



What's Trending in Condo Conflict Management

By Marc Bhalla

A STRING of recent case law, together with a greater appreciation of just how much time is required to proceed to court, has led many condominium communities to start approaching conflict differently.



1. Mindset: Encouraging Compliance.

A few years ago, attention was given to a service that helped condominium communities collect DNA samples of dogs so that anyone who did not pick up after their pet could be identified and punished. More recently, we are seeing and hearing about many condos providing residents with bags and well positioned receptacles to make it easier for them to pick up after their pets. These different approaches highlight a shift toward encouraging compliance by aiming to avoid issues arising rather than allocating resources toward a reactive approach.

2. Role: From Cop to Educator.

We are finding condominiums moving away from taking on the role of police officer and toward that of teacher. Stories of property managers and boards sitting down with new owners to “translate” condominium documents and otherwise increasing efforts to make those new to the community feel welcome can help avoid the unfortunate circumstance of a condominium resident’s first introduction to their board or property manager coming only once they have become involved in a problem.

3. Time: Early Intervention.

Increasingly, condominium communities are recognizing and taking advantage of the opportunity to address conflict in the early stages. Having a difficult conversation instead of avoiding it, mediating voluntarily and other like-minded approaches provide a chance to address conflict quickly and cost effectively. In many



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ways, early conflict resolution is becoming viewed in a similar light as preventative maintenance.

4. Tone: Communication Considerations.

As some may not appreciate that condominium business can only be conducted at duly constituted board meetings which typically take place no more frequently than monthly, many condominium communities are starting to appreciate the benefit of establishing shared expectations. Little things like acknowledging receipt of an email and letting the sender know when they can expect a reply can help avoid a situation becoming worse as a result of assumptions or imagination.

5. Vision: Fostering Enlightened Community.

Technological advancements, such as digital notice boards and social media, have made it easier for condominium communities to foster an informed environment and avoid disputes escalating as a result of a lack of understanding.

Recent trends in condominium conflict management embrace an approach that is proactive, conciliatory and intended to avoid the escalation of issues and resulting costs. ■

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