

Manager's Perspective...



Russell Munz

How to Get Community Business Done Faster & Easier

Bring in Advisors to Speed up Projects

By Russell Munz

Pyramid Real Estate Group

This article is the sixth of a seven part series designed to help your community accomplish more this year. After working with numerous associations, our firm has seen a pattern of behaviors and processes that can be improved so you can operate your property more efficiently. In this article I will discuss 1) the negatives and positives of using help, 2) projects you should strongly consider obtaining outside help and 3) sources of support.

In your career, you have probably been trained by someone who had more experience in a certain field or task and their advice improved your performance. Help from people who have done a task before or who specialize in a field for a living can save you time. Advisors, who have formal training, years of experience, go to training seminars, read the latest trade journals, and know more about their field than a "lapperson."

There are reasons why people don't look outside their communities for help. The first and most common reason is cost. Boards do not want to spend community money unwisely. Second is not knowing where to turn for help. Many boards do not know there are professionals who focus exclusively on condominium issues. Third is not wanting to spend time shopping for the service. Boards are already busy and they don't want to spend time interviewing another vendor.

However, the positives of using outside help often outweigh the negatives. First, you will save time when you hire an advisor. Rather than trying to research and learn how to do something yourself for the first time, an advisor will get you quickly up to speed. Second, missteps and mistakes can be avoided when using an advisor. People who do something for a living have a wealth of experience that will help you avoid wasting time investigating

the wrong solution, a misstep, or having to do something over, correcting a mistake. Third, by saving time spent on research, missteps and mistakes, the board will get things done faster, and free up time to work on other projects.

Several community projects in particular are deserving of outside help. First is a facilities plan, long range plan, or reserve study. Whatever you call it, a community should look to an outside specialist to help advise them on how to prepare for repair or replacement of aging common elements at their community in the coming years.

Help from people who have done a task before or who specialize in a field for a living can save you time.

Second is bid specifications. For more complex projects a detailed bid specifica-

Recipe File

Karen's Chocolate Praline Layer Cake

Submitted by Karen Conway of Community Association Banc

Okay. So the holiday season will soon be upon us. This low-fuss cake will be a great diversion from fruitcake. Try it! You'll impress your friends.

Cake:

1/2 cup butter
1/4 cup whipping cream
1 cup packed brown sugar
3/4 cup chopped walnuts
1 package devil's food cake mix
1 1/4 cups water
1/3 cup oil
3 eggs

Topping:

1 3/4 cups whipping
1/4 cup powdered sugar
1/4 teaspoon vanilla
16 whole walnuts
1/4 cup chocolate chips

1. Preheat oven to 325°. In small saucepan, combine butter, 1/4 cup whipping cream and brown sugar. Cook over low heat just until butter is melted, stirring occasionally. Pour into two 9 inch round cake pans. Sprinkle with chopped walnuts.
2. In large bowl, combine cake mix, water, oil and eggs; beat at low speed until moistened. Beat 2 minutes at medium speed. Spoon batter over walnut mixture.
3. Bake at 325° for 35-45 minutes or until cake springs back when touched lightly in center. Cool 5 minutes; remove from pans. Cool 1 hour or until completely cooled.
4. In small bowl, beat 1 3/4 cups whipping cream until soft peaks form. Add powdered sugar and vanilla; beat until stiff peaks form.
5. Place 1 layer of cake on serving plate, walnut side up. Spread with 1/2 of whipped cream. Top with second layer, walnut side up; spread top with remaining whipped cream. Sprinkle with whole walnuts and chocolate chips. Store in refrigerator.

tion will ensure that all the necessary items are covered in a contractor's bid for a job at your community; more importantly it is the only way you can really analyze a good contractor price from a bad price (since all the items, measurements and materials will be specified by the community's advisor up front rather than by each contractor). Third is a construction detail write-up. Again, rather than allowing each contractor to dictate how they will replace common elements at your community, you have an outside advisor prepare drawings and measurements for the contractors to follow, to ensure the proper technique is used and you get a quality job (examples: roof flashing details and window replacement details). Fourth is construction project supervision. So you spent money on a bid specification and a construction detail but you don't have someone looking out for you with a trained eye making sure the contractor doesn't cut a corner when you are not there. A construction advisor should be hired to supervise a contractor to make sure you get what you paid for. Fifth is a recurring maintenance problem. When a community keeps seeing the same repair bills over and over again, they should hire someone with a trained eye to track down the source of the problem and get it fixed. Sixth are utility conservation projects. If your community wants to seriously reduce utility bills hire an advisor. Changing to fluorescent lighting in your common hallways is a start, but an expert can find items you simply don't have the background for. Last is amending condo documents. A good condo lawyer who has

worked with many communities can save your residents a lot of time and confusion by suggesting realistic amendments to make your documents more up-to-date and user friendly.

Where do you look for Advisors? The best place to start is with free advisors. My third article in the August 2004 issue of *Common Interest*: "Turbo Charge Change at your Community with Committees," I discussed surveying the community to see what skills your neighbors have and if they are willing to volunteer. Second, consult former board members. If your association has dealt with an issue in the past, or has recurring problems chances are former board members are knowledgeable. Third, a neighboring condominium board may be able to provide advice. Maybe a friend lives in another condo that has dealt with the same problem previously. Or maybe a community you drive by is going through the same project, don't be shy, stop in and ask how it is going? Ask what they think about their contractors. Ask if they know which board member would know more and get their name or unit number and talk to them.

Outside of free sources of help, there are many professionals who deal exclusively with condo communities like yours that are available to advise your association. First, ask professional associations, like CAI, Community Association Institute, Connecticut Chapter, www.caict.org for referrals. Next, property management companies may have folks on staff whose sole function is to advise and work with

boards on projects like yours. If you are self-managed, call a property management company in your area and ask if they have an option where you can hire managers or people on their staff as a consultant for an hourly or project fee. Structural engineers, architects, construction managers and lawyers are all available to be your association's reference too.

Reminder: Remember if cost is the main reason why your community does not get advice from people who have "been there, done that" you have options. You don't have to hire a person for the entire project length. Instead, hire advisors to provide initial instruction, to work on part of a task, or on an hourly basis. The cost of doing a job without competent advisors has the potential to be much greater than the cost of doing a job properly—as a board member with fiduciary responsibility are you willing to take that risk?

Next month I will summarize the techniques we've discussed over the last six articles. Until then I hope you list the projects you are facing and see if any of them would benefit from outside assistance in order to get things done at your community faster! ■

Mr. Munz is a former US ARMY Captain where he learned the importance of providing clear guidance and delegating to teammates. Prior to military service, Cornell University business programs taught him the importance of focusing time on tasks that have the greatest impact. Now he works with Pyramid Real Estate Group.