

Best Use of Your PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER

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Realtors say the three most important factors in the transaction are location, location, location. In an association's relationship with their professionals, particularly professional engineers, the three most important factors are communication, communication, communication.

In beginning a relationship with your engineer, establish the lines of communication. Who is the point of contact on the association board? Is it the treasurer, the president or the entire board for every communication? It could be that for different communications different board members should be the point of contact. For instance, the professional's invoice, and approved invoices from contractors performing work for the association may be best directed only to the association treasurer.

Some associations establish committees for specific projects. There could be a reserve study, transition study, or

construction committee to whom all the communications for that project are directed. The association board should also make clear what the role of the property manager is expected to be. Does the property manager receive all the communications and then distribute them to the appropriate members of the community or is the property manager just copied on what the engineer distributes directly to the association?

In the other direction, the engineer should identify to whom within the engineering office the board or property manager should be contacting. It could be the principal of the engineering office or an engineer who is a project manager for a specific task.

Managing the expectations of the association members is next. Boards must decide when the engineer can most effectively present information and solutions to the broader community. The engineer can be very helpful in presenting clear information at owner's meetings about capital improvement projects that are about to begin or how funding in a reserve study was determined and the explanation of why it is needed. Meetings can be in person or via video. The association should understand that any professional has particular expertise and one

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ENGINEER...

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measurement of the value of that expertise is the time the professional spends to convey it. Professional fees are based upon time, so all those requested meetings should



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be understood to be reflected in invoices. Avoid a misunderstanding about what is included in services.

An engineer must understand the history of the association. Any construction documents that may be available from the original construction or improvements that have

been made over time are important for the engineer to review. Particularly important with the recent emphasis on structural evaluations is anything from the original construction. If old paper drawings are available, the engineer can assist in making electronic copies to preserve those documents and make them available for future reference.

In the development of the specification for new construction or renovation, it is important for the association to be involved. While the engineer can provide the technical specifications for the project, the association has a keen interest in the administrative, schedule, and risk management aspects. The association must be prepared to review the specification, approve the proposed schedule, allow the contractor use of the facilities, review contractor required insurance coverage and any impact to homeowners during construction. Depending on the complexity of the project, the association may want the engineer to be on site to confirm the contractor is performing according to the specification. The frequency and duration of that engineer's on-site work needs to be established. Those on-site inspections are also going to assist the engineer in approving

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the contractor's invoices for progress payments on the job.

The association can better understand the responsibility of their professional engineer with a little understanding of the code of ethics specific to our profession. The National Society Professional Engineers has six fundamental canons of the code. Two of them are:

- Hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public
- Act for each employer or client as faithful agents or trustees

Keeping the ethical responsibility of the professional engineer and the benefits of clear and consistent communication in mind will make the relationship between the association and the engineer most beneficial for both. ■

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