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WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR HOA?

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To my fellow members,

As we approach the end of another year, I want to take a moment to reflect on our journey together and express my heartfelt gratitude for your hard work, dedication, and resilience. The enthusiasm and creativity you all displayed have made a remarkable difference and has strengthened our community this year.

Serving as your Chapter President has been a rewarding experience — one that I will never forget! I am particularly proud of the growth we have seen within our organization. Membership, engagement, retention, sponsorships, and volunteers support has been off the charts in 2024, and I look forward to continued success as we enter 2025.

Looking ahead, we have exciting opportunities on the horizon. We will continue to focus on delivering memorable experiences and best-in-class education to our nearly 1,000 members. A few important dates to remember are:

- **January 19, 2025** – Houston Marathon (Mile 11 Refueling Station)
- **January 24, 2025** – Annual Awards Gala (Omni Houston Hotel)
- **March 5, 2025** – TLAC Rally Day (Austin)
- **April 23, 2025** – Tradeshow (The POST Houston)
- **July 24, 2025** – Take a Manager to Lunch (River Oaks Country Club)
- **October 1, 2025** – Legal Seminar (Houston Racquet Club)

Next year's calendar is beginning to take shape and will include a renewed focus on homeowner leader education and out-of-the-box thinking for social events.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to thank all of the dedicated Board members who have served with me during my six-year tenure of the Board of Directors. The insight, thoughtful conversations, and consistent focus on CAI's mission has helped shape our industry for the better.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support and dedication. I wish you and your loved ones a joyful and restful holiday season. Let's come back energized and ready to take on the new year together! 🍷

Regards,

NIKKOLE LUNA, CMCA, AMS, PCAM,
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“

The enthusiasm and creativity you all displayed have made a remarkable difference and has strengthened our community this year.

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**CALENDAR
 OF EVENTS**

**PREMIUM PARTNER
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**2025 HOUSTON MARATHON
 VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY
 JANUARY 19**

**AWARDS GALA
 JANUARY 24**

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WHEN DISASTER STRIKES:

What Property Owners' Associations (HOAs) Should Know About

LEVYING ASSESSMENTS

TO FUND REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE, AND LOANS.

By: Kate Kilanowski, Cagle Pugh Ltd., LLP



Because of our aging communities and extreme weather events, property owners' associations across Texas are trying to figure out how to pay for the costly, unbudgeted maintenance and repairs of common areas, common elements, and other items that are the association's responsibility. Such items may include screening walls, fences, siding, roofs, carports, garages, detention ponds, balconies, streets, lighting, trails, pools, and landscaping. This article will provide a VERY brief overview of SOME of the legal issues and prerequisites HOAs should consider before levying a special

assessment, increasing regular assessments, levying an individual assessment, or approving a loan.

First, consider whether your client is a subdivision association or a condominium association, and if it is a condominium association, know when its declaration was recorded and whether Chapter 81 of the Texas Property Code applies. For the sake of this article, an "HOA" means a residential property owners' association (including associations that administer



condominiums and subdivisions). A condominium association is an HOA that administers condominium development, while a subdivision association is an HOA that administers a subdivision development. Each of these HOAs is subject to various provisions of the Texas Property Code. We will also assume in this article that the HOA is a Texas nonprofit corporation. *But you, as the HOA's counsel, should not assume anything.* Just because the HOA has always called themselves a condo does not mean they are a condominium development. I have seen a developer of a subdivision development prepare and record bylaws invoking the Texas Uniform Condominium Act. And be wary of the client who insists they are neither a subdivision association nor a condominium association, but instead a "townhome association."

Next, determine whether the expense contemplated is the HOA's responsibility (often called a "common expense"), as opposed to an owner expense. Something to think about is whether the money the HOA needs is for maintenance, repair, an insurable loss, an insurance deductible, and/or a capital improvement. Maintenance and repair responsibilities can be different from insurance responsibilities, especially in condominiums. In order to make this determination, the HOA's counsel will need to analyze all of the HOA's dedicatory instruments, and for a condominium development, Chapter 82 of the Texas Property Code (and Chapter 81 if applicable).

Once you confirm that the money needed is for an HOA common expense, determine the HOA's authority to increase assessments, levy a special assessment or any other kind of assessment, obtain a loan, and/or collateralize the association's right to collect assessments and to assign its rights to collect assessments. With respect to condominium associations, their own dedicatory instruments may provide such authority, but the Texas Property Code also grants condominium associations certain powers and authorities. For example, Texas Property Code §82.102(f) specifically grants the condominium association, through the board of directors, the power by resolution to (1) borrow money; and (2) assign as

Something to think about is whether the money the HOA needs is for maintenance, repair, an insurable loss, an insurance deductible, and/or a capital improvement.

collateral for the loan authorized by the resolution: (A) the association's right to future income, including the right to receive assessments; and (B) the association's lien rights. Texas Property Code §82.111(j) provides that the cost of repair or replacement in excess of the insurance proceeds is a common expense, and the board may levy an assessment to pay the expenses in accordance with each owner's common expense liability. Conversely, for subdivision associations, there is no statutory authority to levy special assessments, borrow money, or pledge assessments as collateral. If the subdivision association's dedicatory instruments authorize the subdivision association's board of directors to levy a special assessment, increase assessments, or borrow money, Texas Property Code §209.0051 states that the board may not, unless done in an open meeting for which prior notice was given to owners, consider or vote on matters like increases in assessments, levying of special assessments, or lending or borrowing money. If the HOA lacks the authority it needs to obtain the money it needs, consider amending the appropriate dedicatory instruments to obtain that authority.

In short, reading and understanding the HOA's governing documents, as well as the pertinent statutes, are important factors in appropriately obtaining the funds the HOA needs in order to do the things the HOA is supposed to do. Hiring counsel on the front end can make the process run smoothly. 🗨



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A Closer Look

at Implementing Surveillance Cameras in Your HOA

By: Becca Johnson, E&M Consulting, Inc.

In this technologically advancing landscape, there is a palpable increase in the use of video surveillance. From the grocery store to the amusement park, it seems they are everywhere these days—and understandably so! These pieces of technology have been shown to impact the spaces they monitor positively. It only makes sense that your HOA should begin considering the implementation of these helpful devices. Determining if your HOA should invest in video surveillance and how to go about it can be a lengthy process. Still, we've gathered some essential information to help lessen the burden.

Before committing to implementing surveillance cameras, it is crucial to weigh the pros and cons. This process will help you determine whether these tools are right for your community.



The Benefits of Surveillance Cameras in HOAs

There are many benefits to integrating surveillance cameras into your HOA, and as safety is the top priority of an HOA, this implementation has become more and more popular. Did you know that even just the visibility of surveillance cameras can deter potential criminal activities from happening? One city even saw a 50% drop in crime after installing security cameras.¹ While crimes still occur, a security camera's round-the-clock monitoring aids investigations and provides liability protection for HOAs. Some insurance companies will even lessen an HOA's premium as surveillance cameras reduce risk.



The Cons of Surveillance Cameras in HOAs

When deciding if surveillance cameras would be a good addition to your HOA, it is key to be aware of the possible cons. There are three dominant detriments to be mindful of when it comes to investing in surveillance cameras. The first would be homeowners' concerns for privacy. People can often associate surveillance cameras with a George Orwell 1984-type of an ever-present watchful eye. It is important to listen to and


address these concerns and assure your homeowners that the camera(s) will *not* invade privacy. The next con would be the cost and maintenance. Like any technology, there will be malfunctions and, at times, required maintenance. Staying on top of these maintenance needs will be decisive in preventing irreparable damage. Finally, an often-forgotten con would be that surveillance cameras can provide a false sense of security.² It is important to remind homeowners that while this addition could help prevent crime and increase the likelihood of successful investigations when crime does occur, the cameras won't catch everything, and crimes can still happen. Homeowners must remain vigilant with preventative measures like locking doors and windows.



Making Restrictions and Guidelines

If your HOA has decided to proceed with the installation of surveillance cameras after weighing the pros and cons, you will need to adjust the governing documents. These will need to be updated to correctly include guidelines and restrictions.

Your restrictions must be well-thought-out and made with the homeowners



They are helpful tools, and adding surveillance cameras to your HOA can be great, but it is important to do your research and thoroughly prepare before beginning any installations.

in mind. Ensure there are restrictions to where cameras can be placed—don't allow their installation in private yards, bathrooms, inside homes, etc. With this, there should be parameters on when the HOA is allowed to

access the surveillance footage and when the HOA will give others (homeowners or law enforcement) specific footage. It is also necessary to ensure that your updated governing documents comply with the laws regarding surveillance.

Do your research and consult legal help to ensure all the bases are covered. Some homeowners may want to install their own cameras. It is a good idea to include the reiteration that these personal surveillance cameras cannot point into neighbors' windows or yards.³

Preparing guidelines further ensures the success of the implementation. First, make installation guidelines; this might look like listing where and when the cameras will be installed. Have a written plan on data retention; typically, footage is only kept for 30–90 days and then deleted. However, this can depend on local laws and other factors.² The surveillance and recordings collected will need to be kept safe with data security, so be sure to prepare guidelines on this as

well. Also, make sure to keep up with your safe cybersecurity practices. At a basic level, this means changing passwords often and ensuring they are complex, with at least 12 characters using a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols.⁴ Along with this, perform security audits regularly.

Another great recommendation is to make data retrieval as smooth as possible. If a crime happens and footage needs to be reviewed or given to law enforcement, it is important that this process is as streamlined and intuitive as possible. Having timestamps on the footage is a significant first step, but when housing the retained data, make sure you have a process in place. Categorize the footage by date/time and keep your files up-to-date and clean.² A written protocol that is ready in case this occurs will ensure the HOA is prepared to take the following steps.



Choosing What Cameras are Best for Your HOA

When it comes time to decide which cameras will best suit your HOA, there are many to choose from. You will need to do comprehensive research, but we'll get you started.

There are a few popular types of cameras to consider first:

Dome Cameras—

The most popular type of CCTV, making up just over 33% of the CCTV types in use, the dome camera protects itself from vandalism and has a discreet look.⁵ Its 360-degree view also makes it a great option for extensive coverage.²

Turret Cameras—The younger sibling of the dome camera, turret cameras have a compact design and feature a ball-and-socket mount.⁶

Pan-Tilt-Zoom Cameras—

These cameras get their name from their ability to zoom in and move horizontally and vertically.²

Bullet Cameras—As their name suggests, these cameras have a cylindrical shape and are great for long-range footage. They are also highly visible, which can help deter people from committing crimes.⁶



When doing your research, keep in mind what features the various cameras have. Some popular considerations are whether you want them to have night vision, be wired or wireless, have high-resolution recording capabilities, and be weather-resistant. As these cameras are quite an investment, it is crucial to cover all your bases.



Notifying Homeowners and Ensuring a Smooth Introduction

Once you have weighed the pros and cons, updated your documents, and picked out the perfect camera(s), it is time to notify your homeowners and begin the introduction. Begin with a written notice explaining the transition, where these cameras will be, the intention, and other key details. This notice should be mailed and included in an online newsletter. The notice should also include a meeting date for homeowners to

attend. This meeting will go further in-depth and answer any questions that come up. Be prepared for questions. As mentioned earlier, some people have reservations about the idea of surveillance. These concerns should be met with an open ear and a level head.

With the number of surveillance cameras worldwide reaching 1 billion, the world is sure to see the increasing popularity of these devices.⁵ They are helpful tools, and adding surveillance cameras to your HOA can be great, but it is important to do your research and thoroughly prepare before beginning any installations. We know that your HOA is doing all it can to keep its community safe, so consider the addition carefully and take your time on the journey to increasing safety measures. 🟢

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Sowing the Seeds:

The Importance of Supporting DEI Programs in Community Management Companies

We've all done it, and we all know people who do it. It can be easy to say one thing but then not put in the work to back it up. Yet, as the popular saying holds true, "Actions speak louder than words." Many companies report holding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as central values, yet so many have yet to establish the programs to prove it. DEI programs are vital for community association management (CAM) companies. Building this program into your CAM company is an excellent way to cultivate a thriving workplace, so let's take a closer look.

WHAT DOES DEI LOOK LIKE?

In the workplace, supporting DEI comes in many forms. Embracing diversity means not only *hiring* people of different races, ages, gender identities, sexual orientations, etc., but it also means *uplifting* them. This is where equity comes in. Equity calls attention to the fair treatment of people by taking an individual's circumstances into account. This supports adjustments to ensure an equal end result.¹ An example of equity would be supporting accommodations for those who need it, such as letting someone work from home a couple of days a week due to a medical condition. As for inclusion, this term refers to the company's ability to involve its employees and help them succeed. It means that employees must feel comfortable speaking their minds,

know that they will be listened to, and be included in the company culture. These three aspects are all inextricably linked. It is essential to ensure that you, your company, and your workforce are all working together to ensure that DEI is a core value and practice.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DEI PROGRAMS ARE SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED?

A CAM company with a robust DEI program will reap the benefits of what it sows. It is important for workers to feel safe to be themselves at their jobs. With this, people also need to know they can voice discomforts, struggles, or issues that arise and that these will be listened to. Investing in a DEI program helps this happen and better the company culture. When a company works proactively to further

its DEI initiatives and the education of all employees, people feel more supported. This commitment welcomes growth and understanding; it embraces adaptation.

It is no secret that having people with different experiences, backgrounds, and views builds a company up—making it well-rounded. DEI programs drive innovation in the workplace. It has been reported that companies in the top quartile of broad-gender and -ethnic diversities outperform those at the bottom quartile financially.² For CAM companies, implementing and strengthening DEI programs means community managers are more prepared to help their community members. As 53% of association managers reported receiving at least one diversity or discrimination complaint in 2020, it is clear that community managers must be readily prepared for when these situations arise.³

HOW TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL DEI PROGRAM

Assessing the current state of your CAM company's DEI is an excellent place to begin. CAM companies should build a team with the DEI program as its central task. Once this is formed, the team will need to collect internal data and use this to recognize where they stand. It is important to take note of those areas in which the company is doing well and those where the company is lacking. Take into consideration past hiring trends as well as employee retention and advancement across the different demographics. Another essential move is sending out anonymous surveys where employees can mark or enter their

identities and then express their views on the company's current DEI status. This lets employees know you care about how they feel and you want to support them. Once you have these datasets, review them, take all the information and responses into account, and begin developing goals. Write these goals down—make a list, or write a few paragraphs, whatever feels best. This is an important step as it will act as your guide along this journey.

WHEN A COMPANY WORKS PROACTIVELY TO FURTHER ITS DEI INITIATIVES AND THE EDUCATION OF ALL EMPLOYEES, PEOPLE FEEL MORE SUPPORTED.

Making the plan and a list of commitments comes next. Make a document of commitments available to the entire office; adding it to the employee handbook is a great option to increase visibility and awareness. This will help keep the company and the workers accountable for holding up these values. When making the DEI plan, you can get inspiration elsewhere, but remember that your situation is unique, and you want to stay true to that. If you aren't sure where to start, educational seminars are a good first step. Many companies find success in this addition. These can be online or in-person during the work week, but either way, they should be mandatory for all. These, coupled with

the other implementations the company makes, are significant steps in the right direction. Once the plan is complete and the company begins rolling out the DEI program, promote the importance of employee feedback. Let people know the company wants to hear their thoughts and feedback; this will help increase the visibility and success of the program.

It is important to hold leaders accountable and to have them track diversity in hiring *and* promotions. A recent LinkedIn survey asked HR professionals if their companies were committed to enhancing diversity while hiring. While the survey found that 69% said yes, only 47% reported that their companies hold hiring managers *accountable* for this commitment.⁴ Implementing guidelines and check-ins will help ensure that increasing diversity is at the front of the mind and will help keep leaders on track and moving toward success.

Building your CAM's DEI program is an exciting and important journey. It is an opportunity to support your workforce and ensure your company culture is thriving. For a CAM company to flourish, a focus on implementing actions is needed. Understand that the program will change, and it should! Adaptation is key; it means you are responding to the needs that arise. Your efforts in this matter are essential and will help strengthen not only your company but also the work your community managers do in their communities. So, nurture your DEI program and watch how your company flourishes. 🌱

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HOW TO PROTECT HOMEOWNERS' PERSONAL DATA



FROM THEFT AND FRAUD

By: Graham Davis, Vice President, Association Banking at American Momentum Bank

Cybersecurity threats and internet fraud are on the rise. While it's the large-scale cyberattacks that make news headlines, in reality, according to Accenture's 2023 Cost of Cybercrime Study, 43% of cyberattacks are aimed at small businesses.

Homeowners' personal and financial data are especially vulnerable in today's high-threat cyber environment. Community association management companies and self-managed associations cannot be too careful when protecting themselves and their homeowners from theft and fraud.

Below are a few potential theft and fraud risks associations and management companies should be aware of, as well as tips for mitigating them.

Foreign Outsourcing

Some management companies are outsourcing accounting services to countries outside of the U.S. in an effort to significantly reduce payroll expenses. These overseas companies and individuals have access to associations' financial information, including homeowners' personal data and bank accounts.

Association boards should ask whether their management company is outsourcing



Remember, spyware and spear-phishing attempts are only successful if an unsuspecting employee or board member follows through on the cybercriminal's request.

work to organizations outside of the U.S. and, if so, ask additional questions to help ensure their association and homeowners are protected from potential security and fraud risks.

Examples of questions to ask community association management companies outsourcing their accounting services overseas include, “What legal protections roll down to homeowners in the event of fraud or identity theft?”, “What protections are in place for associations if funds disappear?”, and “What cyber insurance coverages may be applicable in various theft or fraud circumstances?”.

Data Breaches

Any organization that collects Personally Identifiable Information (PII)—names, social security numbers, driver's license numbers, addresses, birthdates, etc.—is at risk of a data breach. That includes associations and CAMs that collect this type of information from homeowners.

The costs of a data breach can be steep. Expenses can include, and are not limited to, hiring attorneys, computer security experts, and PCI forensic investigators; providing credit

monitoring to victims; and fines and penalties issued by regulatory agencies.

Community association management companies and self-managed associations can protect homeowners from a data breach by having a layered cybersecurity program in place that includes monitoring, detecting, and preventing data breaches.

Spear-phishing

When criminals send someone a fraudulent email that appears to be from a trusted sender to induce them to reveal confidential information or perform an action that seems legitimate, this is considered *spear-phishing*.

For example, a CAM employee or association board member receives an email that looks like it came from a colleague. The email asks the recipient for a list of homeowners' personal information, such as names, account numbers, and access codes. Thinking this is a valid request, the recipient sends the requested information, which then results in fraud or theft for the homeowners.

Training CAM employees and association board members on detecting

fraudulent emails is critical to protecting homeowners' PII. Various organizations offer cybersecurity awareness training to help people identify fraudulent emails, prevent potential cybersecurity attacks, and protect sensitive information.

Malware/Spyware

Malware is malicious software designed to infiltrate, damage, or disrupt computer systems. It can pose a significant threat to associations and homeowners by stealing sensitive data, compromising operations, and causing financial losses.

One type of malware is spyware, which is unwanted software that infiltrates a computer and allows the criminal to secretly monitor and collect user data. CAMs and associations are at risk of cybercriminals using spyware to collect information that will allow them to access PII and bank accounts.





Again, training employees and association board members on detecting fraudulent emails and potentially malicious files can offer stronger protection against a cyberattack. Remember, spyware and spear-phishing attempts are only successful if an unsuspecting employee or board member follows through on the cybercriminal's request.

In addition, it is vital to have a solid IT security infrastructure and processes in place—including IT detection

software, content filtering, and web blocking—to help block fraudulent emails and malicious files or sites.

Additional Ways to Protect Against Cybercriminals

CAMs and self-managed associations can also help protect themselves and their homeowners against cybersecurity risks by:

- Working with their bank to implement a system of checks and balances to protect against fraudulent activity.

For example, before completing large transactions, perhaps the bank requires call-backs or codes for approval.

- Investing in cyber insurance, which is protection from financial losses caused by cyberattacks, data breaches, and other cyber-related incidents. Cyber insurance helps organizations mitigate their exposure to risks by transferring financial liability related to cybersecurity and privacy events. 



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LET'S TALK *Seasonal*

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR HOA PREPARED THIS WINTER

By: Becca Johnson, E&M Consulting, Inc.

Well, folks, I suppose it is that time of year again—say goodbye to those cool autumn evenings and hello to the wintery days ahead. As any experienced Houstonian knows, one must expect the unexpected when it comes to winter in southeastern Texas. Successfully preparing your HOA for this season and keeping up with all it is sure to bring is no small task—but here are some valuable tips to keep everything running smoothly.



Checking the Lights

Let's start off simply! Keeping the lights in working order becomes an essential task for an HOA as the days get shorter and the nights grow longer. Make sure to check batteries and power sources; ensure that everything is in proper working order. Having backups in case anything goes awry is another crucial step. Prepare to have some flashlights, candles, and matches ready just in case you lose power this winter. Along with prepping backups, investing in LED lighting to reduce lighting costs can be a good idea. The winter can spike electricity bills, and the higher use of lights can lead to burnt-out bulbs. LEDs have a lifespan of 25 times longer and are lower maintenance than incandescent bulbs, making them a great substitution.¹



Pipes and Sprinklers

Pipes and sprinklers have fairly similar winterizing processes, with the most important step being to drain them of water. The first step is to stop the water flow. Disconnect the water line or the shut-off valve and turn off any outdoor faucets. For the sprinkler, turn the timer to "off." Next comes manually draining the pipes and sprinkler systems. Once the sprinkler has been disconnected, you will open the head valve and wait until the water stops coming out. To be extra thorough, you can also use an air compressor to ensure *all* the water comes out. Another often overlooked tip is to occasionally open any cabinets that house internal pipes (such as the cabinets under your kitchen or bathroom sink) and let the warmth from the rest of the house in.^{2,3}



Pool and Recreational Maintenance

Winterizing your pool requires a few essential steps. Before beginning, be sure to properly and thoroughly clean your pool, including the filter. Next, check your pool's pH, alkalinity, and calcium hardness. Adjust as necessary, but a good rule of thumb is to bring the pH to about 7.5 and the alkalinity levels to 80 to 120 parts per million. Remember to lower the water levels and empty the plumbing lines to

THE LIST MIGHT SEEM LONG, BUT WINTERIZING IS AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF YOUR HOMES, APPLIANCES, AND MORE.

prevent ice formation in your pipes.⁴ Finally, cover the pool. All this work will help avoid costly damages and make reopening the pool much easier in the summer.

If your HOA has any other recreational facilities, it is always a good idea to winterize those as well. If you have a tennis/pickleball/basketball court, take note of any cracks. If possible, get them fixed. In the winter, water can get into those seemingly inconsequential cracks, and when it freezes, it adds stress and expands the break. Any facilities that won't be used in the winter can be locked.



Clean Those Drains!

While not the most aesthetic winterizing task, cleaning and preventing debris from gathering at storm sewers is a top priority. This task can be easily forgotten but can have upsetting effects. When debris builds at these sites, it can clog and cause flooding, water pollution, property damage, and more.⁵ We want any water to flow easily where needed, so keeping these drains clear is important.



Managing Roofs and Exteriors

Keeping roofs and exteriors in good shape is important year-round, but before winter hits, it is a good idea to do some preventative care. Inspect your roof and ensure there isn't any hidden damage or missing shingles you aren't unaware of. Remove any debris from your roof and gutters. Pests love to make their way into our cozy homes through this debris, so stay on top of it. Beyond that, the roof and gutters must be kept clear so water can flow properly. It is always a good idea to seal any gaps or other openings to prevent a blustery winter chill from sneaking in. This could mean applying caulk or weatherstripping to windows and doors where needed. It might seem tedious, but this can help save energy costs by 5–10% and prevent any rotting from occurring, as well as lessening the chances that those little rodents might find their way in.⁶



Reminding Homeowners

We all need reminders on seasonal tips; your homeowners are no different, and the sooner, the better! Before the winter starts, homeowners should check and, if needed, replace smoke and carbon monoxide detector batteries. As we know, pipe issues have become even more of a concern during Houston winters. To prevent a frozen or burst pipe, purchasing insulating pipe foam or heat



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tape to cover them is a good idea. Homeowners should also prepare a kit with items that would help in case of any outages that may occur. This means being sure they have enough batteries and flashlights or lanterns. A couple more tasks homeowners should complete include reversing the directions of their ceiling fan blades and cleaning furnace filters.

It is an excellent idea to provide homeowners with a list of seasonal tasks so they can prepare their homes. If you feel up for it, explaining why certain winterizing tasks matter can also increase the likelihood that people will complete them. Be sure to send out virtual versions of these lists, but mailing them and posting them in shared spaces are smart moves to increase visibility. Also, if there are any inspections, ensure homeowners know those dates in advance—no one likes a surprise inspection. It is also a good idea to send out a reminder of any winter emergency plans your HOA has in place.

Expecting the unexpected is a way of life in Houston; your communities are no different. With the varying winter temperatures and freezing conditions affecting us more and more, being prepared is vital. The list might seem long, but winterizing is an investment in the future of your homes,

appliances, and more. So, make sure that when that colder weather settles in, you can curl up with a warm drink instead of worrying about the season's effects on your home. 

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'Tis the Season!

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

By: Janelle Hyde, E&M Consulting, Inc.

You're sure to have heard them by now—clear silver bells, caroling choirs, and classic holiday music wherever you go. The entire month of December is rejoicing in the festivities and traditions of multiple holidays, bringing excitement and joy to our youngest children and a warm sense of nostalgia to our oldest family members. The magical season is the best time for people to come together and celebrate, and as association board members, you have the greatest opportunity to help create lasting memories for everyone in your community.

There are many important choices to make when setting up a holiday event. It may even be worth establishing a committee solely for the preparation of the occasion so that special, undivided attention can be spent on the planning, funding, and execution of whatever festivities you may have in mind.¹ There's a lot more than just a time and date that goes into these events, and knowing what kinds of decisions to make on the smaller details will take more than a general board meeting to figure out.

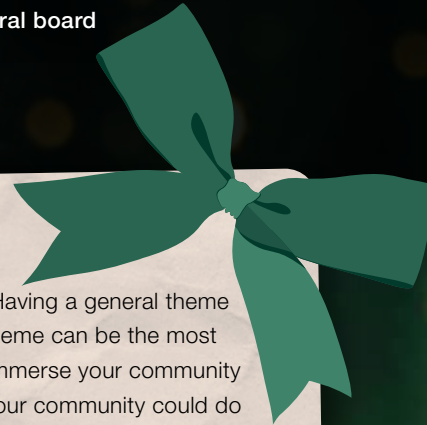
FESTIVE THEMES

The first choice your board faces will be the specific theme of the event. Having a general theme of "holiday season" is all fine and dandy, but diving into a more detailed theme can be the most memorable for years to come. Generating a strong, cohesive theme will immerse your community and strengthen bonds and relationships.¹ Here are some ideas for what your community could do to get together and celebrate:²

- Festive light show
- Warm and hearty potluck
- Classic music performance
- Cookie blind taste test
- Ugly sweater competition
- Gingerbread house decorating

DECK THE HALLS

Once you have your theme, think of the decorations that will make your event shine. This is the perfect opportunity to support and promote local artisans and businesses, which can encourage co-owners' sense of pride within the community and area.¹ Investing in the small, family-owned companies around your neighborhood is also an investment in the strength and stability of the faith many co-owners place in you as an association. Purchasing handcrafted items as decorations can serve as a sign to your community of your effort and care, which is especially important during the most wonderful time of the year.



While decorating can be a fun and creative process, it is also important to have a practical mindset. Depending on your association's values, you may find it essential to utilize sustainable items, ethically sourced products, or inclusive verbiage to create a more welcoming atmosphere.¹ You may want to reuse decorations next year to save money and time. Perishables such as food, candles, and plants and flowers can only last so long. You can also be creative and try to reuse decorations for other themed events throughout the year.

SAFETY & FUN ALL IN ONE

Another mindset to uphold is safety. Maintaining regulations and rules is the most essential step for your community to enjoy a seamless, festive get-together without having any accidents or injuries occur. A reliable way to communicate safety regulations is to condense them into short, concise, and easy-to-understand rules that co-owners can follow. This is where a holiday committee can be extremely useful, as they can spend time going over comprehensible verbiage and signage so that your community knows exactly what is and what isn't allowed. This will be your biggest tool in maintaining a fun holiday occasion without having to worry too much about potential dangers.

If you haven't set up rules surrounding what co-owners can use to decorate their homes, now is the time to do so. Regulations on lights, sounds, and where and when decorations can be put up are common rules for holiday decorations.³ The decorations you use for your holiday events should also follow the same safety standards. In fact, using decorations for any holiday event must be observed with even more precautions than co-owners' decorations because of the publicity of the event. More people means greater potential for something to go wrong.

A FEAST FOR EVERYONE

Depending on what theme you're going for, food is an element that will either make or break the festive cheer. You can go for the classic feast items, but some co-owners can have dietary restrictions. Do you have gluten- and dairy-free options? What about catering to a vegetarian or vegan diet? In order to bring forth a sense of holiday spirit, it's important to ensure no one is left behind, especially not at the dinner table. It will show your community that you're taking the time to think about every single one of them during the holiday season—and inclusivity is just about as festive as you can get.

INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

With so many different holidays happening this time of year, inclusion can be your greatest tool in fostering joyful moments for everyone who resides in your community. This can be shown in your decorations, the food that you provide, and the themes you come up with at board meetings. While celebrating the

holidays with your co-owners is important, your main priority should be finding ways to promote a sense of belonging.

Making your event as accessible as possible is also key to generating a high turnout. This can be as straightforward as ensuring your festivities follow ADA guidelines for those who cannot walk or stand without aid, or you can expand your event's theme to include a wide array of traditions from different cultures. Adding educational material is also a great way to respect and appreciate the cultures that have celebrations during this time of year.

THE SEASON OF GIVING

Another way to foster a sense of unity is to create or host a charity drive. With the season of giving upon us, December is the perfect time to organize a donation drive. Donations don't have to be monetary; items such as nonperishable foods, clothes, toiletries, and children's toys can have lasting impacts on those who receive them.² Have your community work together for those who need it the most. This way, your co-owners will have the opportunity to create bonds with one another while working toward a positive change this holiday season.

SUFFICIENT FUNDS

Not all homeowners associations have the budget for grand productions or a fancy communal feast. There may be some local businesses that would be willing to sponsor association events. This can look like providing food or decorations or promoting the event to a wider audience.¹ Grants can also be a reliable tool for fundraising, granted there are applications available in your local neighborhood.

Event planning should have necessary conversations regarding safety, inclusion, and funding, but there should also be a sense of fun and positivity. Arrange your planning with a festive spirit! If your board acts with excitement and engagement, your co-owners are sure to feel their enthusiasm once the event has commenced. Provide a warm, inviting event that will create memories that will last for years to come. As members of homeowners associations, upholding community connections and unity is what you and your board do best. 🍷

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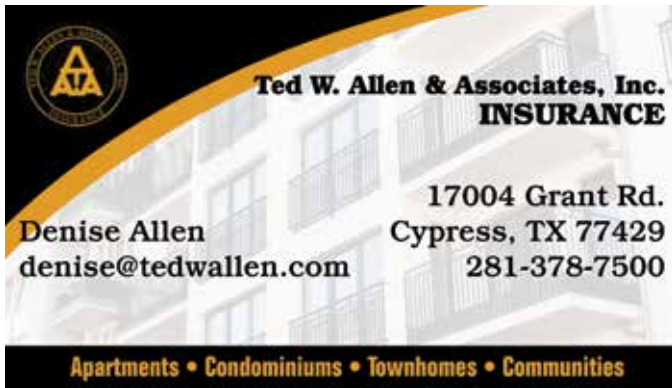
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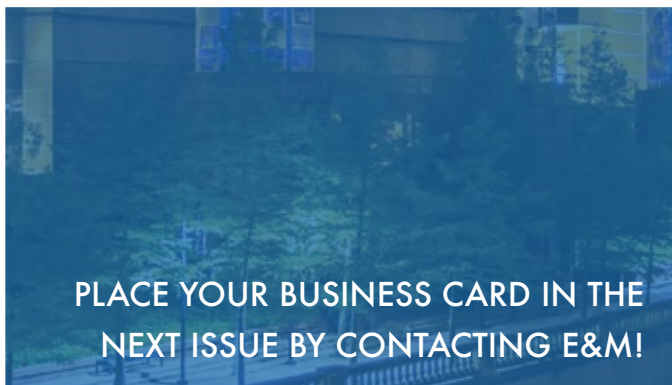
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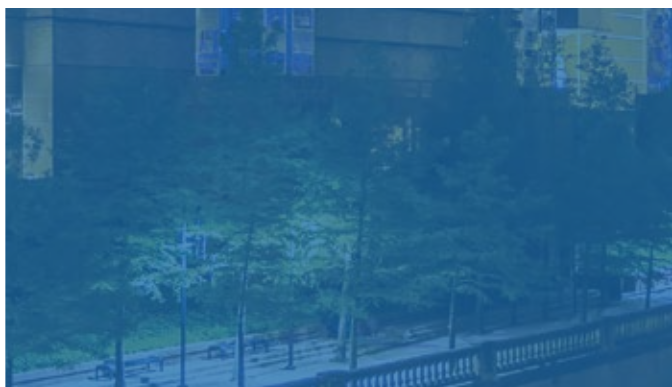
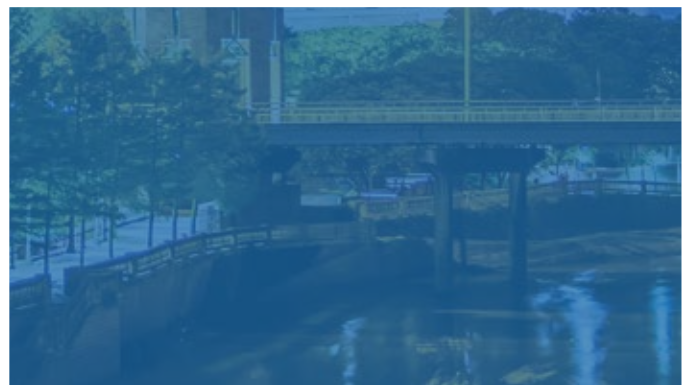
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