in a "U" shape. Both of these allow the participants to interact with each other easily in a non-

confrontational manner. If you have members who always seem to be in conflict try seating them side by side or parallel to each other with a third member between them as physical buffer. It is very difficult to be confrontational when attempting to talk through someone in the middle.

Some last tips on room arrangements:

Do not sit adversaries opposite each other. Set them parallel to one another and separate them with one or two other members. This will make it more difficult to confront each other and will allow them to more easily focus on the issues at hand.

Do not allow smoking in the meeting room. Get rid of any ashtrays. Many people today are bothered by smoke and this may prevent them from participating in a positive way.

Under no circumstances allow the consumption of alcohol prior to or during a meeting. To make good decisions the members should be of sound mind. This can easily become a legal issue, (competency) as well as an operational problem.

Agendas

Nearly everyone uses an agenda. However, keeping to the published agenda is often difficult. A method needs to be found to keep the meetings on time and focused. The most effective tools for this process are Robert's Rules of Order or some other form of parliamentary procedure and a "timed agenda".

First, let's examine the basics of Robert's Rules. Before we begin let me say that the effective use of Robert's Rules does not require anyone to be a parliamentarian. Likewise, as the preamble to the Rules states, "Robert's Rules are merely a guideline to an effective meeting and decision making process". They can be flexible and only in the most extreme and formal of cases do they need to be followed to letter. However, certain of the rules can be very useful in any meeting.

For instance, no discussion should take place about any item without a motion and a second being made to adopt or reject the item. Remember that time is our most valuable asset. Too many times lengthy discussion is held on a particular topic that is of only marginal interest to the group as a whole. If this simple rule is adopted you may find your meeting taking on much more business-like tone and therefore a more productive content.

This means that no member may raise any topic without first making a motion regarding the topic. If there is no second to the motion the issue will die without discussion. If a second is made, then the President is obligated to ask for discussion. Discussion is not an unlimited forum for the members to express

their opinions. The President has the power to limit discussion on any topic by announcing that, "Discussion will be limited to one round of comments by each member." This will guarantee that each Board member may be heard if they so desire while limiting the informal filibuster that can be a problem in some meetings. Discussion should never be allowed to wander from the topic at hand, nor should too much repetition be permitted. If a member has nothing new to add to the discussion they should be encouraged to say that they agree with whatever opinion has already been expressed and the discussion should move on. In all cases it is the President or Chair's responsibility to see that Robert's Rules are implemented at the meeting.

This can be difficult and politically sensitive. Especially because none of us likes to appear as though we are foreclosing someone else's ideas. To make the task of keeping the meeting on track and on time easier, it is a good idea to employ the use of a "timed agenda". A timed agenda simply lays out the approximate length of the meeting and the time which will be allotted each report or item for discussion. In its simplest form it looks like this:

Board Meeting Agenda

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Call To Order | - 5:00 |
| 2. Secretary's Report | - 5:00 (5 min.) |
| 3. Treasurer's Report | - 5:05 (10 min.) |
| 4. Management Report | - 5:15 (25 min.) |
| 5. Committee Reports | - 5:40 (10-20) |
| 6. Unfinished Business | - 6:00 (10 min.) |
| 7. New Business | - 6:10 (10 min.) |
| 8. Adjourn | - 6:20 |

As you can see, in this typical scenario the meeting will last an hour and 20 minutes. This may even be a little long as typically the unfinished and new business portions of the agenda are handled under the various reports which take place earlier on the agenda.

As you think about this process keep in mind it is not necessary to read the minutes of the previous meeting aloud, nor to read the management report, (informational section) verbatim. The minutes should have been in the Board member's hands with their packet of information at least three to five days prior to the meeting. All that is required is a motion to approve, or correct and then approve. If time permits, the manager may summarize the informational items in the management report but should move quickly to any action items that are part of the report. Remember that the members have had the report for a few days. The manager has discussed it with each one and hopefully has answered any questions outside the meeting. The Board should get on with the business portion of the meeting as quickly as possible.

If the Board wishes to raise issues about the managers performance they should arrange a time to hold a meeting with the manager, preferably in the manager's office, to go over these items. Unless they are making a motion to terminate the contract, the manager's performance should never be an issue at a Board meeting. Again, the purpose of the Board meeting is to make decisions. It should never be allowed, by the President, to deteriorate into a general gripe session.

Before you say it, yes this can be a tough task for an association not used to operating in a business-like manner. It requires discipline and a commitment to success by each member of the Board. Successful meeting procedures can not be imposed. They must be agreed upon.

There are certain tools that can be used to assist in the process of the timed agenda. The President should always come to the meeting with a gavel. The gavel is the symbol of authority in a business meeting and sets a psychological mood in each member. The President can also appoint an official timekeeper. Often this is the secretary of the Board but it can be anyone, (including the President) who will occasionally remind the members of the time or that time has run out to discuss a particular item. This is especially important early in the implementation process when members are attempting to acclimate. These time reminders should be gentle nudges as opposed to authoritarian statements. No one likes to be bullied into moving on. A good tool to gently remind the Board of the importance of the clock is an hourglass or large timepiece placed directly in the middle of the table. This will assure constant awareness of the need for efficiency on everyone's part.

We have left out one essential element to the Board meeting success. That is celebration. Prior to every adjournment someone should state the reasons the meeting was successful. There is always a reason even in the worst of meetings. No one was killed, no one went to jail, no one went bankrupt and, very likely, no physical violence took place. There is always a reason to celebrate. Ending on a high note is one of the most important responsibilities of the Board. It provides a reason to come back and allows for positive success. A manager can thank the Board for helping him improve their management style or the operation of their company or the opportunity to explain why a certain thing was done a certain way. The same holds true for the Treasurer, Secretary and each participant in the meeting. Celebration is paramount to success.

Homeowner Input

In 1996 the California legislature passed a bill requiring associations to allow homeowner input at

Board meetings. However, the legislature included language allowing the Board to restrict the amount of time any member would be allowed to speak on a topic. Input from the homeowners is an invaluable tool in the decision making process. The proviso, as always in such matters, is that the time allotted should be "reasonable".

To accommodate homeowner input the Board should establish a Homeowners Open Forum which commences immediately after the Call to Order. As you can see, there is no place on the agenda for homeowner input. The purpose of the forum will be to hear various residents' opinions on any issue they care to raise. The Board should listen carefully, take notes and respond only, (and then briefly) if a direct question is asked. An often heard response to request for action at these meetings is, "Thank you for bringing this issue to our attention. We will consider it between now and the next meeting and will take appropriate action. We will keep you informed of progress and may ask your advice if it looks as though we will be voting on this issue at the next meeting."

Again, the purpose of the forum is to allow the owners access to the process and the Board members. When it is time for the meeting to begin the President should thank all homeowners for attending the forum, invite them to stay to watch their representatives in action and remind them that during the balance of the meeting the Board will conduct its business and only the Board is allowed to participate. The purpose of the Board meeting remains for the Board to conduct the business of the association and it falls only to them to decide the various issues. Thank the homeowners again for coming and sound the gavel to move the meeting along to the next item on the agenda.

No part of the meeting process should be attempted "cold turkey". This is especially true if the association currently operates in some other fashion. A good idea is to have all the Board members meet to discuss implementing the meeting plan at least two months prior to the first attempt. After that meeting, the changes in meeting operation should be published to the membership with an explanation of why they are necessary, (Board burnout, lack of volunteers, efficiency of operation, fiduciary obligation to operate in a business-like manner, etc., etc.). Certainly questions will be raised. Some objections may surface but all can be dealt with logically. A business-like meeting environment is more conducive to good decision making, is less work, more efficient and may eventually be more fun for the participants.

A word of caution. Timed agendas are the most effective way to hold an efficient meeting. For those not used to the process a caveat is in order. The first time you use a timed agenda you will probably not conclude all the business listed. You may only cover

half the items. This is not unusual. The members of the Board must be prepared to table the remainder of the items until the next meeting or call a special Board meeting for another day to conclude the business. It is extremely important that the first meeting end on time.

At the second meeting the Board will accomplish more than they did at the first and by the third meeting everyone should be comfortable with the process and understand that they must come to the meeting prepared to do business. As a general rule, at the third and subsequent meetings all business will be able to be conducted in accordance with the agenda. Patience is often required to unlearn unproductive meeting habits but the end result will be well worth the efforts and the rewards will be seen on many levels over time in the association.

Executive Session

The California legislature has established the following reasons a homeowner association Board is allowed to adjourn to "executive session".

1. Discuss litigation matters
2. Discuss personnel matters
3. Member discipline

When the Board adjourns to executive session to discuss any of the above matters detailed minutes need not be kept. However, a note in the Board meeting minutes should describe in general terms the matters which were discussed in the executive session.

If the Board adjourns to executive session for purposes of "member discipline" the subject member may, upon request to the Board, be in attendance during the "executive session".

Board Meeting Conduct Summary:

1. Hold a homeowner's forum. to accommodate member input.
2. Hold meetings at a regular time and on a regularly scheduled date.
3. Use a timed agenda.
4. Appoint a timekeeper.
5. Do not read the minutes of the previous meeting aloud. All members should have these in advance and simply move for corrections or approval.
6. Use parliamentary procedure.
7. Allow no business to be discussed without a motion and second.
8. Do not discuss informational items; merely point out where they may found in the written reports.
9. Celebrate!
10. Adjourn on time regardless of your place in the agenda.

Board Meeting Follow-up

Follow-up to Board meetings will involve the President, Secretary, Treasurer and the various committees of the Board. It will also involve the manager.

One of the most important elements of following up on a Board meeting is to report to the owners. Summarize actions that were taken and discussed and either post these or publish them in the newsletter. Some associations publish the minutes of the meeting. This can be risky since the minutes are not approved until the following meeting. In addition, good minutes are generally very boring reading since they should contain little except the motions that were made and the resolutions of those motions.

Each Board member should be given an action list following each meeting which details not only the action he or she is expected to perform but all actions that will be taken as a result of the meeting. This becomes the Boards ongoing action calendar and can be reviewed at each meeting. Along these same lines the manager should send his or her action list from the meeting to each Board member to be certain there were no misunderstandings during the meeting. Again, this can be included as part of the management report at the next meeting. In addition, any legal actions that were taken should be implemented from the various action lists. These will include collections, executed contracts, rules and covenant enforcement, etc.

The Secretary should catalogue each resolution that was adopted and place it in the association's book of resolutions for easy access at subsequent meetings. The Secretary will also be responsible for including all approved minutes in the corporate record book of the association. This is an important document that must be updated each month. It is the official legal record of the corporation and should always be kept current. Finally, any associations have the Secretary send a copy of the minutes to their attorney to keep them advised of the actions of the Board.

The Treasurer should publish the Treasurer's report to the homeowners. One of the most effective methods would be the newsletter unless there are specific other legal requirements.

Annual Meetings

The stated purpose of nearly every Annual Meeting is to elect the directors of the association and conduct such other business as may properly come before the assembly. Sounds pretty exciting eh? Not to most homeowners. To quote Thomas Jefferson, "In an ideal world all people would look upon their responsibilities in a democracy with serious intent that leads to action." Ah Tom, if only we lived in an ideal world.

In condoland things are not always so ideal. Most of us have had to adjourn an Annual meeting from time to time due to a lack of a quorum. Perhaps this is because we fail to be creative in the ways we use the Annual meeting. At the Annual meeting the directors must be elected. That is the legal task. But the Annual meeting can be considerably more than that.

Why not use the Annual meeting to celebrate the past contributions of various members. Use it as an awards celebration. Have entertainment by some of the members or bring in someone from outside. Have refreshments served after the business portion of the meeting is finished. In other words, use the Annual meeting as an excuse to have to have a party. Going somewhere to vote, for most of us, is work. We all like to go to parties. You can have a very successful Annual meeting simply by dressing it up in a new suit of clothes.

One association in Minneapolis has a community photographer. A retired woman who lives in the association loves to take pictures and does so throughout the year. She covers Board meetings, socials, the garage at 1:00 a.m. and anything else of interest. She manages to catch many of the more active members in candid poses and then she does a slide show at each Annual meeting. Everyone giggles and laughs at the pictures and a good time is had by all. In fact, many members feel slighted if they are not part of the show. Attendance at these Annual meetings runs close to 85% each year. Even many of the absentee owners show up for the refreshments and food that are served after the meeting. This community budgets at least \$1000 per year for the Annual meeting. A small price to pay for awards, food, refreshments, entertainment and an opportunity to report the annual business and elect the directors of the community.

Another community brings in a guest speaker each year. The speakers have ranged from a leading member of the local chapter of CAI to a prominent Senator from the district. Again, the result has been very high attendance figures at the meetings. Remember, once the owners are there you can conduct the business of the community. Give them a reason to come. If it costs a little, it is money well spent.

Annual Meeting Preparation

The preparation for next year's Annual meeting actually begins at this year's Annual meeting. The nominating committee should be formed and charged with soliciting candidates for next year's election. Then, the wait is on until its time for the notice of the next Annual meeting. A cutoff date for a list of candidates should be set by the Board. This generally can be 30 days prior to the mailing of the notice and

should become part of the Board's annual calendar. The next step is to actually mail the notice.

You should check the Declaration & Bylaws each year for the requirements regarding mailing of the notice for the Annual meeting. Do not rely on memory. Go over the requirements for proxies, cumulative voting, (if allowed), reports and the agenda. Set the date time and place if these are not specified in the governing documents.

Annual Meeting Follow-up

Minutes of the meeting should be typed and sent to all members of the Board immediately following the meeting. A copy should also be sent to the Association's attorney. These will be approved at next year's Annual Meeting so they should also be on file, (in the corporate record book), for distribution to the members at the appropriate time the following year. The election results become part of the corporate record as well. They should be sealed and kept in an appropriately.

Annual meetings are considered "meeting of the members" under California statute and as such must be run in accordance with a set of parliamentary procedures adopted by the meeting. These can be Roberts Rules of Order or any other set of procedures the assembly chooses to adopt.

Follow-up to the Annual Meeting includes reporting to the members on the results of the election and any other business or topics of interests discussed. Attendance at the next Annual Meeting will depend, in some respects, on the success of this years meeting. You must report the meeting in its most positive light to keep the community interested and motivated.

In addition to the members, the Association's attorney and insurance company will need to be notified of the change of directors and officers. Because the community is a not for profit corporation it will also be necessary to inform the state of the these changes. The procedure for doing this varies from state to state so you will need to check with your state corporate authority about the proper registration procedure.

Finally, send a congratulatory letter to each candidate that ran for office. It is important that everyone volunteering to participate feels like a winner. If they weren't elected this year they may be willing to run again next year or serve as an alternate for the current directors. Candidates not elected are often willing to serve by appointment should the need arise. They are tomorrow's resource for the community.

Special Meetings

Just as with the Annual Meeting you should check the governing documents of the community to determine the notice and voting procedure to be used to call and conduct a Special Meeting. It is a legal meeting of the members of the corporation and must fulfill all the requirements of state statutes and the Declaration and Bylaws.

Special Meetings of the membership may be called to take any action allowed by the governing documents. The preparation for the meeting is similar to that of the Annual Meeting, as it requires the mailing of a notice, proxies and other related materials. There is, however, one important difference. At a Special Meeting of the members the only topics which may be discussed or considered are those for which the meeting was called. In other words, the notice for the meeting must state the purpose of the meeting and no other topics may be considered, discussed or voted on.

There is, traditionally, another form of general meeting. This involves no legal requirement in most states but instead is an informal gathering of the members for some informational purpose. No action is taken. Instead, the meeting is held simply to disseminate information to the community.

All pertinent information about the issues should be mailed to the members well in advance of the meeting so everyone comes prepared. Just as with all other meetings, surprises are not healthy for the meeting process.

Special Meeting Conduct

Special Meetings are considered "meetings of the members" under California statute and as such must be run in accordance with a set of parliamentary procedures adopted by the meeting. These can be Roberts Rules of Order or any other set of procedures the assembly chooses to adopt.

The conduct of a Special Meeting, like the conduct of any meeting, requires the use of an agenda. To be effective a timed agenda is again recommended. Of course, any member wishing to address the issues should be given ample opportunity to be heard. Maximum participation by those in attendance will assure sound decisions based on informed opinion. With this in mind it will still be necessary for the chairman to control the meeting. Perhaps a time limit for discussion and comment can be set prior to the meeting. In this way, all the members will be prepared to address their comments in as concise a way as possible.

The agenda itself will consist of a roll call, call to order, statement of resolutions, voting procedures and adjournment. There will be no place for approval of minutes, reports of officers or committees, new

business or unfinished business. Remember that the Special Meeting is called for specific purpose. The agenda need only address that purpose.

After the issue has been discussed the question may be called and the vote taken. It is useful, but not required, to announce the results of the election at the meeting. If the issue is very controversial the Board may choose to announce the results by mail instead to eliminate the possibility of hostilities erupting between factions in the community. Either way is acceptable as long as the results are published quickly and accurately.

Special Meeting Follow-up

After the meeting has been adjourned, the appropriate actions must be taken. Minutes must be typed and included in the corporate record. These will be approved at the next meeting of the Board of Directors. A report of the meeting should be sent to the general membership announcing the results of the election and reporting on the meeting itself.

The Board members and/or manager should be assigned whatever tasks are needed to carry out the directives of the meeting. If the actions taken alter the annual operating plan or budget these should be amended accordingly and distributed to the membership and affected professionals working with the association.

The Importance of Group Dynamics

Understanding the operation of any successful group requires an understanding of what is referred to as "group dynamics". Group dynamics affect the ability of any group to solve problems and achieve harmony. To be successful every group needs the elements outlined by the following anachronym:

Goal
Reward
Organization
Unity
Process

Every successful group needs a clearly defined and agreed upon goal. It must be specific and realistic. A group without a clear goal quickly deteriorates into a mob. If no specific task is assigned the group will undoubtedly create one. Very likely this goal will be of questionable value to the community as a whole and will likely damage the volunteer process because it was misguided.

Organization requires strong effective leadership. The leader of any successful group leads by consensus.

All members of the group must agree that the leader is the final authority for their project and agree to abide by the leader's decisions. The leader must be strong enough to control and guide the group without alienating or excluding anyone from the process.

Unity will be created when good meeting techniques are employed. The ultimate result will be a group moving toward a goal in an expeditious manner. The group's success can be enhanced by using a clearly outlined process of reporting. Progress toward a goal can be measured if the group reports in writing and weighs the report against the achievement of the ultimate result.

As discussed earlier, rewards can be self-congratulatory (as in celebration) or come from the empowering body. In the case of a committee the best reward will be for the Board to act on its recommendations without discussion or delay. A great deal of praise can be lavished on the participants of a group that has performed to a clearly defined standard. If people know exactly what is expected of them they will nearly always attempt to perform to that expectation. Having done so, they deserve the congratulations of the entire community in as public a forum as possible.

Summary

As you can see, the meeting process of an association involves many elements. To be successful each of these need to come together at appropriate ways and times. It is possible to meet without considering any of these elements, however, the chances for success are greatly diminished. Remember that there are many purposes being served by the meeting process besides those that appear on the agenda.

Each meeting sends its own subliminal supportive communication to the members. Following the above outlined steps should assist you and your community in alleviating many of the pitfalls which can destroy good group process. If you try the methods above, and they don't quite work the first few times, don't be discouraged. There may be much that needs to be unlearned before you can be successful. As I mentioned earlier, old habits and behavior patterns are not easily changed. However, if you put out the effort, are patient and persistent in the end you will be successful. The community can't help but prosper on all levels as a result. Good meeting process is in the interest of everyone.