

“What Should We Expect from the Next Generation?” Florida Community Association Journal

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Despite statistics proving that the age of condominium owners in the Sunshine State is trending younger and younger these days, the stereotypical notion of a condominium dweller being retired and overly concerned with the lives of his or her neighbors still prevails.

With a healthy economy and new condominium construction offering more amenities than ever, it should not be surprising that younger, first-time homebuyers may choose the condominium lifestyle over single-family home ownership. Condominium ownership permits a younger individual to own real property while sharing rather than shouldering many of the maintenance and expense burdens which accompany single-family home ownership.

Are these younger owners prepared for the unique operational framework of the condominium lifestyle, or will they change the model to fit their tastes and style?

Having counseled shared ownership communities in Florida for more than two decades, I have seen the tone and temperament of boards change over that time period. Whereas some boards, usually comprised of long-time owners and part of an older generation, were skeptical of the benefits technology could offer and reluctant to fully fund reserves and spend money on improvements and even some necessary maintenance as well, boards these days are not only open to change, but many are embracing it.

Younger directors these days are focused on questioning the status quo implemented by the old guard. Governing documents which haven't been brought up to date in decades are being amended, rules which no longer make sense are being jettisoned, and long overdue improvement projects are being tackled. Many boards these days are no longer fearful of passing special

assessments needed to undertake improvements which will help their communities compete with newer offerings in the market. The changes in these communities are not just physical; they are also operational.

Many community members these days do not want to wait for the mail to arrive to receive association information. They want to receive notices immediately by having them directed to their email inboxes. These younger owners have spent their formative years as well as their careers communicating electronically. As a result, transmitting meeting notices and voting materials electronically is becoming a normal part of the operations in many communities. Boards no longer see the value in maintaining dusty bins filled with paper, but instead are choosing to digitize their records and upload them to association websites to avoid the hassles associated with paper inspections. More and more, important membership votes are being successfully conducted by offering online voting as an option.

Among some of the changes we're seeing are the following items:

- Implementing proactive, preventive maintenance programs;
- Installing community-wide hurricane protection;
- Fully or at least partially funding reserves;
- Implementing online voting;
- Digitizing records;
- Offering more up-to-date and fashionable amenities, such as state-of-the-art gyms, yoga rooms, common area media rooms, wine lockers, and cigar rooms;
- Installing energy-saving LED lights in the common areas;
- Providing Wi-Fi throughout the community;
- Live streaming meetings;
- Texting emergency messages community-wide; and
- Posting information on community websites.

The kind of cultural shift reflected in the foregoing examples will have a huge fiscal impact on Florida. The infusion of new blood, energy, and ideas might mean the difference between increasing the lifespan of older buildings or allowing them to deteriorate and diminish in value until they become candidates for tear-downs. Strategic planning and smart monetary investments in older buildings can make them competitive with newer buildings and maintain their value long-term and preserve the quality of life for the owners. The trickle-down effect on the local tax base and businesses surrounding these communities will either be positive or negative depending on the decisions the community members make.

Throughout human history, we have viewed the younger generation as "the future." Nowhere is that concept more pertinent than in our shared living communities.

