

It is impossible to comprehend the experience of living in a condominium community unless you have lived in one. Having to accept decisions that will affect your lifestyle and finances being made by individuals who need no qualifications except to be voted onto a board shows complete irresponsibility and frankly is quite frightening. Putting power and control into the hands of ill prepared individuals can prove hurtful and harmful to condo owners and their communities.

People move to a condo because they don't want to be bothered with some of the responsibilities of owning a home- but that doesn't mean that they are willing to give complete control to individuals who have no particular credentials or experience to make decisions for them without having some discussion and input from owners who just might have some helpful information- after all it's their money they are spending.

Boards have the declaration, by-laws and rules and regulations to guide them but they only help if the Board members have taken the time to read and interpret them. Our members didn't even read the managers contract before they signed it obligating the condo to a 3 year contract.

Would you turn over your money to be managed by a group of people who may or may not have any credentials to do so? I've been told that if I think the Board is acting irresponsibly I have 3 options- get rid of the Board, hire a lawyer or move.

Unfortunately none of these are feasible. In a small community it is very difficult to vote out a Board because there aren't enough owners who want to be on the Board and hiring a lawyer is too expensive although I did spend quite a few hundred dollars for an attorney when I was concerned about some of the Boards actions. Most of all I certainly shouldn't have to sell my home because the Board members don't have a clue about their obligations and responsibilities. .. In addition if the Board is clueless they will lean too heavily on the manager who in some cases may know even less than the Board but will view it as an opportunity to take control.

We are told that because we are a private non stock corporation the government cannot be involved in our affairs. But there is a difference between a business and a condo. In a business I could just sell my investment and walk away- no problem. But when I bought this condo it became my home. In the past year there have been a few owners who just threw up their hands and said "I can't take it anymore and I can't afford the fees" and they moved. One board member's comment was "if they can't afford the fees they shouldn't be living here". How insensitive can you be?

I happen to enjoy living in this condo- it's a very special place. But I have given serious consideration to moving over the past year. However I am reminded that I might just run into the same problems in another condo.

I would like to tell you of the first incident I had that has brought me to where I am today. I asked for permission to screen in my porch which was already enclosed on 3 sides. I was told that I couldn't. When I asked "why"- I was told that an owner had nailed up screening and the wind had blown it loose and it was waving in the breeze. However when I read the by-laws they said quite clearly that I "could enclose with either screening or glass". That's when I knew I had to stay involved. I was on the Board for 3 years but wasn't able to make much headway. But that's another story for another day. .

I would like to thank Rep. Lawlor for taking the time to listen to some condo owners and realize that there are issues that needed to be addressed. His bill is certainly a good beginning but if possible it should allow for owners to arrange for the educational programs if for some reason the Board chooses not to. At least it may produce some educated potential Board members.

I would like to finish with a few more issues that could be given some consideration. The first one would be to consider some form of meaningful licensing for property managers. At present they need only register yearly giving their list of condos that they manage. Our management company is a 1 man operation with no office – the manager works full time and manages 6 condominiums. How much time can he give to condo management?? Is it any wonder that our complex is in a constant state of disrepair??

There are 2 states who have started using ombudsmen to hear owners complaints and holding hearings with condos if there is a need. Our condo recently assessed all the owners \$550 to restore a destroyed conservation area because the Board refused to hold a notice and hearing to establish accountability.

A review of the Common Interest Ownership Act from the perspective of safeguarding owners rights. Presently it mandates yearly audits for condos of more than 50 units but has no requirement for any audits in condos less than 50 units unless the owner requesting it is willing to pay for it. We have 44 units.

As an RN, Real Estate Broker and a laundromat owner I consider myself qualified to make these criticisms.

I have also been instrumental in organizing a group of local condos for the purpose of sharing information. In doing so I realize that some condominiums are run more responsibly than others. But for those that are lacking it is imperative that protections be put into place.

Since condominium living is on the rise it is important that these and other issues be addressed so owners can enjoy their homes.

Thank You

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