**COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION BEST PRACTICES**

The successful operation of a community association is not an easy task. Most associations rely on the volunteer efforts of residents to carry out their chartered functions. This means that over time there must be enough residents with the interest and the time to devote to the task. Moreover, there are a number of important legal aspects to consider.

An association is created for the benefit of its residents and to be successful, it must be able to develop and sustain a strong sense of community. To do this, there are a number of “best practices” to employ. They are shown below under general headings, with specific examples of the type of activities that are most useful.

**KNOWLEDGE**

* Know your community:
* History
* People
* Demographics (breakdown by age/race/ethnicity/languages spoken, etc.)
* Things that make it unique or special
* Know (and follow) your foundational documents
* Deed of Dedication
* Articles of Incorporation
* Bylaws
* Restrictive Covenants (if applicable)
* Insurance Status
* Know applicable statutes
* Virginia Property Owners’ Association Act (Chap. 18, Code of Virginia)
* Virginia Condominium Act (Chap. 19, Code of Virginia)
* IRS (503(c)4) tax-exempt status provisions
* Know your supervisor and staff
* Attend Neighborhood College
* Join the Braddock District Council
* Know your County government
* Departments
* Boards, Authorities and Commissions

**COMMUNICATION**

* Provide regular information to your community via a variety of means
* Newsletter (online and/or paper; are other languages needed?)
* Website
* Facebook
* Instagram
* Nextdoor
* Sign boards
* Flyers
* Develop and promote an association “value statement”
* State what the association offers the residents
* Provide an association vision and goals (one-year, five-year)
* List unique features and assets (e.g., neighborhood pool/scout troops, schools, common areas, Fairfax County parks, nearby mass transit, activity centers, etc.)
* Meet every new resident as soon as possible after they move in (“Welcome Wagon”)
* Give them a copy of the “Value Statement”
* Make them feel welcome to the neighborhood
* Plant the seed for eventual participation in association activities
* HOA/Condo Associations: review covenants/architectural review requirements

**CAPACITY-BUILDING**

* “Building capacity” means developing your community’s “human resources” to support your association board’s vision and goals
* From “know your community,” identify those residents who have the talent, interest, and time to form a core group of “movers and shakers” who can drive things forward; include everyone who has shown an interest in helping out
* Ask people personally to serve on the board or committee and why you want them
* Engage the community
  + Reach out to neighboring associations to partner with them
  + Solicit feedback and engagement from the community through surveys and polls
  + Collaborate with groups within the community (pools, PTA, scouts, park volunteers, etc.)
* Create committees (even if only a couple of people)
* Social Committee (to plan youth and adult activities to build community spirit)
* Common areas committees (as appropriate)
* Neighborhood Watch coordinator
* Senior Outreach program
* Recognize achievement and participation
* Frequent “thank you’s” in your communications outlets
* Submit nominations for district-level awards (Citizen of the Month, Best of Braddock) or County-level awards (Lord/Lady Fairfax, Community Champions, Friends of Trees, Environmental Excellence Award, etc.)

**FINANCES**

* Develop and advertise an annual budget which includes a set-aside as a cash reserve
* Set reasonable dues based on expected expenses
* Make it easy for residents to pay and make it easy for the treasurer to collect/deposit dues (e.g., online invoicing and paying or use of ACH or Zelle)
* If your board decides to hire a management firm to do billing and collecting dues and paying other bills, carefully vet several companies to get the best deal
* Have a system of internal controls and conduct a yearly audit

**RESULTS**

* Based on your vision and goals, ensure that whatever you undertake is successful and let your residents know it; publicly thank those who contributed to each and every success
* Success builds on success and helps generate community support for the association