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How To Minimize HOA Sniping

by Richard Thompson

Out of the blue, an irate homeowner launches a sniper campaign aimed directly at the board. It's relentless and focused. The motivation may be some personal grievance, hatred of a board policy, disagreement regarding how the board does business in general or a loathing for the HOA concept. Rather than seeking redress in an orderly and open way, however, the sniping takes the form of poison pen letters, back alley rumor mills or a personal assault at a board Meeting.

Board meeting sniping is designed to hold the board hostage to relentless demands. The goal is clear: instant gratification. This form of HOA terrorism directly challenges board authority and to disrupt the process. As with any attack, the board's initial reaction is disbelief. But, the reality of the assault soon becomes clear and the need to act urgent.

How should the board deal with this kind of attack? When presented a list of demands, should the items be discussed point by point? Should they be recorded in the minutes? What should be done?

- **Rule #1: Never negotiate.** The board is not obligated to discuss anything that is not on the agenda. And it's unreasonable to respond to firing line questions. The response should be, "Thanks for making your points. We'll review them and give you a response in writing or consider them at the next board Meeting."
- **Rule #2: Don't record a list of demands.** Minutes are intended to discuss in broad terms the business of the board. Specific motions should have enough detail to describe them, the discussion and outcome of the vote. It is not a forum for soap boxing, editorializing or where items are entered into "evidence". It's enough for the minutes to state, "Mr. Sniper asked that the board consider issues relating to (describe)."
- **Rule #3: Control your Owner Forum.** To encourage input, an "Owner Forum" before the meeting should give each speaker owner up to 5 minutes to speak, but no more, so the board can get on with its business. Letting someone hold the board hostage should never be allowed and it's up to the President to control such actions. An abusive person should not be allowed to continue for any length of time.
- **Rule #4: When attacked, respond quickly and firmly.** When the attack becomes apparent, it's the President's job is to interrupt and, if necessary, ask the offender to leave the meeting. If the person refuses to comply, the President should adjourn the meeting and advise that such conduct will not be allowed at future meetings. Call the police if necessary.

HOA homeowner attacks fan the flames of emotion and promote rash responses. The board needs to walk the high road and refuse to counterattack. While this isn't easy, the directors outnumber the sniper and with a unified response, should be able to defeat the challenge and even help point a better way.