

Brief - Problem Management

Neighborhood associations sometimes run into problems, become unproductive, and devolve into conflict. The following provide some suggestions in managing these problems.

Unproductive Association or Committee

Look for the following conditions:

- Fear of the possible results
- Conflicting loyalties of some members
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Poor leadership
- Rigid decision-making methods, not allowing open discussion

When such problems occur, encourage open, respectful discussion. Let the members try to identify the obstacles in their way.

Understanding and Managing Conflict

One of the primary benefits of forming a neighborhood association is the improvement in communication between neighbors. However, there will be times, in spite of our best efforts, when communication will break down and a conflict will develop. A simple unresolved conflict can escalate and cause serious damage to relationships and to a neighborhood association, so it is very important that neighbors do their best to handle these situations constructively.

One of the biggest obstacles to managing conflict well is that most of us find conflict to be very uncomfortable. As a result, we either try to avoid dealing with it, or we approach the conflict as if we were going to battle, determined to "win". There is, however, another approach to this common dilemma, one that accepts conflict as a normal aspect of any relationship or organization. Seen in this light, one can approach conflict resolution as an opportunity for growth, change and new understandings.

Neighborly Communication

Consider using the following tips the next time you are faced with the challenge of effectively resolving a conflict:

- **Talk directly.** Direct conversation is much more effective than sending a letter, banging on the wall, throwing a rock or complaining to everyone else.
- **Choose a good time.** Try to talk in a quiet place where all parties can be comfortable and undisturbed for as long as the discussion takes. Don't approach the other person as he or she is leaving for work or after you've had a bad day.
- **Plan ahead.** Plan out what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.
- **Don't blame or name call.** Antagonizing the other person only makes it harder for her or him to hear you.

- **Give information.** Don't judge or interpret the other person's behavior. Instead, give information about your own situation and feelings and how the person's behavior affects you.
- **Listen.** Give the other person a chance to tell his or her side of the conflict completely. Relax and listen; try to learn how the other person feels.
- **Show that you are listening.** Although you may not agree with what is being said, tell the other person that you hear her or him and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.
- **Talk it all through.** Get all the issues and feelings out into the open. Don't leave out the part that seems too difficult to discuss.
- **Work on a joint solution.** Two or more people cooperating are much more effective than one person telling another to change. Be specific. "I will turn my music off at midnight," is better than "I won't play loud music anymore."
- **Follow through.** Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure that the agreement is still working.

Ways to Kill Any Organization

The following are some ways that an organization can be destroyed. Knowing them is the first step in avoiding their influence on your neighborhood association.

1. Don't attend meetings, but if you do, arrive late.
2. Be sure to leave before the meeting is closed.
3. Never say anything at the meeting – wait until you get outside.
4. While at the meeting, vote to do everything, then go home and do nothing.
5. The next day, find fault with the officers and other members.
6. Take no part in the organization's activities.
7. Be sure to sit in the back of the room so you can talk freely to another member.
8. Get all the organization can give you, but don't give the organization anything.
9. Never ask anyone to join the organization.
10. At every opportunity, threaten to resign, and encourage others to do the same.
11. Talk cooperation, but don't cooperate.
12. When asked to help, say you don't have the time.
13. Never learn anything about the organization.
14. Never accept an office – it is easier to criticize than to do things.
15. If appointed to a committee, never give any time or service to it.
16. If there are dues to pay, don't pay them.
17. Don't do anything more than you have to, and when others willingly and unselfishly use their ability to help the cause along, cry loudly that the organization is being run by a clique.