

Resident Associations



Residents of manufactured home parks have a lot of power. Manufactured Homeowners can:

- Take legal action
- Reveal the truth about park lords
- Withhold rent via legal processes (rent escrow, tenant remedies actions, etc)
- Vote
- Negotiate with the park-lord
- Demand that the police department respond to issues in the park
- Propose legislation on the local or state level to protect homeowners

Almost everyone has the power to do any of these things, but often times people choose not to take action. Why?

Round Robin Exercise: In a group setting, go around to each person and ask him or her to share one common reason people give for not acting on the power they have. Some reasons may be: fear of retaliation, too expensive, too time consuming, or they don't know their rights.

Group Activity: Break up into groups of 2-3 people. In each group, choose one of the ways homeowners can act on their power (listed above) and answer the follow questions:

1. What would it be like to do this action on your own? What would likely happen?
2. What would it be like to do the action in an organized group? What would happen?

De-brief: Make a list of ways a resident association would make you more powerful than going it alone.

With a resident association neighbors can share the risks and benefits of acting on their power. Resident associations also create more power. Here are some examples of how:

- Resident association leaders gain credibility (e.g. when they present themselves as the "President of the resident association" for example)
- Resident associations can build a reputation as a powerful group of people. The benefits of being known as "a group to be reckoned with" often stay even when new leaders take the reigns.
- Resident associations can organize resources, including funds, allies, and property to promote the goals of the association.

Resident associations promote new ideas about who lives in manufactured home parks. The current perceptions and stereotypes of park residents work to take away homeowners' power. Ending these stereotypes and creating a new public meaning of parks will, in the long-term, make park residents more powerful.

Resident Associations are Most Powerful When:

- There is a large base of active members who believe in the mission
- There is frequent communication between leaders and members
- Residents know their rights
- Leaders are strategic and fair in negotiations
- Leaders get support from others in the broader community
- Leaders and members consistently follow through with what they commit to do
- New leaders are continually developed to keep the association going

Residents of any manufactured home park can join together with their neighbors to form a resident association (also known as a homeowner association or HOA). The concept is simple: there is great strength in numbers. Resident associations give structure and legitimacy to any group of neighbors who want to organize to protect and improve their community.

What is a Resident Association?

A resident association is a formal group of neighbors who come together and form an organization to act on their shared values and vision for the community. Three things are needed to make change in any community: a vision, a base of people who believe in that vision, and a vehicle to organize the base. Resident associations are a vehicle manufactured homeowners can use to organize a base and promote their vision.

Characteristics of Resident Associations:

- **Participatory:** everyone in the community is encouraged to get involved
- **Represents a majority:** at least 51% of the households in the community are members of the association
- **Democratic:** every member has a vote and a voice in decision making
- **Community-Led:** the leaders of the association are from the community and elected by the members
- **Mission Driven:** the association has a written mission statement that describes its purpose
- **Structured:** there is a formal structure created by the membership, called bylaws, mapping out instructions for how decisions get made and how leadership roles are filled

Examples of What Resident Associations Can Do:

- Negotiate with a park-lord or manager to resolve community issues
- Pass legislation on the local or state level to protect homeowners
- Develop a neighborhood watch
- Host a park-wide cleanup day
- Purchase the park as a co-op, land trust, or non-profit
- Have a regular newsletter to communicate to homeowners
- Establish a welcome committee for new residents
- Participate in broader coalitions (affordable housing, racial justice, etc.)
- Organize voter turnout for elections
- Hold accountability sessions with public officials
- Host community celebrations and social events
- Organize against park closings
- Organize for relocation compensation

Benefits of a resident association:

- Important decision makers such as politicians, police, park management are more likely to listen to an organized group of residents than individuals
- It makes your community visible
- A resident association can be a place where neighbors exchange information and ideas about how to respond to issues in the park
- If residents in the park want to take legal action the resident association can be the plaintiff instead of individual residents
- A resident association gives people a place to voice their concerns where they can be heard without fear of retaliation
- A resident association can build a sense of community in the park as people get to know each other

Accomplishments of Park Residents in Minnesota



Moorhead, MN

Faced with a park owner who was illegally selling homes and then evicting people and keeping the money, residents of Bennett Park got the Attorney General to sue their park owner for malpractice. They won and the park owner was forced to sell the park to the residents. Bennett Park Cooperative is now the 3rd resident owned park in the state!



Stacy, MN

Manufactured home park residents in Stacy, MN used their voting power to elect 3 of their park leaders to the city council. The new council members are now working to make sure “park issues” become city issues. They also got the park management to establish a 24-hour emergency park number, add stop signs, replace damaged street lights, and remove abandoned homes from the park.

*Dedicated to the memory of Bud Wilson,
a fighter for Mobile Justice*



Inver Grove Heights, MN

Residents of Skyline Village started a neighborhood watch to improve the safety in their park. They met with the police chief and fire chief and worked closely with them to catch an arsonist who burned down several homes. Then, they worked with the city to pass an ordinance that will guarantees all residents compensation for their homes if the park closes. Now they are negotiating with the corporate park-lord to improve maintenance of the park.

Over the course of your work you will inevitably be involved in a number of meetings. These include resident association membership meetings, public meetings (city council, legislative committees, etc.) and coalition meetings. Meetings are the lifeblood of an organizing campaign. Meetings should serve as the main tactic for communicating directly with your base. It is at meetings that major decisions are made and crucial information revealed. Holding regular meetings is key to building momentum. Knowing how to run an effective meeting is necessary for success.

The Problem with Meetings

Think about all the meetings you have attended in your life: school meetings, family meetings, work related meetings, church meetings, and community involvement meetings. That's a lot of meetings! Most of your neighbors have probably been to a similar number of meetings.

Think of some of the worst meetings you have attended. What made them so bad? Were they unorganized? Boring? Did they seem to go on and on without accomplishing anything? Maybe there were insurmountable differences between people at the meeting. Maybe there were people who monopolized the meeting and did all the talking. Maybe people got side tracked and talked endlessly about issues that weren't related to the meeting.

This isn't to depress you. These are some ideas of things to avoid when you are organizing meetings for your community. If your meetings are boring, unorganized, and a place where only a few people do all the talking, then people aren't going to come.

Steps to Pulling Off an Effective Meeting

STEP 1: Personal Reflection

You never want to have a meeting just for the sake of having a meeting. Before calling a meeting, take some time to think about what you want to accomplish. What should the meeting look like? Who should be there? What needs to happen for the meeting to be successful?

STEP 2: The Pre-Meeting

Planning the meeting ahead of time will greatly increase it's likelihood of success. It's well worth the time to have a "pre-meeting" with your leaders. At the pre-meeting, brainstorm goals and think about the actions necessary to achieve them. At the pre-meeting you should also decide:

- The date, time and location of the meeting
- The agenda
- The ground rules
- Who's invited to the meeting
- Roles for the meeting:
 - Facilitator
 - Topic presenters
 - Timekeeper
 - Note-taker
 - Ground rule enforcer
 - Greeter and sign in table attendant
 - Plants: people in the audience who are told to make a specific question or comment

- Who will play these roles
- How the room will be set up
- The outreach strategy to get people to turnout

When discussing who should be invited, you should also consider the possibility of uninvited guests showing up at your meeting. Make sure you have a plan in place for how to handle this. If an adversary shows up and you are not sure what to do, we recommend putting it to a vote. Whether they decide to have the person stay or leave, you are respecting the will of the majority. Hopefully the person in question will respect that too.

STEP 3: The Meeting

Meetings are likely to be effective when they:

- Start and end on time
- Have a printed agenda
- Have ground rules
- Provide opportunities for everyone to participate
- Create tension
- Address a problem that people care about
- Present a solution to the problem that requires everyone's participation

The **agenda** is a tool to ensure the meeting stays focused, on schedule, and is run in an organized manner. It should include:

- The date and location of the meeting (for future record)
- Ground rules
- The major points that will be discussed
- Time allotments for each agenda item

Ground rules are a means of enforcing the will of the majority at a meeting. They are the basic code of conduct.

Examples of ground rules are:

- Stay on Agenda.
- One person at a time.
- No interrupting.
- Give everyone a chance to speak.
- Respect each other
- Turn off cell phones

At the start of the meeting present your ideas for ground rule and ask for feedback. Then ask everyone to approve the ground rules by a show of hands. That way if someone gets out of line, it is easier to enforce the ground rules if everyone has agreed to them ahead of time.

Tension is an important element of a good meeting. Tension arises when people are confronted with an unjust situation and challenged to make commitments to do something about it. Unless you're organizing a meeting about a bake sale, there should be tension in the room. There is nothing warm and fuzzy about causing social change given the forces we are up against.

It is only with the continued involvement of your base that things will change. You want to give people hope, but not put them at ease. If people leave your meeting feeling totally at ease, then the problem is resolved in their mind, and there will be no reason to stay involved. When the problem comes back again because nothing changed, they will blame you for giving them a false sense of security. Therefore, it is a mistake to try to avoid conflict in a meeting. Instead you should identify conflict that exists and use that conflict towards positive ends.

Look for ways to ensure that **everyone participates**. There are several ways of doing this.

- Introductions- have everyone say their name and how long they have lived in the park. Also try to think of one good question to have everyone answer. For example: What's one thing you like about living in the park? Why did you come to this meeting? What's one thing you would like to change about the park?
- Ask people how they feel. When discussing topics that bring new information to light it's important to get residents' reactions. Ask people in one word how they feel about what they just heard.
- Ask people "Why?" Once you know how people feel about a situation or problem, it's important to get their sense of why it is happening. This will get your audience heated up and ready to tackle solutions.
- Group brainstorming is a great way to generate ideas, foster participation, and identify new leaders. Brainstorm topics can include: What do you want to change in the park? How should the association respond? Write all of the ideas down on a wipe board, chalkboard or large sheet of paper that everyone can see.
- "Dotmocracy" is the perfect follow up to a brainstorm. Usually you will have a ton of ideas written down. Give people 3 to 5 small sticky dots (you can buy them at an office store, they're pretty cheap) and have them vote for their favorite ideas.

STEP 4: Evaluation

You must evaluate every meeting you do. In order for people to keep coming back you want to know how they felt about the meeting. Here are three different ways of evaluating a meeting. We recommend all of them:

- **BEFORE THE END OF THE MEETING:** "In one word, how do you feel?" Even if after you did this at some point earlier in the meeting. A quick check in at the end of the meeting with everyone there will tell you a lot about how the meeting went. This will also help you plan the next steps.
- **AFTER THE MEETING ADJOURNS:** pull together a group of people to do a more detailed evaluation right on the spot. This can include everyone at the pre-meeting, people who spoke out during the meeting, and anyone else who wants to be a part of evaluating the meeting. Go around the circle and ask people one thing that they thought went well. Then ask them one thing that didn't go well or that could be better next time. Looking at both lists, brainstorm what the next steps are coming out of this meeting.
- **A COUPLE DAYS AFTER THE MEETING:** schedule some one-on-ones with people who made an impression on you at the meeting as having leadership potential. In the one-on-one ask them how they felt about the meeting and identify ways that they can work on next steps.

Making a flier seems simple, but creating one that will stand out among all of the advertisements and demands on your neighbors' time is an art. These days we are constantly being baited to spend our time and money. Not only are we bombarded with advertisements on TV, the radio, billboards and cereal boxes, we also have friends, family and hobbies competing for our attention. All of us have developed fine-tuned defenses to these solicitations and your flier will have to get past them. How? Here are some simple tips that work:

Purpose

Before you hit "print" and 1,000 copies start spitting out of the machine, wait! Did you ask yourself why you were doing this? It's always important to think these things through. What outcomes do you want as a result of this flier? Do you want people to call you? Do you want them to come to a meeting? Do you just want them to have information? Or do you want them to do something? Once you've identified the purpose of the flier, read it over and make sure it accomplishes it. "Can I print now?" you ask. No, keep reading.

Different Types of Fliers

	Purpose	Audience	What they get from it	What you get from it
Educational Outreach flier	Informing people of something (their rights, threats to the park, your organization, etc). Identifying interest in these things.	New people.	Information, somewhere to go with questions or concerns.	Learn what people care about. Develop new contacts.
Meeting flier	Getting people to come to your meeting.	Whoever is invited.	Information about the meeting.	People at your meeting!
Update fliers	Updating people on key developments over the course of a campaign.	Your base.	Knowing what's going on, confidence in your organization.	Knowing that your base is aware of what's going on and ready for action (without having to have a meeting).
Action flier	To compel people to do something (call an elected official, write a letter to the editor, sign a petition, etc.).	People who will likely participate in the action.	The satisfaction and empowerment of doing something about an issue they care about.	Having a successful action, building the power and leadership of your organization.

Basic Information

Your flier has to include some basic information. Who is the flier from? Is it your resident association, a statewide group, or just you? People rarely consider anonymous fliers to be a credible source of information. After you identify who the flier is from you should also provide some basic contact information (phone number or e-mail) in case people have questions.

If the flier is for a meeting make sure you include the correct date, time and location of the meeting. This may seem horribly obvious, but it's amazing how often people leave it out. If the location is unfamiliar to folks, consider either putting a map or directions on the flier.

Too Much Versus Too Little

It's important not to try to do too much with one flier. How do feel about this?

Rainbow Paradise Valley Park Residents:

Your Park Lord can only charge you \$3.17 per day for late fees according to State Law 30137c subdivision F

Call 555-LAW-SUIT if your park lord in charging more and our organization will tell you what to do about it.

We will be having a meeting on Sunday, January 1st at 6:00 am at the Mobile Justice Amphitheater

We just met with the park lord and they said that they would continue to charge \$3.18 for late fees.

\$3.17 is too expensive; so we are trying to change the law make it \$3.16 instead.

Call Senator Prejudice and let him know that he needs to support Senate File 9145 or else you won't vote for them next time around!!!

"Yikes, that was terrible!" I know, but it's an example of what can happen if you are trying to do too much. This flier is educational, it advertises a meeting, it updates people about a meeting with the park lord and it tries to compel people to action. Now some of you might be thinking, "I would do all of those things! What's wrong with putting it all on the flier?" You would do all of those things because you are a powerful leader for mobile justice and fighting to reduce the late fee by \$.01 is clearly aligned with your self-interest. Not everybody in your community is there however, right? Otherwise why would you be reading this manual? The point is, if you give people too many things to do, they will probably get overwhelmed and do none of them.

Keep it Simple. It is important to have a simple flier. Most people skim a flier on first look. They only read the rest of the flier if they think that it is interesting. You can maximize reading by keeping the information short and to the point. Another problem with too much information in the context of meeting fliers is that sometimes the flier will tell people everything they need to know, and then they decide not to go to the meeting. Make sure your flier says what the meeting is about, but leave them wanting more so that they actually show up.

Feelings

Don't do a boring flier. No one wants to read a boring flier. Think about people's feelings in the community right now vs. how you want them to feel when they get the flier. Are they indifferent and you want to make them angry? Or are they already mad and you want them to feel hopeful? Sometimes we get accused of using "scare tactics" when we do fliers about park closings. People have every reason to be scared about park closings. Scaring people for the sake of scaring them is wrong. But providing information that wakes people up to a grim reality in order to compel them to action is good. Just make sure that your information is accurate.

Think Visually

Part of not having a boring flier means having it look nice. Make sure the layout is aesthetically pleasing and professional looking. Use pictures that capture the feelings you want to provoke. Highlight major information using bold, BIG LETTERS, underline, etc.

Use boxes and borders to separate information. If your association can afford it, go with colored paper. Pick a color that is warm and bright so that the letters and images stand out.

Beware of Your Flier Falling into the Wrong Hands

There is nothing you can do to keep a flier from falling into the wrong hands. For that reason, make sure that you are prepared to defend everything that is in your flier in terms of the it's tone and accuracy. We take time to ensure that all of our fliers are accurate because, on more than one occasion legislators have received our fliers. In order to maintain strong relationships with your targets, always take the time to be accurate.

Getting People Involved Through Action and Meeting Fliers

People will get involved when your flier can get them to answer "yes" to three questions:

Q1: Is the meeting about an issue/problem that I care about?

If the issue your resident association is working on is well-known and easy to explain then simply write it on the flier. Example: "Our water is brown and disgusting." If the issue is more complicated, make it as simple as possible by relating it to common values. Example: "We don't have the same rights as other homeowners. This must change!" If most of your neighbors don't care about an issue, the resident association should put it aside and work on something people do care about.

Q2: Is there a realistic solution to that issue/problem?

People don't want to get involved in a group if all they do is complain. Most people get involved in a resident association because they want something to change. Make sure your solution is specific and that there is a good possibility that it will work. Unrealistic solutions will discourage involvement. Example: It's time to ask the mayor to enforce the city's clean-water laws.

Q3: Do I have to get involved in order for the solution to work?

It is human nature; we all do it. If we know there is a problem and we also know that someone else is going to fix it for us, then we won't get involved because our involvement is not required in order for the change to happen. It is important to let people know that there are specific things they can do and that the problem won't be solved unless they do them. Example: Bring a cup of water from your house so we can demonstrate to the mayor that everyone is impacted by the park's failing water system. Be clear and specific about what you want people to do.

Can Your Flier Pass This Test

This is a pass or fail test. Ask someone who knows nothing about your meeting to look at your flier for 10 seconds. Take the flier away and ask them to answer these questions. If they answer them correctly, you pass. If not, go back and edit your flier so that all of the important information stands out.

- Who is the flier for? Who is it from?
- What is the flier asking you to do?
- When is the meeting? Where is the meeting?
- What will change if I get involved?

Step 1: Identify Issues a Resident Association Can Address

What are park-wide concerns the association can work to resolve? Invite everyone to a park to a meeting where they can speak their minds about what they want to see changed in their community. Vote to find out what issues unite the most people.

Step 2: Get Support From a Majority of the Households in Each Park

Get a team of volunteers together to go door-to-door and invite people to join the association by signing a membership petition. In the state of Minnesota, an association is official when at least 51% of the households join. Check your state laws to see if there is a definition of a legal resident association. Regardless, to avoid splinter groups and to be certain of park unity, 51% or more of households is a recommended percentage.

Hold a Park wide meeting to do steps 3-5

Step 3: Define the Mission/Purpose of the Association

Work together to write a 2-3 sentence mission statement to let people know what the resident association is about.

Step 4: Decide on the Structure of the Association

Decide how many people you want on the association board, who is eligible to be a board member, and what board members will do.

Step 5: Hold Board Elections

Decide who will be the leaders and representatives of the resident association. Accept nominations and elect someone for each board position

Step 6: Approve By-laws

The board's first job is to write the rules, or by-laws of the association. Bylaws map out the structure of the association and set a process for decision-making. After a draft of the by-laws is written, hold another meeting to have them approved by the membership.

Step 7: Celebrate!

Keep the energy high by celebrating. Some ideas: have a party, put up "we did it!" signs around the park, make t-shirts or stickers for association members, and recognize individual contributions.

Step 8: Win Real Victories for Your Community!

Do a community power analysis for each of the 3 priority issues. Do a community power analysis. Set a goal, meet with potential allies, negotiate, and win real changes for your community.

Every year APAC receives hundreds of hotline calls from park residents who have various problems. Door knock your community or attend a resident meeting and you will likely hear about a lot of problems. Some of these problems have clear concrete solutions and others do not. Some problems are shared by many people in the community and others only pertain to one or two individuals. Your success in pushing forward positive changes in your park will rely on your ability to turn a problem into an issue. An issue is a solution to a problem. For example, a rent increase in your park is a problem, while fighting to get rent control is an issue.

Criteria for Picking Issues

When residents first get organized they often have limited resources. It is impossible to deal with every problem that is of concern to someone in the neighborhood. You should instead focus on crafting issues and have specific criteria in determining how those issues are prioritized.

The Issue Must be Winnable

The issue must have clearly defined goals that can be achieved in a limited period of time. If you go after issues that are not winnable, you will be wasting people's time and leave them feeling powerless and frustrated.

The Issue Must be Consistent With Your Values

Any issue the association addresses should be consistent with your mission and values.

Park Residents Must Participate Democratically in Choosing the Issue

Park residents as a whole should identify what issues they want to work on. If issues are chosen without consulting the residents, it contradicts the purpose of being organized. If an issue is of little concern to people in the neighborhood, then few people will get involved. Even if you win the issue so what, people won't care.

The Issue Must Attract Active Support Sufficient to Win the Issue

It is only with the active involvement of a significant number of park residents that you can have a big impact. Additionally, sufficient support helps prevent leader burnout.

The Issue Must Create a Sense of Unity Among Residents

You must work on issues that will bring the diverse constituencies of the neighborhood together, not tear them apart. This will help create a true sense of community and build your power.

The Issue Must Develop and Expand Your Leadership Base

Winning one issue alone will not solve all the problems of the neighborhood. You must always aim to cultivate new leaders to work on other issues.

Why does your resident association exist? Who is it for? What is your charge? A mission statement can answer all of these questions. It might not seem important, but it is. Every organization has a mission statement that clearly maps out why the organization exists. The point of a mission statement is to let people know what your resident association is about. Mission statements can also be a litmus test for future ideas that are brought to the association.

How to Write a Mission Statement:

A mission statement is a brief 2 to 3 sentence overview of your association. Every association member should be invited to participate in a discussion about the mission of the association. The following questions can guide the discussion: Whom does your association include and represent? What are the general goals of the association? Why does the association exist? What values does the association promote?

Coming up with a mission statement out of nowhere is hard, but it is perfectly fine to borrow ideas from other organizations. There are some examples of mission statements printed below. Find things you like about the sample mission statements and think about what these mission statements might be missing. Allow everyone to talk about what they'd like to see in the statement. Once you come up with something, vote on it, and approve it.

Sample Mission Statements:

Bonnevista Residents Association: Our goal as an association is to unite neighbors for the well-being of all people residing in Bonnevista Park, and to make this park a safe community for all who live and visit, here, now and in the future.

Mission statement for the Skyline Village Resident Association: We the members of the Skyline Village Resident Association exist to protect and give a voice to all residents of the park. The principal goal of the association is to encourage resident participation in finding solutions that improve park conditions.

Dayton Park Resident Association Mission Statement: We, the members of the Dayton Park Resident Association, aspire to create a community in which equality, respect and friendship are fundamental values. We want to ensure that all residents regardless of race, creed, nationality, or gender preference have a voice in our community. We have organized to improve the environment and conditions in our neighborhood.

What to do With a Mission Statement:

- Share the mission statement with everyone in the park and use it as a way to get more people involved
- Translate it into other languages so that everyone in the park can read it
- Include the mission statement on letters and fliers
- Read it out loud at the beginning of all park meetings
- Require incoming board officers to work to uphold the mission
- Go back and read the mission when people are not sure if an issue or idea is appropriate for the resident association to work on

1. Confirm Status of the Association

Some states have specific definitions of what constitutes a resident association. For example, Minnesota defines a resident association as “an organization that has the written permission of the owners of at least 51 percent of the manufactured homes in the park to represent them, and which is organized for the purpose of resolving matters related to living conditions in the manufactured home park.” Before holding elections, confirm that you have met whatever requirements exist to form an association. If none exist, as a general rule it is best if the majority of households in your park have joined the association.

2. Define the Mission of the Resident Association

The association should have a brief mission statement defining its purpose and values, so that it is clear to potential board candidates what the association is about.

3. Decide the Structure of the Board

Size: The board should have an odd number of people. Generally 5 or 7 people is a good size. If the board is too small, your officers may get burned out. If the board is too big, meetings may become unmanageable and hard to coordinate.

Officers: Boards typically have a president, vice-president, secretary, and a treasurer (if the association wants to do fundraising). The other members are known as “at-large” members and share the same voting privileges as officers.

4. Identify Potential Conflict of Interests

It is critical that in a resident association, the issues affecting residents be the main concern of its officers. There are numerous ways in which a conflict of interest may arise, and the membership will have to decide whether or not someone can be on the board. For example:

- Park managers, owners, landlords, maintenance or people otherwise employed by the park
- Immediate relatives of the park owner or management
- People who own a home or homes in the park, but do not live in the park
- Anyone else who doesn't live in the park
- Anyone who benefits financially from the operations of the park or from closing the park due to a unique relationship with the park or developers

5. Determine Who can be on the Board

Before nominations, the membership should clarify who can and cannot be on the association board. As a general rule, conflicts of interest are best avoided, and only members of the association can be members of the board.

6. Nominations

Only resident association members can be nominated for board positions. Members can also nominate themselves. Once a candidate has been nominated they should either decline or accept the nomination.

10 Steps to Electing a Resident Association Board

7. Candidate Speeches

Candidates should give a brief speech (2 minutes) on why they want to be on the association board, what they hope to accomplish, and why they are the best person for the position.

8. Voting

Elections should begin for the highest office (president) and proceed down so that people can run for multiple positions if not elected. They should be done through secret ballot and only one person per household is allowed to vote. To win the election, a candidate must receive 51% of the vote. If no one receives 51% during the first round of voting then the top two candidates will hold a run-off election.

9. Vote Counting

An objective party should count votes. Candidates for a particular position should not be involved in counting ballots for that position. Votes should be tallied and the results posted for all to see.

10. Acceptance Speech and Pledge

Each newly elected board member should give a 1-minute acceptance speech and promise to uphold the mission of the resident association.

President

The president is responsible for working with the board to run the association. They preside at association board meetings and park wide meetings. They are usually the association's spokesperson and a key contact with allies, targets, and media. The president must lead in a democratic manner and consult with the board and membership before taking actions or making major decisions.

Vice-President

The vice-president will take over for the president in the event of absence or inability to perform normal duties, as well as succeed the presidency, should the president be removed or resign. The vice-president will assist the president in the performance of his or her duties.

Secretary

The secretary takes minutes of all board meetings and distributes them as needed by the board and membership. They also collect ballots at election times for the board and can facilitate the production of newsletters.

Treasurer

The treasurer will facilitate fund raising efforts and keep the board apprised of the association's funding budget at each meeting. They also present an annual budget to the association at the annual meeting. If the association decides to require the membership to pay dues, the treasurer will collect them.

At-Large Members

At-large members along with the other officers vote on matters of importance to the association. They are responsible for outreach work and for recruiting support. They also represent the residents' interests at board meetings.

Developing strong allies is one of the most important things a resident association can do to build power and promote their vision. Allies are people or groups who support the resident association's work.

What Allies Can Do for You

Support	Examples
Moral Support	Attend association meetings, visit with families affected by the issue, host social events so association feels connected to larger community, show park residents they are not alone
Financial & Resource Support	Host or donate to fundraisers for a specific association project, provide space, equipment, transportation, or day-care for association events
Education & Research	Educate their base about your issue; give the association insight based on their experience with similar issues. Research the issue, or distribute surveys
Advocacy	Write letters of support or generate phone calls to target, speak at public meetings, meet with target, make supportive statements to the press, write open letters, speak publicly about the issue
Organizing	Collect signature for petition drives, foster leadership development by encouraging people in the community to become actively involved, organize or participate in building a coalition around the issue, organize or facilitate meetings, outreach, flyering, etc
Relationships	Connecting the association with powerful organizations or leaders with which they have a relationship
Mediation	Between the association and the target or between the association and opponents

What's in it for Them? Inside the Mind of a Potential Ally

There are some questions people will want answered before they will say "yes" or "no" when you ask: "Will you support us?"

Potential Allies want to know:

- What is the problem? (Do I agree that it really is a problem?)
- Why should I care? (Does the problem impact me? What will I gain?)
- What is the solution? (Do I agree with the solution? Is it possible? Is it worth the time?)
- What do they want me to do? (What am I committing to? Can I do it? Do I want to?)

The key to recruiting an ally is to answer all of these questions and start building a relationship based on your common self-interest. It's not enough to just prepare a persuasive speech. It's best to let people talk themselves into becoming an ally during a one-to-one visit. There are a number of things a resident association needs to do in order to prepare for a one-to-one visit with a potential ally.

Steps to Recruiting Allies:

Step 1: Define your values

People who share the values of the resident association are likely to be strong allies. What are the values underlying the work your resident association has set out to do? Why are people in your community willing to spend time and energy on the goals of the association? The answers to these questions will help you figure out whom you might share a common self-interest with and who might be potential allies.

Step 2: Community Power Analysis

Potential allies want to understand what you are trying to accomplish and how they fit into the big picture. The Community Power Analysis is a tool resident associations can use to map out the big picture of any issue in the park. One important part of the analysis is to brainstorm a list of potential allies. When doing this its important to be creative. Recruit allies that have influence over your targets but that may not be directly tied to your issue. Remember to think about your values and who might feel the same. Be as specific as possible - names are better than titles.

Example Brainstorm of Allies:

- Guiding Light Church
- State Senator Johnson and Representative Smith
- Mayor Holmes
- Maggie Burns from the affordable housing coalition
- Police Chief Marx
- Our neighbors
- Hormel plant, where many of us work
- the American Legion
- Betty Ann from Legal Aid
- Catholic Charities
- The Immigrant Rights Coalition
- American Civil Liberties Union
- AARP
- University of Wisconsin student group
- the Bell Plain neighborhood group
- Dave from the Alliance of Churches
- SEIU, UFCW and other labor unions
- the local newspaper: The Park Times
- the pickle factory
- the Sierra Club

Step 3: Brainstorm what allies can do

Once you have a list of allies, decide what you want each of them to do. Make sure to identify concrete things that can be done right away. Here are some ideas:

- Write a letter of support
- Speak out publicly at an upcoming press conference
- Turnout members to an association event
- Call your target and ask them to respond to the association's demands
- Attend a negotiation between association and a target
- Call the media and ask them to cover an upcoming association event
- Do research for you
- Testify at the next city council/ legislative committee meetings
- Present information/ answer questions at the next association meeting
- Put up a sign in their yard or store
- Announce an event in the church bulletin or at the next union meeting
- Write a letter to the editor
- Make an in-kind donation to the resident association
- Give their workers a day of paid vacation so they can go to capitol

Step 4: Set up and prepare for the meeting

Find out how to contact the people you want to get support from. It might be good to divide the list of allies among the leaders of the association. Call each potential ally and ask them to meet with you to talk about the resident association and the issue you are facing. If the potential ally is a group of people, like the city council or an organization, perhaps start by meeting with just one person from the group.

Make a list of questions you want to ask the person you are meeting with. Remember that your goal is to find out about their self-interest and get them to tell you why it would serve their group to support your cause. Also remember that one of the questions should be a proposition for the person to do something.

Step 5: Meeting

Review your goals and questions before the meeting. Remember that the one-to-one is not only about getting the potential ally's support for this issue, but to begin to build a relationship that could be beneficial in a future campaign. Be sure to reflect after the meeting and record any commitments you made. What valuable information did you learn? Even if the potentially ally declined your proposition, a new relationship was formed and new information was gained. If you did recruit an ally: congratulations.

Step 6: Follow-up

If the person or group made a commitment to do something, be sure to remind them of that commitment a few days later. You could make a phone call or send a thank you card. If you promised to do something, make sure to do it right away. Public relationships are built on accountability. It is important to hold yourself and your new ally accountable for following through with commitments. Sometimes a friendly reminder is all it takes.

No Permanent Friends, No Permanent Enemies

In organizing, allies come and go. Some will support a resident association long-term and others will stick around for just one issue-campaign. This is because allies are people who share an interest with the resident association. Anyone can be an ally if they 1) will benefit in some way if the resident association accomplishes its goal and 2) are willing to do something.

It is important that an association be strategic in the way it uses its allies. Don't just recruit allies for the sake of allies. Knowing the type of support you need, will help you prioritize who to talk to and what you want from them.

The ability to negotiate is crucial for a resident association to be effective. There may be certain issues where an association can win without ever directly engaging their opponent. This is not always the case though. Often your association will have to sit across the table from a target and use your power to negotiate a just outcome.

Negotiations will vary greatly based on the issue, personalities involved, history, how powerful you are and how powerful your opponent is. Nonetheless there are some common ideas that are universal to negotiation, regardless of the circumstances.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS

Before The Meeting:

Know Your Demand

It's not enough to know that there is a problem. Your association must turn the problem into an issue (solution!). This solution should come in the form of a specific demand. The demand should be reasonable, clear, and within the other side's power to achieve. You should have a specific timeline involved, and measurable means of monitoring their progress towards satisfying the demand.

Know What You are Willing to Settle For

Negotiations often entail give and take. In the best of all worlds, the other side will accept your demand unconditionally. It is likely that they will try to get concessions or that they will only accept part of the demand. For this reason it is important to know what your bottom line is. What are you willing to settle for?

Know When to Walk

It is possible that conditions in the negotiation will reach a point where continuing the meeting will do more harm than good. Know where to draw the line, and make sure that everyone in the group is comfortable with walking out under a pre-determined set of conditions.

Know Their Arguments Ahead of Time

Plan ahead for arguments that the other side may make to counter your demand. Put yourself in their shoes and think of what concerns they may raise. This may lead you to do research that will strengthen your argument.

Know Their Self-Interest

If someone is willing to negotiate, they may fear they have something to lose. Think of what they have to gain. There is almost always a benefit to the other side for agreeing to your demands (financial, social, moral, political, etc.). People are generally unlikely to sacrifice something without getting anything in return. Think about what's in it for them.

Understand Your Power

If you haven't done a community power analysis on your issue, do it now! You have power as an organized association, but it's important to know where it comes from and how to use it in the negotiation.

Determine Their Consequences

Once you understand your power, you can have a plan for what to do if an agreement can't be reached. This way you have the power to escalate your tactics if they refuse to consider your demands. Be ready to threaten these consequences if negotiations sour. Some examples include contacting the media, holding a rally, and contacting someone with power over them. Sometimes the threat of an action can be more powerful in the eyes of a target than the action itself.

Know Who You Want at the Meeting

This works for both sides. Think of allies that could strengthen your argument or demonstrate your power if they are at the meeting. Also think of who specifically is invited to represent the other side and who isn't.

Set the Agenda

To maintain control over the meeting, come up with an agenda ahead of time. The agenda can have strict amounts of time listed to discuss specific topic. If you are unable to reach an agreement in the time allotted then you have the power to end the meeting. If the other side attempts to sidetrack the discussion in the meeting, refer them back to the agenda.

Possible Negotiating Roles

You should decide how to divide up roles. There are various roles that people on your side can play.

Good Cop: someone with a pleasant demeanor who is honed in on the other side's self-interest. When things get heated, they can constructively bring the opponent back into the conversation constructively.

Bad Cop: someone who is gutsy and willing to take risks. They can present the potential consequences if the other side refuses the demand

Agenda monitor/Time keeper: keeps things on track and makes sure that all the demands are addressed.

Story teller/ Expert: someone with personal testimony or expertise who strengthens your position. They put a human face on the issue.

During The Meeting:

State Your Demand.

This may seem obvious, but a lot of groups will talk among themselves about the issues they want to see resolved, but are too timid to make any demands once the other side is sitting across from them. Once you state your demand at a meeting, it may be necessary to restate it multiple times throughout the meeting. If the other side tries to change the subject when you state your demand, it generally means that it makes them uncomfortable. Always state and restate your demand. Make sure they give a yes or no answer.

Silence is Golden.

Allow there to be periods of awkward silence during the negotiation. The social skills we have developed in our personal lives tell us to jump in and fill awkward silences. In negotiations however, awkward silences tend to happen at times in which the conversation has reached a breaking point or an impasse. Studies show that when there is an awkward silence in a negotiation, the side that speaks first almost always loses.

You Must Look Unified

It is crucial that the association has a clear position and that there is consensus among your representatives in the negotiation. Never disagree in front of each other, or the other side may try to exploit your differences to strengthen their own position. In the event that something comes up in the negotiation that is unexpected or if you are uncomfortable with what is being said, call for a caucus to work it out as a group away from the person you are negotiating with.

Stick to the Most Important Points

At all costs avoid side tracking the discussion by raising issues or questions not relevant to your demand. This is a tactic your opponent may use to avoid responding to your specific demand. Don't do their work for them by bringing up things that steer questions away from the discussion. Remember that you are at the table to represent the concerns of the resident association, not your own individual problems. This can be challenging, especially if you are meeting with someone who you may not have an opportunity to meet with again and who has a great deal of power to change an individual problem such as park-lords.

It's About Power not Personality

It is important to avoid overly personalizing the conversation. Remember that negotiation is part of your role in public life. Your job is to win real victories for your community, not to make friends. It is just as likely that your opponent will try to "hug you to death" as they are to come in yelling and screaming at you. Your tone should always be respectful, but don't feel like you can't be firm and demanding just because someone is being "nice" to you. Also, just because someone is yelling and screaming at you doesn't mean you have to yell and scream back. Negotiations are a power play, not a social outing.

Don't be a Victim

Most of your opponents are probably not accustomed to negotiating with organized groups of homeowners. They will likely look at you through a lens of park prejudice. For many people, their image of park residents is that of a victim based on what they see in the media. You are a leader, not a victim. You are not there to beg. You are there to bargain.

Get Clear Commitments: Yes or No!

If your demand is clear, reasonable and within the person's ability, it is fair to push them to make a commitment. Don't let them get away with, "I'll think about it" or, "I'll do what I can." If the other side needs more information, be specific as to the process of getting back together to negotiate. If they say they need to talk with someone else, find out who and what exactly they need to find out. Any commitment made should be demonstrable. In some cases you may even request for them in writing. If they say "it's not our responsibility," ask them to accompany you to a meeting with the person who they feel does have the responsibility.

Responding to the Other Side's Tactics

Tactics the Other Side May Use	Your Response
Over personalizing	Stay professional
Divide and conquer	Be unified
Non-committal	Force commitment
Threats	Assert your rights
Compromise	Know your bottom line
Refusal to cooperate	Escalate tactics
Changing the subject	Stay on agenda

After The Meeting:

Evaluate

Immediately after the negotiations end, get everyone on your side to evaluate the negotiation. What went well? What didn't go well? What could you have done better? What are the next steps?

Make the Results Public

If you win, celebrate! If the outcome is mixed, telling others what happened could spark interest, which may get new people involved or make them aware of next steps. If you lose, shame the other side into returning to the negotiating table. This may be the time to consider new tactics, such as legal action, protest, or a media campaign.

Follow Through on Your Commitments

If there are commitments you made during the negotiation, it is critical that you follow through on them in good faith. You can't expect anything from them otherwise. If they said no, and you threaten consequences, you have to deliver on them. Otherwise they will not take you seriously when issues come up in the future.

Identify New Issues and Continue Dialog

Once an issue is resolved, there are always more that can be addressed. It is important to continue the dialog in order to see sustained progress. Sometimes a positive relationship can be achieved with the other side.

Negotiation Worksheet

Pre-Negotiation Questions

1. What is our demand?
2. What are we willing to settle for?
3. Under what conditions do we walk out of the negotiation?
4. What arguments might the other side use against us?
5. What is our target's self-interest in this issue?
6. How could our desired outcome benefit them?
7. Where does our power come from?
8. How can we use our power in the negotiations?
9. What will the consequences be for the other side if they fail to agree to our demands?
10. Who should be at the meeting?
11. What needs to be on the agenda?
12. How are we going to divide up roles?

Evaluation Questions?

1. What went well?
2. What didn't go well?
3. What could we have done better?
4. What are our next steps?
5. How do we share the results with our base?

Why the Legal System can Work for You

The law is not a replacement for good, solid, neighborhood organizing. Without a solid foundation of community leadership and power, it is impossible to get meaningful change in you community. However, for a well-organized and strategic resident association, the legal system can be a powerful tool, if it is used wisely.

A Different Way to Get Things Done

Regardless, of what the laws are in your state, there are some basic protections and rights that exist for residents of manufactured home parks. The question is, how do you use the laws to et things accomplished in your community?

The first question is: does it make sense to approach the park owner or management about dealing with the issues before taking legal action? On the one hand, it takes a certain amount of time to allow the park ownership to receive and react to demands from the residents, while on the other hand; it is a show of good faith and a demonstration of unity that could get results from the ownership. Depending on the type of issue that the homeowners are working on, communicating with the management can prevent the management from claiming ignorance of the issues that the resident association is raising.

When Negotiation is Not Enough

So, what should a resident association do when negotiation is simply not working? In some ways, working on a legal challenge and working on an organizing campaign are not so very different. The questions you need to answer are: What do you want to accomplish? What resources do you have that will help you get things done? Who has the power to make the decisions that get you there?

What do you Want to Accomplish?

Just like a resident association needs to pick winnable goals when organizing, so to does an association need to choose legal issues carefully. The hardest part of choosing legal issues with your association is making certain that the issues are winnable. This does not mean that an association should back down just because something is a struggle: to the contrary, hard cases are sometimes the most important. It simply means that there are some issues ("my landlord is a jerk and we need to get rid of him") that are not legal issues.

Another question is: can your issue be resolved under the law. Either because of the specific circumstances or because of the way the laws are written, there are times when, even though something looks like a legal issue, there is no authority for the courts to do anything about it. That does not mean your issue can't be solved, but it does mean that instead of a court of law, the association must work in the court of public opinion.

Another possibility, which will be discussed more below, is that instead of the court system, an issue might be under the power of a government agency. In this cause, it may be possible to get the issue addressed outside of the formal court process.

Finding Resources

In the legal process it is important to evaluate your resources. If you are taking your issue to the court system you need:

- as much information as possible about your issue
- documentation on what has happened up to this point
- people who are willing to speak about the issues in court
- access to legal services
- money
- time
- patience

If you do qualify and the resources are available, legal aid has attorneys who will understand the court system and the laws in your state. Each state has a legal aid system, but the resources that are available to the local legal aid office can vary drastically and depending on the issues that your resident association is working on. Legal aid offices may be limited in the type of work that they can do because of the types of funding that they receive. They are also limited to representing people who qualify for their services based on income.

If you do not qualify, or if the local legal aid office does not have the resources to work on your kind of case, there are several other options for obtaining legal services. One method is to look for other programs that provide free or low cost legal assistance. Some possible places to ask are law school clinic programs, state and county bar associations, and volunteer lawyer programs.

Another possibility, if the resources are available, is for the association to pay for an attorney. Make certain that before you agree to hire an attorney she understand what you want, and that you understand what the attorney will be doing and how much it costs. Do not be afraid to ask questions or talk to more than one lawyer before you decide whom to work with.

The last option is going it alone. This can work for some individual issues, because a person has the right to represent him or herself. However, it is not legal for someone who is not a licensed attorney to represent other people. If the action is taken by the resident association as a separate entity, only a licensed attorney can represent the association. Additionally, depending on what kind of court an issue is brought to, the process can be very complicated. Small claims courts and specialized housing courts have systems that can be navigated by people who are not lawyers, but other parts of the court system are full of procedures and rules that are designed to be as complex as possible.

Who has the Power

Sometimes an issue looks like a legal problem, but that does not necessarily mean that the court process is the place to get the law enforced. Sometimes an issue is a legal issue and the court process is the right place to go, but it is not the resident association who has to bring the park owner to court. The big question in both of these instances is, who has the decision making power in your state for your issue.

Some issues, such as racial discrimination, are under the jurisdiction of both federal and state agencies. Other issues may be enforceable by the state attorney general's office. Some issues may even be under the control of local authorities. It is important to identify who has the power over your specific concerns and work on getting them involved in your issue in a manner that is helpful to the association. Just like every other person or entity, agencies, and especially municipalities, have self-interest and sometimes this does not necessarily match up with what the resident association wants.

Utilizing the power of government entities and their enforcement authority can be a lifesaver for a resident association trying to get laws enforced. It takes the burden off of the association to do all of the work; it shows that there are others paying attention to the issue, and it gets things accomplished in your community.

Ten Tips to Prepare for Legal Action

1. Get a copy of your lease and park rules if you do not already have one
2. Put all requests to the park owner in writing and make sure you keep a copy. To be on the safe side, send things by certified mail.
3. Establish priorities
4. Be unified
5. Keep records and take notes of all communication with park management
6. Request records for all applicable agencies
7. Comply with your lease agreement (pay rent, follow rules) unless there is a court order saying otherwise
8. Find allies
9. Identify who has the power to make the decisions
10. Develop a clear message

