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HOA Board Meeting Notice Requirements as of 9-1-15

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Effective September 1, 2015, the laws for notice for HOA board meetings have changed. These laws are not applicable to condominium associations. The new laws apply regardless of what an HOA's governing documents require in terms of notice. HOA board members should familiarize themselves with the meeting notice requirements to ensure that no inadvertent violations occur. An HOA's own legal counsel, and in professionally managed communities, an HOA's professional property manager, will be able to assist associations in helping to make sure these notice requirements are met. The new requirements affect what a board meeting notice must include in the event a board meeting is held electronically, and adds additional items that require 72-hour notice before being discussed and/or acted on. The new requirements include the following:

- ALL board meetings may now be held electronically or by telephone;
- A board no longer needs to provide notice of a meeting when the board acts on an item (any item, it's now immaterial whether it's "routine and administrative" or "a reasonably unforeseen emergency or urgent necessity" as long as the item is not one of the "magic 14" (these items are outlined below); and
- Seven new items now require a board meeting before being discussed or acted on (these items are outlined below).

Summary of Items Requiring 72-hour Owner Notice.

For any board meeting, in-person or otherwise, at which the following items are even DISCUSSED, regardless of whether a vote is taken, 72 hours notice must be given to all owners as outlined below. Items that may not even be discussed at a Board meeting without 72 hour owner notice are **[bolded items are new effective 9-1-15]**:

- (1) fines;
- (2) damage assessments;
- (3) initiation of foreclosure actions or enforcement actions¹;
- (4) increases in assessments;
- (5) levying special assessments;
- (6) appeals from denials of architectural control approval;
- (7) suspending rights of an owner before the owner has an opportunity to appear before the board;
- (8) lending or borrowing money;**
- (9) the adoption and/or amendment of one of the association's governing documents;**
- (10) the approval of an annual budget or and amendment of an annual budget that increases the budget by more than 10%;**
- (11) the sale or purchase of real property;**
- (12) filling a vacancy on the board;**
- (13) construction of new capital improvements (does not include repair, replacement, or enhancement of existing capital improvements); or**
- (14) the election of an officer. (These are the "magic 14" items that will be referenced further below.)**

¹ **Initiation of a force mow** or other self-help remedies would be considered "initiation of enforcement action" in all likelihood – so force mows should be approved by the board at an in-person noticed, open, board meeting, or there should be a policy adopted prescribing a pre-set policy and authorization for force mows. Same with **finances, common area usage right suspension**, and initiation of any other enforcement action.

However, a board may take action outside of a meeting, including voting by electronic or telephonic means, without 72-hour notice if each board member is given a reasonable opportunity to express their opinion to the other board members and given the opportunity to vote and the “magic 14” items are not voted on or discussed.

Form and content of 72-hour owner notice of board meeting.

*The 72 hour notice of Board meeting must include the “date, hour, place, and general subject” of a regular or special board meeting, and a general description of each item to be brought up in executive session.

*Ideally (though the statute provides no guidance on what “general subject” means), include in the notice any specific agenda item that you know of (for example, “a rule amendment will be voted on.”)

*In addition to specific known agenda topics, general notice might look like: “Topics may include general association business, including old business and new business, covenant enforcement and budgeting/assessment.”

*If the board meeting is going to be held electronically or telephonically, the notice must include instructions on how the owners can access the electronic communication method. The owners must be able to access the meeting using the same method the board uses to access the meeting. Owners should not, however, be allowed to listen during executive session.

*Executive session matters may include personnel matters, litigation, contract negotiations, enforcement actions, confidential attorney communications, matters involving the invasion of owners’ privacy, or matters involving parties who have requested confidentiality and the board has agreed to honor that request.

Timing and method of 72-hour notice.

Notice of a board meeting (in-person, electronic, or telephonic) at which any of the “magic 14” items are even discussed, must be either:

(1) mailed to owners at least 10 but no more than 60 days beforehand;

OR

(2) provided at least 72 hours before the meeting by:

(a) being posted notice in a conspicuous location on the common area or (with permission) and owner’s Lot, *OR* on an association-maintained website or on “other internet media” – presumably Facebook, etc.); **AND**

(b) being emailed to all owners who have provided their email address to the HOA.

****Situations in which open board meetings and 72 hour owner notice ARE required**:**

ANY time the board will be voting on *or even discussing* any item on the “magic 14” list.

****Situations in which open board meetings and 72 hour owner notice are NOT required (board must only observe whatever notice requirements are contained in the bylaws for director meetings)**:**

Where there is no discussion or vote on any of the "magic 14" items. For example, meetings at which none of the "magic 14" topics are discussed or voted on do not need to be open or noticed. Landscape contracts could be approved at a non-72-hour noticed meeting, for example.

Actions taken without noticed meeting must be documented.

Actions taken without the 72-hour notice to owners must be summarized orally at, (including any actual or estimated expenditures approved) and documented in the minutes of, the next regular or special board meeting.

Executive session permitted topics.

The board continues to maintain the right to adjourn a board meeting and reconvene in a closed executive session for certain issues, namely, personnel matters, litigation, contract negotiations, enforcement actions, confidential attorney communications, matters involving the invasion of owners' privacy, or matters involving parties who have requested confidentiality and the board has agreed to honor that request. Decisions made in executive session must be summarized orally in general terms, including any expenditures approved, and recorded in the minutes. This author recommends that boards not make any decisions, or keep any minutes, in executive session. Discuss items as appropriate, then come out of executive session into the "regular" meeting and take the vote, and record the vote in the minutes. There is no "requirement" that the board go into executive session to discuss certain topics, it is simply an option for the board to use at its discretion.

Development Period Exceptions

With important exceptions, the meeting requirements discussed above do not apply during the development period. The only instances where the 72-hour open, noticed meeting requirements apply during the development period are if a board meeting is conducted for the purpose of:

- (1) adopting or amending the governing documents, including declarations, bylaws, rules, and regulations of the association;
- (2) increasing the amount of regular assessments of the association or adopting or increasing a special assessment;
- (3) electing non-developer board members of the association or establishing a process by which those members are elected; or
- (4) changing the voting rights of members of the association.

In these four cases, even under the development period, owners must be given the 72-hour (or mailed) noticed of meeting. There is no "magic 14" for the development period – it is a "magic 4."

Minutes.

Boards must keep written minutes as record of each regular and special meeting and give owners access to approved minutes. This is true for conference call meetings just like in-person meetings.

Recommendation.

The "magic 14" items have the potential to make board meetings lengthy and unwieldy, consuming large amounts of volunteer board member time. The potential for this depends obviously on the size of the community and the number of violations that occur. It is recommended that Boards consider speaking with the Association's legal counsel regarding adopting a standard, standing policy that would eliminate the need to discuss routine "magic 14" items on a case-by-case basis.

For example, fines are on the "magic 14" list – the board cannot even *discuss* fines without an open and noticed board meeting. The board could consider adopting a policy of a standard fining schedule, to automatically be followed in the event of a violation, without need for case-by-case discussion of fines unless the board deems it appropriate (in which case the board would reserve discussion on the topic for an open and noticed board meeting.) Force mows are "initiation of enforcement action", so again, need to be approved case-by-case at an open board meeting, or a standard pre-approved procedure needs to be adopted. Consult with association legal counsel to discuss options – they will vary depending on the particular HOA documents.

Conclusion.

These statutory changes represent a significant change in the HOA Board meeting landscape. HOA directors would be well advised to familiarize themselves with these new laws, and consult with the our attorneys and your management professional to help ensure compliance.