

An Expert Community Manager is a Dream Come True

By Lori R. Storm, CCAM

You are the treasurer of your association's HOA and have just received the first draft of the budget for next year. The three largest numbers in that budget are looming in your mind: insurance, landscaping and the management contract. Insurance is insurance – not much to be done about that. Landscaping, well, you get what you pay for. But, what about that management contract? Your manager is pleasant enough, but what does she really do? Maybe the association could get by without her.

You set the budget on your nightstand and drift off to sleep.

The next thing you know you are at a board meeting. Everyone is sitting around the conference room table. You turn to your fellow board members and say, "Our manager doesn't do that much. I think we should get rid of her." Poof. In a puff of smoke she is gone. Hey, that was easy.

"Wait a minute," says the association's board secretary. "Who's going to take minutes? Certainly not me." Just like that, a secretary appears in the chair the manager just occupied. Not bad.

Your meeting begins and the secretary is furiously taking notes. One of the board members says, "Can we take this action before us?" Everyone looks at the secretary, who shrugs her shoulders.

A puff of smoke and your attorney is standing by. "I am happy to advise you on that matter," he says. Everyone relaxes and the meeting continues.

"Shouldn't we have financials to review?" you say, and a bookkeeper appears and hands out financial reports to everyone. He explains all the charges and the ins and outs of the report. "You are getting all the invoices and assessments and tracking all of that, right?" asks the president. "You bet," says the bookkeeper.

But who is verifying that the work being billed for has actually been done? The bookkeeper shrugs and a project manager appears next to him. "I take care of following up with contractors and suppliers to ensure that everything is in order. I will also help you when you need contractor bids." Great, you think. We're all covered now.

Now the meeting is in full swing and talk turns to delinquencies. "Who is following up with owner delinquencies?" The board turns to the secretary. She says, "I am happy to send out letters. Who do you want to send them to?" The bookkeeper says, "I will give her a list of owners in arrears and a statement of what they owe."

"What should these letters say?" the secretary asks. Everyone looks at the attorney who explains in detail the law regarding delinquencies, the CC&Rs and timelines that need to be followed. "What's a lien?" the secretary wants to know. The board lets out a collective sigh. Maybe it would be cheaper to have a collection agency take care of this. Poof – a collection agent appears. "I can take on the whole process for you. I will work with your bookkeeper on this." Great! Now everything is being handled.

The Director at Large, who also works on the Rules Committee, starts to complain about owners who are flouting the rules –

trash cans left out, clotheslines on the front porch, noisy parties late at night. Who takes care of this? The secretary says, "I'm happy to write a letter." Hmm.

A woman appears in the crowd that has formed. "I am a compliance officer. I'll drive through your community and make note of residents out of compliance with the rules. I will send this information to your secretary for letter writing."

"I guess I need to be on staff full time," says the secretary. "I will need to answer phone calls and emails from owners, direct calls to and from your experts, and call your vendors to help the homeowners. I can do that." She frowns. "What do we do about after hours and emergency calls?"

An arm reaches through the crowd with a business card in its hand. In a moment a man squeezes through. "I run an answering service. I specialize in handling just this sort of thing."

A homeowner shouts from the room, "Hey, what about insurance?" Your insurance agent appears with a smile on his face. "How can I help?" he asks.

"Does the painter have adequate worker's comp insurance?" "Oh," comes your agent's reply. "I only handle the association's insurance. I don't monitor contractor insurance compliance." The crowd starts looking at one another, trying to figure out who handles this. Everyone's gaze finally rests on the project manager. "Wait a minute," he says. "I check for insurance coverage when I bring a vendor on board, but I don't know if he is maintaining his insurance coverage long term." Heads swivel toward the secretary. "Um, I don't know much about insurance," she says in a small voice.

The crowd is starting to get unruly, talking amongst themselves, arguing about who should be responsible for what. The president pounds his gavel and brings the meeting back to order. "Let's wrap up this meeting and get this straightened out later." Everyone nods their heads and quiets down. The board adjourns the meeting and all the experts hand sheets of paper to the secretary. She neatens up the edges of the stack



and hands it to you for approval. "What are these?" you ask. "Invoices from all of us," comes the unanimous answer.

You, the treasurer for the board, start to pale as you look through the stack:

- Attorney: \$300/hour
- Bookkeeper: \$39/hour
- Project Manager: \$80/hour
- Full-time secretary: \$18/hour
- Compliance Officer: \$25/hour
- Collection Agent: \$40/hour
- Answering Service: \$12/hour

The numbers begin to swim before your eyes, you start to sweat and your vision goes dark. You sit straight up in bed, breathing heavily. It was just a dream.

At the next board meeting you rush up to your community manager and give her a big hug. "You are doing a wonderful job," you say. "Thank you so much!" She looks a bit bewildered and then a smile spreads over her face. "You are welcome."

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