

# USING OWNERS' FORUMS TO DIFFUSE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

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# Where we're going today

- What is an Owners' Forum?
- Do you have to have them?
- Should you have them?
- Closed vs open meetings
- Removing an unruly owner
- Common complaints in forums
- Examples of rules for forums
- Responding as a board
- Listening as a board



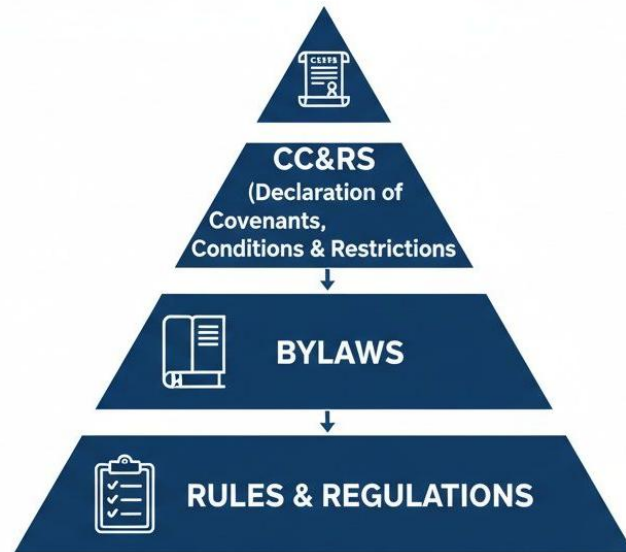
# What is an Owners' Forum?

- **Owner's forum** (or homeowner forum) is a dedicated time during a community association or condo board meeting when residents can ask questions, share concerns, or give feedback to the board.



# Do you have to have an Owners' Forum?

## HOA DOCUMENT HIERARCHY



Supremacy: CC&Rs > Bylaws > Rules  
All documents must comply with the level above.

- **Check your governing documents:**
  - (1) Statutes (state, federal laws)
  - (2) Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs)
  - (3) Articles of Incorporation
  - (4) Constitution and/or bylaws
  - (5) Parliamentary authority (like *Robert's Rule of Order* or *AIP Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*)

# Iowa Code

- For Condo Associations, state code (Horizontal Property, Section 499B) says you must allow owners to attend board meetings. It does not give them any speaking or voting privileges.
- For HOAs, usually governed by the Iowa Nonprofit Act (Section 504), there is nothing said about owners attending board meetings.

# Open Meetings Act (Sunshine Laws) do not apply

- In Iowa, it's for governmental bodies.
- Check your governing documents, though. They may have specific rules around open meetings.





## Robert's Rules of Order:

Non-board-members are guests at a board meeting. It is not their meeting. They cannot make motions, speak in debate, or vote unless the rules allow it or unless the board votes to allow it in specific circumstances.



## Is it a good idea?

- You do not have to allow owners to speak, but it's a good idea.
- How else will you know how to make decisions as a board?

# Should you have closed board meetings?

- There are legitimate reasons for a closed meeting, usually related to legal issues, discipline/privacy issues, and discussion that would harm the organization if held in public. **BUT**



# Open the door!



- Secrecy invites suspicion and controversy.
- Consider your fiduciary duty as a board member.
- Better to **manage the open meeting** than to cut off communication with the owners.
- Better to **manage the one disruptive owner** than to penalize all the other owners.

# How to remove unruly member



- **Check your governing documents first**, to see if there is any disciplinary procedure
- Removing a non-board member from a board meeting:
  - Chair can remove someone at the chair's discretion. (Try to diffuse first.)
- Removing a member from a membership meeting:
  - Members can vote to have a person removed

# Common complaints heard in forums

- Less for more: higher dues, assessments, vs cutting services
- Financial transparency-- confusing accounting records, unshared reserve studies, or unexpected budget variances
- Selective rules enforcement – pets, parking, landscaping
- Overly restrictive rules – punitive?
- Poor meeting management: time, preparation, conduct
- Others?
- How to fix?



# Owners' forum rules -- examples

- Have a designated time for the forum – usually before the board meeting begins. Have a sign-up sheet. OR
- Have owner input on a pending issue, with limitations
- Owners must be recognized by the chair in order to speak
- First time speakers go before second time speakers
- Speak through the chair, not directly to each other
- Have time limits – each speech is 2 minutes, for example
- Stick to the issue, not the person
- Comments should not be personal, improper, or disruptive.
- Avoid using other owners' names – “the previous speaker...”
- Don't speak on action that is not pending

# Listening skills for board and chair

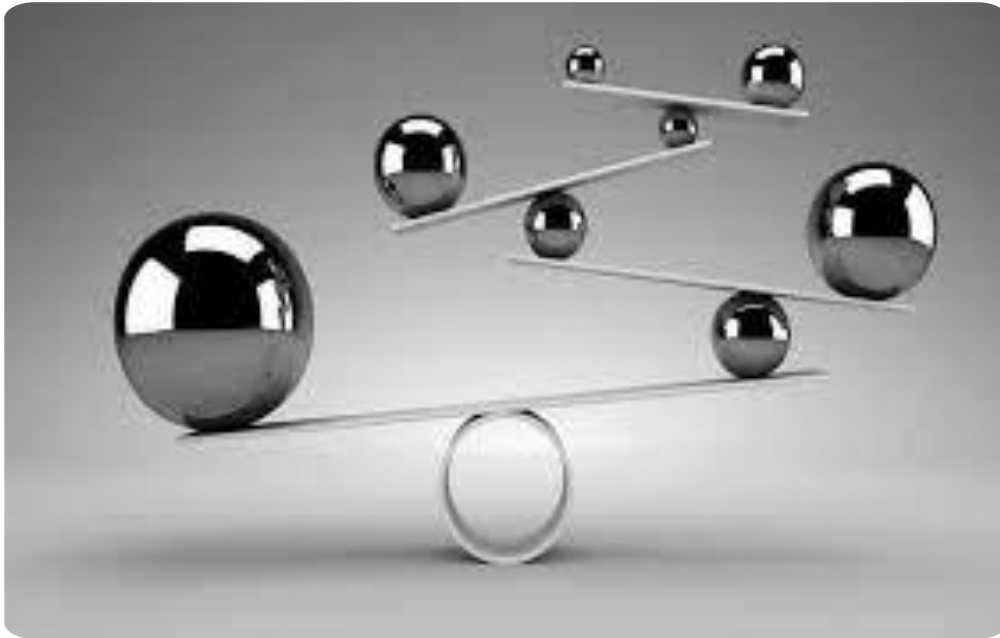
- Let them finish
- Reflect before responding
- Separate the emotion from the question
- Use their name and keep your voice lower and slower than theirs
- Take it offline when it's individual, not collective



# Responding as board members

| DO:                          | DON'T:                        |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Acknowledge the concern    | • Don't debate or argue       |
| • Stick to facts and process | • Don't get defensive         |
| • Offer a concrete next step | • Don't threaten removal 1st  |
| • Speak for the board*       | • Don't discuss another owner |
| • Set a time limit           | • Don't promise an outcome*   |

# Final thought...



- “...the best meetings usually come back to the same basic principles:
  - **be respectful,**
  - **be fair,**
  - **be clear,** and
  - remember that the board’s job is to **do what is best for the association.”**

*Jim Slaughter’s blog, June 20, 2026*

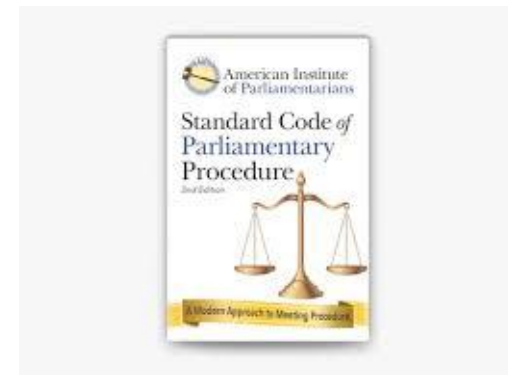
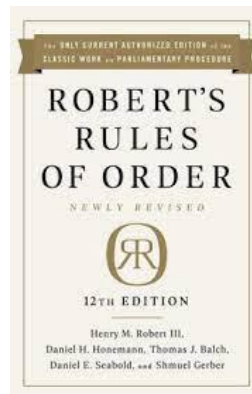
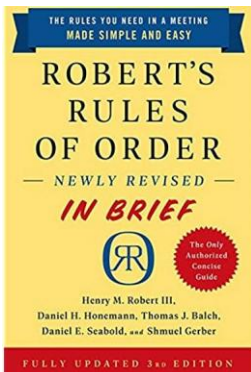


•Questions?



# Resources

- *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12<sup>th</sup> edition.
- *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised **In Brief***, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
- *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.
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