



RUNNING BETTER BOARD MEETINGS

How to Make Meetings More Focused, Productive, and Decision-Oriented

A practical guide for volunteer Boards that want shorter meetings, clearer decisions, better minutes, and less unnecessary risk.

A Board meeting should be where decisions are made - not where everyone first learns about the issue.



Because Communities Deserve Better!

Community Association Management, Limited

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Better Meetings Start Before the Meeting

Most long Board meetings are not long because the issues are unusually complex. They are long because directors are seeing information for the first time, discussion begins without a clear decision question, routine reports consume meeting time, or the chair allows the agenda to drift.

The President is responsible for preparing and managing the agenda. The Secretary is responsible for preserving the official record through meeting minutes. Management can provide information, reports, recommendations, and operational context, but the Board should arrive prepared to govern and decide.

The meeting is for deliberation and decisions. Preparation should happen before directors take their seats.

What this guide covers

- The President's role in preparing and controlling the agenda
- How directors should prepare before the meeting
- How to use parliamentary procedure without letting procedure take over the meeting
- How to structure owner comments without turning them into open-ended debate
- Why minutes should record actions taken - not everything that was said
- Why routine audio or video recording can create avoidable litigation risk
- How to use executive session appropriately
- Practical ways to prevent two- and three-hour meetings from becoming normal

1. The President Owns the Agenda

An effective meeting needs a clear destination. The President should prepare the agenda, identify the decisions the Board needs to make, and arrange the order of business so the Board can address those decisions efficiently. A good agenda is not a list of topics; it is a plan for how the Board will transact business.

Build the agenda around decisions

- List unfinished matters that actually require Board action.
- Separate informational reports from items requiring discussion or a vote.
- Identify the decision being requested when an issue is placed on the agenda.
- Avoid adding major issues at the last minute when directors have not had time to review the facts.
- Consider a timed agenda when meetings routinely run long.

The CAI meeting reference provided for this paper likewise describes an agenda as one of the most valuable tools for keeping a meeting on track and explains that timed agendas can help Boards allocate meeting time intentionally.¹

¹ James H. Slaughter, "Running a Darn Good Meeting: What Community Association Attorneys Need to Know About Parliamentary Procedure," CAI Law Seminar (2015), discussing agendas and timed agendas as tools for managing meeting flow and duration.

Routine business should stay routine

A consent agenda can be useful for noncontroversial items that do not require separate discussion. Routine approvals can be grouped together, with any director able to request that an item be removed for individual consideration. Used correctly, this preserves time for issues that actually require deliberation.

2. Directors Should Do Their Homework Before the Meeting

Board members cannot make good decisions efficiently if the meeting is the first time they read the proposal, financial information, contract, or background material. Relevant information should be distributed far enough in advance for directors to review it thoughtfully, even when the association does not use a fixed number of days for Board packets.

Before the meeting, directors should

- Read the agenda and supporting materials.
- Review financial reports and proposals before discussion begins.
- Send factual or clarifying questions in advance when possible.
- Identify what additional information is truly needed to make a decision.
- Come prepared to discuss the decision - not reconstruct the history from the beginning.

Community's earlier Board-meeting guidance makes the same practical point: distributing materials in advance allows directors to make informed decisions, and clarifying questions should be raised before the meeting whenever possible.²

3. Parliamentary Procedure Is a Tool - Not the Purpose of the Meeting

Parliamentary procedure exists to make group decision-making orderly, fair, and understandable. It should provide structure without becoming the meeting itself. North Carolina law currently provides that, unless the bylaws say otherwise, association and executive-board meetings under both the Condominium Act and Planned Community Act are conducted under the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised.³

The level of formality can still vary. The CAI reference explains that smaller Boards can operate more informally, while annual meetings and larger or contentious meetings generally benefit from more formal procedures. Even a small Board should become more formal when the issue is significant, controversial, or likely to be challenged.⁴

² Community Association Management, Limited, "Tips for Running an Effective Board Meeting," legacy Board education material, recommending advance distribution of agendas, minutes, reports, financial information, and supporting materials.

³ North Carolina General Statutes §§ 47C-3-108 and 47F-3-108 (current through 2026). Unless the bylaws provide otherwise, meetings are conducted under the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised; the statutes also address owner opportunities to attend and speak at portions of Board meetings.

⁴ Slaughter, "Running a Darn Good Meeting" (2015), explaining that smaller Boards may use less formal procedure while larger, annual, or contentious meetings generally warrant more formality.

Keep the basics simple

Element	Practical purpose
Quorum	Confirm that a quorum exists before conducting business.
Motion	When a formal motion is appropriate, state clearly what action is proposed.
Discussion	Keep discussion on the pending issue and give directors a fair opportunity to participate.
Vote	Make sure directors understand exactly what is being decided before the vote.
Result	The chair should clearly announce whether the action passed or failed.

Procedure should make the decision clearer. If directors spend more time debating parliamentary terminology than the actual issue, the procedure is no longer serving the Board.

4. Owner Comment Is for Listening - Not Instant Problem Solving

Owners should have an appropriate opportunity to be heard when required by law, the governing documents, or Board policy. In North Carolina, the condominium statute requires Boards at regular intervals to provide owners an opportunity to attend a portion of an executive-board meeting and speak about issues and concerns; reasonable limits on speakers and speaking time are permitted. ^{[[FN3]]}

The most effective open-forum practice is usually to listen, take notes, and avoid turning every comment into an unprepared debate. A factual question with a known answer can be answered briefly. A matter requiring research, legal review, Board deliberation, or a decision should be placed on a future agenda or referred for follow-up.

A practical owner-comment framework

- State the time limit and ground rules before comments begin.
- Apply the same rules to everyone.
- Do not allow cross-talk, personal attacks, or debate among owners.
- Do not promise an outcome before the Board has considered the issue.
- Move appropriate issues to a future agenda rather than improvising a decision.

Community's prior guidance similarly recommends a defined owner-comment period and notes that the Board can listen without feeling compelled to provide an immediate, unprepared response.⁵

⁵ Community Association Management, Limited, "Tips for Running an Effective Board Meeting," legacy Board education material, recommending reasonable time limits for owner comments and avoiding unprepared debate during open forum.

5. Minutes Record What the Board Did - Not Everything Everyone Said

The Secretary's job is to maintain the official record of Board action. Minutes are not a transcript, meeting recap, or narrative history. They should document the business conducted and the decisions made with enough clarity that a future Board, owner, auditor, attorney, or court can understand what action occurred.

Minutes are a record of what was done at the meeting - not what was said by directors, owners, or guests.

Minutes should generally capture

- The type of meeting, date, time, and location
- Directors present and whether a quorum existed
- Approval or correction of prior minutes
- Motions or other formal actions and their disposition
- Vote counts when required or useful
- The time of adjournment

Minutes generally should not become

- A transcript of debate
- A summary of every director's comments
- A record of owner speeches or guest remarks
- The Secretary's opinion about what happened
- A substitute for the underlying reports, contracts, or supporting records

The CAI parliamentary reference states this directly: minutes record what was done, not what was said, and it identifies actions, motions, results, and adjournment as the core record.⁶

6. Think Carefully Before Recording the Meeting

Routine audio or video recording may feel like an easy way to create accurate minutes, but it also creates another record that must be managed. If litigation occurs, recordings that still exist can potentially become discoverable evidence. An off-hand remark, poorly phrased comment, or discussion that should never have appeared in formal minutes may then become part of the evidentiary record.

For that reason, Community generally discourages routine recording of Board meetings unless there is a specific legal, accessibility, or operational reason to do so. If a Board records meetings, it should first understand applicable law, establish a written retention policy with counsel, and avoid treating the recording as a permanent substitute for properly prepared minutes.

A recording captures everything. Good minutes capture what matters.

⁶ Slaughter, "Running a Darn Good Meeting" (2015), Exhibit B, "Minutes," stating that minutes are a record of what was done at a meeting rather than what was said.

7. Executive Session Is a Limited Tool

Executive session should be used only for subjects that may properly be handled outside the open portion of the meeting under applicable law and the governing documents. It should not be used because an issue is uncomfortable, controversial, or likely to draw owner criticism.

Topics commonly associated with confidential treatment may include legal advice or pending litigation, personnel matters, certain contract negotiations, and other sensitive matters recognized by applicable law. Because the permitted subjects differ by jurisdiction and association type, Boards should rely on current legal guidance rather than habit.

Confidential means confidential

- Directors should not selectively repeat executive-session discussions outside the Board.
- Minutes should reflect executive-session action in the manner required by applicable law and counsel.
- Sensitive materials should be distributed and stored appropriately.
- Executive session should never become a way to conduct ordinary Board business in private.

8. Why Meetings Become Three Hours Long

A meeting that routinely lasts two or three hours is usually signaling a process problem. Long meetings do not necessarily mean the Board is being thorough. They may mean the agenda is unfocused, directors are unprepared, operational matters are being managed in the meeting, or the chair is not moving the group from discussion to decision.

Common causes - and better alternatives

What slows the meeting	What to do instead
Reading reports aloud	Distribute reports in advance and ask only for questions, exceptions, or decisions.
Rehashing history	Summarize the decision context and move to the question before the Board.
Operational problem solving	Delegate follow-up to management or a committee and bring back a recommendation.
No clear endpoint	Use a timed agenda and identify a target adjournment time.
One person dominates	The President should manage recognition and keep discussion balanced.
New issues appear late	Defer significant unprepared matters to a future agenda unless truly urgent.
No defined motion or question	State the proposed action clearly before debate becomes circular.

A useful test - If discussion is no longer producing new information or changing anyone's understanding of the decision, it may be time to vote, refer the matter, request additional information, or move on.

9. The President's Job During the Meeting

The President is responsible for presiding, maintaining order, moving through the agenda, and making sure the Board understands what it is deciding. Presiding does not mean controlling the outcome. It means controlling the process well enough that the Board can reach its own decision.

- Start when a quorum is present and the meeting is scheduled to begin.
- Keep discussion tied to the agenda item.
- Clarify motions and decision questions before voting.
- Protect every director's opportunity to participate.
- Stop personal attacks and repetitive debate.
- Identify when more information is needed and defer rather than guess.
- End the meeting when the work is complete.

10. A Board Meeting Readiness Checklist

Check	Question to ask
Agenda	Has the President identified the actual decisions required?
Materials	Did directors receive enough information in advance to prepare?
Questions	Were factual questions raised before the meeting when possible?
Quorum	Do we know the applicable quorum requirement?
Owner comments	Are the time limits and ground rules clear?
Executive session	Is each closed-session topic appropriate for confidential treatment?
Minutes	Is the Secretary prepared to record actions rather than dialogue?
Time	Does the agenda have a realistic target adjournment time?
Action items	Will every follow-up have a clear owner and next step?

How Community Supports Better Board Decisions

Community's role is to give Boards the information, professional perspective, and operational support they need to govern effectively. We do not replace the President's responsibility for the agenda or the Secretary's responsibility for minutes, and we do not believe a Board should need management sitting in every meeting to make good decisions.

Our approach

- Provide accurate financial, operational, vendor, compliance, and project information for Board review.
- Answer factual questions before meetings whenever possible so meeting time can focus on decisions.
- Clearly distinguish matters that require Board authority from matters management can execute operationally.
- Document Board direction and carry out authorized decisions through the appropriate Community team.
- Escalate legal, financial, insurance, or operational risk when professional guidance is warranted.
- Support continuity so a change in Board membership does not require the association to reconstruct its history from scratch.

The goal is not more meetings. The goal is better decisions, clearly made and consistently carried out.

The Bottom Line

Strong Boards do not measure effectiveness by how long they meet. They prepare in advance, focus discussion on decisions, use appropriate procedure, document actions accurately, and leave each meeting knowing what happens next.

When a Board meeting becomes a place to discover information, manage operations, negotiate every detail, and recreate the record word-for-word, the process is working against the Board. Better structure gives volunteer directors more time to govern - and less time spent simply meeting.

Questions for your next Board meeting

- Did every director know what decisions were expected before the meeting began?
- Did discussion stay focused on those decisions?
- Did owners have a fair opportunity to be heard without taking over the meeting?
- Will the minutes clearly show what the Board actually did?
- Does every follow-up have an owner and a next step?
- Could this meeting have been 30 minutes shorter without changing the quality of any decision?

Want to strengthen your Board's governance and meeting discipline?

Community Association Management, Limited helps Boards focus on governance while professional systems and specialized teams support the association's day-to-day operations.

Educational Notice

This white paper is provided for general educational purposes and is not legal advice. Meeting, notice, quorum, voting, executive-session, recording, and records requirements vary by jurisdiction, association type, and governing documents. Boards should consult qualified legal counsel regarding their specific requirements.