

So you want to be a Board Member?

As the Two Sunset Pointe Homeowners Association moves forward with the Annual Meeting process, voting for the Board of Directors is one of the most important acts a member of the Association will make. I want to assist anyone that is interested in running for a position on the Board with an idea of what it takes to be an effective Board Member. No matter what drives the person who wants to serve on the board it is not something that either the candidate, or the owners selecting their new board, should take lightly.

Do you have the time to commit to being a Board member?

First and foremost there are the monthly Board meetings. These consist of not only the regular sessions that are open to all owners who wish to attend, but also the executive session where items such as contracts and legal issues are discussed. These meetings often times are long, and as a member of the Board you should plan to devote at least one day per month to attend this meeting. There is considerable time in preparation for each meeting to consider in your planning. The Board members will receive their Board Books with information approximately four (4) days prior to the meeting. Each Board Book will consist of approximately 100 to 150 pages for each open and executive session materials. When you attend the Board meeting, you should come prepared to make the decisions that are on the agenda that require Board action. All questions you may have about the materials in the Board book, should be addressed to the Community Manager prior to the meeting. The Board is there to do the business of the Association, this is not a members meeting. Owners may attend and are afforded a question and answer time at the end of the meeting. Owners should not ask questions during the meeting, this is a business meeting.

Each Board member will be assigned to a committee to which he/she will serve on as a liaison. While serving as the liaison, you do not have any voting power on the committee. You are there to represent the Board and to act as a conduit for the free flow of information between the Board and the committees for whom you are a liaison. Most of the committees meet at least four times per year. The committees are an extremely important part of the governance of the community, and as such it is important that the Board member assigned as a liaison to the committee commit the time needed to make sure that the committee's questions are answered and that the Board is kept informed of committee actions.

Can you make the tough decisions when it's required?

Being a Board member can be frustrating at times. The primary role of the Board is to conduct the business of the Association. Being a Board member doesn't just mean showing up for meetings or approving the budget. It does not mean just being a "rubber stamp" based on what someone else thinks or simply supporting a project or activity. It means being able to develop and enforce policies and procedures. It means being able to work well with others in a cooperative spirit to come to decisions. Often times these policies, procedures and decisions may not be the popular thing to do. Board members are required to step outside their immediate circle of family, friends, and neighbors and make decisions based on the greater good of the community. The decisions that need to be made in the best interest of the community may not be what you as a Board member may personally prefer, and usually will not please all your friends and neighbors. While this may be difficult at times, it may also be one of the most rewarding ways you will find to volunteer your time.

Can you do all of this and still have fun?

It isn't all about policies and tough decisions. Your community is only as good as the owners make it and establish and maintaining a sense of community is a part of the Board member's responsibility. Planning and attending functions such as the Lifestyle events and activities produced by the Social Committee and being a presence in the community are as important as any policy decisions you may make. Other owners will want to talk with you about their ideas and concerns and what better way to be in contact with them than attending a variety of events and activities.

So what makes an effective Board member?

Board members must pay attention and be willing to make hard, and often unpopular decisions. When owners agree to serve on the Board they accept the responsibilities that go along with the position. There is a serious commitment of time and to being accountable to the Association. Board members act on behalf of the whole community, and members who do not have that vision can end up being the Association's worst nightmare. Boards, in order to be successful, must be able to step back and see the "Big Picture". They have to be ready to receive information, make the tough decisions and to support the decisions of the majority of the board after the votes are taken. Some key traits of the successful, productive boards are:

- Board Members have to read their governing documents.
- Board Members are prepared for the Board meetings.
- Board Members are professional in their dealings at all times.
- Board Members act in good faith and do not promote personal agendas.
- Board Members keep confidential information confidential.
- Board Members do not use the owner's personal information for business or personal use.
- Board Members do not share the Association's documents, communication, and confidential information with anyone outside of the Board. (Not even spouses)
- Board Members welcome and participate in education and training.
- Board Members think before they act.
- Board Members set overall policy based on their mission statement and allow management and staff to implement those policies.
- Board Members consistently seek ways to improve effectiveness.
- Remember a good Board Member must remain open minded, even if someone disagrees with you. Your role is to carefully consider all sides of an issue and make thoughtful decisions.
- Board Members should understand their authority comes as a board, not a board member. They know they don't possess any individual authority. Therefore, they quickly support group decisions, even if they are counter to their own personal opinion.
- Always exercise fairness. Board Member are there to serve their communities, not their own personal interests. Their friends receive no special benefits; they know that HOA rules must be evenly applied to all community members.
- Take your role seriously. Board Members understand their responsibilities as a fiduciary of a large non-profit company (the HOA) that control their assets.
- Board Members are fair and consistent and don't selectively enforce.
- Board Members understand the value of professional advice.
- Board Members do not take action or make commitments individually. The authority of the Board is as an authoritative body.
- Be positive and optimistic. Should set positive expectations and refuse to get discouraged, even when faced with tough decisions.