

Dallas Homeowners League

**Brief on Committees
For
Neighborhood Associations**

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Neighborhood Association Committees

The tasks and the types of committees for a neighborhood association depends on the overall purpose, responsibilities, and structure of the association. Committees help distribute the work involved in running a neighborhood association. Depending on the association's size, a committee may only have a chairperson and no members or it may have a number of members that meet routinely. The major function of such committees is to assist the board by providing information gathered through research for a recommended course of action for which the purpose, scope and authority must first be agreed upon. Sound simple?

A Story About Committees – Led Down the Garden Path

This is a story told by a frustrated member of a committee who now refuses to participate in the board or committee process for her association. At a board meeting for this individual's association, the board was discussing the need to have some landscape beautification performed for the association. The president of the association immediately asked for volunteers to establish a landscape beautification committee to come up with the necessary plan for the board to implement.

Our volunteer raised her hand and was appointed to chair the committee and gather the necessary help she would need from other volunteers. During the course of the next month the landscape committee visited four nurseries, spoke with a horticulturist and met with three contractors who presented bids on an elaborate plan to re-landscape the association. Hours and hours of work were dedicated to this project by the committee members who walked the community numerous times and met during the evening hours to take all the information they had painstakingly gathered and come up with an agreed upon bid. The final cost of the project was to be forty four thousand dollars. The committee members were excited to present their plan to the board at the upcoming meeting for approval and implementation.

The night of the board meeting came and our chairperson stood up and verbally presented the committee's proposal. Half way through her presentation she began to witness the horror on the faces of the board members once the overall costs were announced, at which point the board president stopped her cold and announced, we only have five thousand dollars available in our landscape beautification budget and we were only interested in beautifying the front entrance to the community. Well, needless to say, the committee chairperson and her fellow volunteers were quite upset as their hours of work were in vain and they stormed out of the board meeting swearing they would never get involved in association business again.

The point to this true story is to stress the importance of the association board of directors setting the correct structure for committees to perform effectively for the board.

Tips for Creating Committees

First and foremost, the board establishes the purpose of the committee as well as the parameters with which the committee shall operate. For example, in the case of the landscape beautification scenario, the purpose may be established to ascertain a written specification and bid to present to the board of directors for the additional landscape beautification necessary to add plants with color to the north and south side of the main entrance of the community. The budget guideline for this project shall not exceed five thousand dollars and the committee is requested to present a qualified proposal in written form within thirty days. Any contractor who is bidding on the work must be licensed, insured and provide a plant warranty with a minimum of a ninety day time frame.

With this directive, the board has presented to the committee the three important guidelines: purpose, scope, and authority. Once these criteria are met, the committees have a platform to work from which will assure the focus that is necessary so the results will be effective for the board of directors.

Another pitfall to avoid, which many presidents and boards experience, is when the board chooses all of the members of the committee. It is usually more effective for the president or board to appoint the committee chair and allow the chairperson to choose their volunteers. In this manner, the committee has a better chance to be more productive and to work together as opposed to becoming a committee saddled with participants who may ultimately agree to disagree.

The success of the committee itself is dependent upon the quality of the leadership of the chairperson. It is the chairperson who sets the tone of committee meetings and keeps the committee members informed of the progress. In addition, the chairperson must ensure that the issues are thoroughly researched, all member ideas are considered, and any controversial issues are resolved prior to presentation to the association board of directors.

For any committee to be successful some basic steps should be followed.

- Determine the authority/basis for the establishment of the committee (refer to the legal documents of the association)
- Also identify the scope of authority that the committee has to act - are they allocated a budget, can they make decisions independently or do they make recommendations only to the board without authority to act?
- Clearly define the purpose and function of the committee so that they fulfill a specific need within the association
- Detail the responsibilities and activities of the committee and its members
- The composition/structure of the committee should identify how many members it should have, how are they appointed, whether they should be residents, the leadership and voting structure of the committee
- Identify a timeline for tasks to be completed and the term of the committee's charter (especially for ad-hoc committees)

- State how many and what kinds of recommendations the committee is expected to deliver to the board
- Clarify the board's expectations for reports and minutes to be provided to the board at regular intervals so as to ensure clear oversight and communications
- Create an understanding of the committee's relationship to the manager and how they will be expected to interact

For continued success of committees in your association

- Be sure to recognize the efforts of the volunteers
- The board should be prepared to make decisions and act on recommendations brought to them by committees. (Think this through when establishing the committee and defining its purpose).
- Verify that the association's insurance covers committee members in addition to board members for errors and omissions as well as fidelity insurance.
- Often overlooked or under-appreciated, committees are the basic building blocks of a healthy association. Committee member involvement meets the board's goal of fostering a stronger community in several ways. Aside from fulfilling a specific role in the functioning of the association and addressing an identified need, the committee's contributions help the board to fulfill its policy-making role more efficiently by allowing board members to receive necessary input and different viewpoints, while remaining focused on their role of governance.

Creating Strong Committees

With the proper use of the committee structure, not only does a board receive the immediate assistance of a support group to help with the current operations of an association, but it also lays the groundwork for potential, more experienced, future board members with knowledge of how the current board is structured. What better method to establish the training of future board members than to have volunteers who have worked together, have successfully participated with their ideas and plans being accepted by the current board, and who have seen their hard work and results placed into action?

A committee with proper direction is a powerful support mechanism to an often overburdened board of directors who will most certainly appreciate the added help. The results can be amazing to behold!

Committee Categories

- **Internal Affairs** such as Fundraising/Finance, Meeting arrangements, Communications/Publicity, Bylaws, or Social events.
- **Neighborhood Affairs** such as Housing conditions, Police-neighborhood relations, economic development, community services and resources, and Traffic safety

Committees Types

There are three types of committees that can be useful in managing the neighborhood association.

A. Mandatory Committees

Mandatory committees are specifically named in the governing documents, such as a Nominating Committee and an Elections Committee, and both play an important part in ensuring that qualified and willing candidates are available for election to vacant board positions at the annual meeting.

The powers of the board usually also include the power to appoint other committees "as the board deems appropriate in carrying out its purpose." These committees may include a Recreation Committee, Maintenance Committee, Communications Committee, Audit Committee or a Grievance Committee. (The grievance committee has traditionally not been one that attracts droves of volunteers!). Such committees are further distinguished based on whether they are a standing committee or an ad-hoc committee.

B. Standing Committees

Standing committees are often identified in the declaration and/or bylaws of the association. They are "function oriented" e.g. a Budget and Finance Committee serves a clearly defined function in the operation of the association. Standing committees remain in force indefinitely.

C. Ad-Hoc Committees

In contrast, **ad-hoc committees** are "task oriented" e.g. a grounds improvement committee may be established to fulfill the task of planning, researching and coordinating installation of new landscaping at the entrance to a community. Cease to exist once the assigned task has been completed.

A committee's structure varies greatly. It can range from one person to a group of individuals. Often the chairperson of a mandatory or standing committee is also a board member depending on the number of volunteers available to work in the association.

To maintain active, productive and motivated members on the committees the association should:

- Encourage members to participate in the association and the committee planning process.
- Define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee
- Provide reasons for the actions to be considered by the committee and the neighborhood association
- Give recognition to members and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the neighborhood association

- Make meeting time and committee work as productive as possible. No one wants to feel they are wasting time.
- Help members develop communication skills.

Generally it is important that the chairperson of a standing committee be a board member to ensure the connection of the committee to the board. It is recommended that the Board promote social events for general membership and to build a sense of neighborhood and community involvement. It is also advisable to focus on the special interests of different age levels, as capturing the interest of one segment of the community often draws others.

Committee Operations

Once committees get started on their assignment, one can encourage greater community participation by holding public meetings that are posted well in advance. Encourage volunteers, recognize them and reward them whenever possible. In order to accomplish this task, it will take participation from board members, the president, and residents alike. It may also take some active marketing and promotion by everyone else involved in association affairs. Since a portion of what the association must do every day is viewed by some as negative, there should be a focus on the many positive aspects of living in and being a member of a neighborhood association.

When a board has a strong committee structure, it can save the association a wealth of time. Instead of requiring that the board as a whole be an expert on every issue, directors can delegate areas of research and responsibility to appropriate committees. During tenure as a board member, one should expect to serve on at least one committee as well. This is a very important responsibility. Committees do much of the legwork and much of the consensus building that helps a board make good decisions.

Remember: Committees are time-savers. Board members should not undermine their efforts by insisting on retracing whatever path the committee members took to reach their decision!

Committee Reporting

Committees should provide a routine report either orally or written at each board meeting and recorded in the minutes. An example of a routine report is provided in the **Appendix 1 - Sample** Committee Report Form **starting on page 14**. Committees also may have proposals that they want to present to the Board for approval.

A. Routine Committee Reporting

The committee chairperson is usually charged with giving an oral report or completing the written report form. If actions are required the board should take a vote with the results recorded in the minutes. Written reports can be distributed prior to the board meeting so board members could ask any questions before the

meeting, and are ready to vote when the item comes up! What a way to spread the workload while accomplishing more than ever!

As a volunteer organization, a community association faces the unusual challenge of running a corporation with part-time leadership. Volunteer residents have varied experience and limited time to dedicate to their roles.

B. Special Committee Presentations

The final requirement is for the committee to present its findings and recommendations in written form to the board of directors. Of course a verbal presentation supplemented with the written report is ideal, as board members will have an opportunity to study the written documentation, possibly request additional information, and then be in a position to make the best educated decisions for the community.

Standing Committee Suggestions

There are a number of possible standing committees that could be established in a neighborhood association. The following provides some suggestions.

A. Government Liaison Committee

Recognizing the need to work with your government officials will be an advantage in maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for your community. Please note that many of the local development ordinances mirror your own Association standards and criteria. When reviewing your zoning and design guidelines, it is not unusual to find that the goals and objectives of the municipality parallel those of your Association. Previously adopted and implemented local ordinances ensure that a community is developed with consistency and provide aesthetic appeal as well.

What can your Association do to initiate this vital connection? Involve your Association in significant governmental matters! Sign up for email notices announcing upcoming municipal meetings that will affect your Community (zoning changes, general plan updates, and architectural ordinances). Attend regular meetings of your local government and make contact with the dignitaries.

If your Association has a small membership (or even if it has a large membership), it might prove beneficial to contact other associations within your geographic area to form a Neighborhood Association. Many local government entities readily recognize and are supportive of the establishment of Neighborhood Associations. How can your Association be involved in issues related to your community through a Neighborhood Association?

- By scheduling regular meetings in which homeowners can interface with their government officials

- By providing guest speakers who address key issues that impact member communities
- By providing meaningful input regarding major issues (traffic, environment, zoning, etc.) through advisory groups
- By hosting educational forums on referendums and the platforms of political candidates

Most municipalities now have websites with links to Neighborhood Associations. They are more than willing to provide your Association with visibility on their website.

Benefits of Connecting to Local Government

Your involvement with your municipality should not be limited to matters such as rules and regulations, speed limit enforcement or neighbor disputes. A great way to connect with your local government is to participate in community promotions. The Fort Lauderdale City Commission, in working with Neighborhood Associations, has created the Community Appearance Board (CAB). In an effort to promote an aesthetic environment, CAB publicly recognizes projects that positively affect the geographic area of the association through the Community Appearance Awards. Another great incentive in the Fort Lauderdale area that involves both the municipality and the homeowners is the WOW Awards program. The monthly WOW Award is presented in recognition of residential properties located throughout the city that contribute to the aesthetic appeal of their respective area. The monthly winner, which is selected by CAB Board Members, is commended for maintaining a home that represents excellence in its exterior beauty, style and landscaping.

If your Association has a new Board of Directors or if the association has been in existence for a while, chances are you will, in time, need the expertise and assistance of your local government. Take the initiative today to connect with your local government and reap the many rewards of careful planning, diligent oversight, and neighborly cooperation.

B. Landscaping Committee

One of the keys to a maintaining a successful community association landscape is a Landscape Committee.

A Landscape Committee is usually most successful when the position is filled by a Board member who has authority to direct the maintenance contractor and promptly approve necessary repairs or minor enhancements from an established budget. The Chairperson should represent the interests of the Association's members and Board.

The roles/responsibilities of the Landscape Committee Chairperson include:

- **Regularly communicating activities** of the landscape contractor to the Board of Directors. Request time on the agenda to present a landscape report including: how things are going, what recommendations you have with associated costs, and other issues with suggested solutions.
- **Attending regular walk thru** with the landscape contractor and communicating results to the Board. Being the conduit between the Board and the landscape contractor is the primary role.
- **Consulting with landscape professionals** (landscape architect and landscape contractor) to establish adequate schedules & effective maintenance programs.
- **Communicating expectations** to the landscape contractor
- **Monitoring performance** and work quality of the landscape contractor, while possessing a complete understanding of the terms and conditions of the landscape maintenance contract
- **Preparing and presenting reports** with recommendations for Board review

Establishing an effective Landscape Committee will improve communication and establish clear targets to enable your landscape contractor to service the specific needs of the Board while maintaining, protecting and enhancing your landscape. It's a wise way for a community association to get the most out of every landscape dollar spent!

C. Social Committee

The Social Committee manages all of the events sponsored by the neighborhood association.

Roles:

- Oversee the Social Committee
- Responsible for planning and implementing social functions for members of the Association. It shall be the general policy of the Association to have a general social function at least once each quarter.

D. Membership Committee

Membership dues are generally a main source of funding for the association. Membership drives are critical to remain viable in the community and ensure that residents know what they need to do to join.

Roles/Responsibilities:

- Responsible for promoting new memberships
- Collecting the dues
- Maintaining a list of all members once a year
- Publishing a directory for the association at least every two years.

E. Communications Committee

Communications are vital to a healthy association. Keeping residents informed and involved is the life of the association. Communications can take many forms and can be as simple as word-of-mouth to routinely published newsletters. You pick what works for your association. Leadership of this committee is important to its success.

Roles/Responsibilities:

- Prepare and publish a monthly association newsletter and supervising its distribution.
- Coordinate the newsletter's distribution

F. Webmaster

A webmaster enables the association to have an electronic presence in the community. It also allows the association to reach beyond its borders for special events it might sponsor. It is great if the individual picked for this role is experienced in web management but it is not essential. The web applications today are intuitive and lots of help is available to ensure your success.

Roles/Responsibilities:

- At large chairperson responsible for maintaining the website.
- Advise the Board of needed changes or revisions to the website

G. Zoning Committee

The Zoning Committee is valuable to ensure that someone in the association is focused on what is happening in the community surrounding the association's boundaries. Connections to city councils and a knowledge of the zoning and/or development processes in the city are very valuable; however, they are not essential. These can all be learned

Roles/Responsibilities:

- Head the Architectural and Covenant Standards Committee. The Architectural and Covenant Standards Committee which is responsible for seeking and maintaining the Building and Use Restrictions provisions of the various association's development areas.
- Notify any person in violation of any restrictions of any possible non-compliance to the appropriate Building and Use Restrictions for their development
- Making a monthly report in the newsletter of the inquiries received, actions taken, and status of each instance of non-compliance.

H. Security Committee

The Security Committee should work with the local police department to monitor what criminal activities are occurring in the surrounding area.

Roles/Responsibilities:

- Responsible for organizing and maintaining such neighborhood watch systems”.
- Obtaining and disseminating information of any criminal activities in the association’s area.
- Foster a healthy and close relationship between the association’s residents and the Dallas Police Department.

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Sample Committee Report Form

(Name of Association)

Date: (Date of report)

Committee: (Name of Committee)

Report submitted by: (Name of Chairperson)

Item #1: (Description of activity)

- **Update:** (Insert the update)
- **Recommendation:** (Insert any recommendations associated with the activity for the Board's consideration.)
- **Action:** (Insert what action should be taken by when)

Item #2: (Description of activity)

- **Update:** (Insert the update)
- **Recommendation:** (Insert any recommendations associated with the activity for the Board's consideration.)
- **Action:** (Insert what action should be taken by when)