

President's Letter: Special Edition

John Serumgard, President, Taberna Home Owners Association, Inc.

Dear Taberna Residents:

I have asked the editorial board of the Taberna Tribune for this extra space this month to present a topic sure to be of interest to all residents: **Should we engage a professional community management company to assist in managing Taberna?**

Beginning last year, the current Board has been discussing hiring a community management company to assist in running Taberna. Informal conversations with some individual residents have not revealed any major opposition, and a few comments have been heard along the lines of "it's about time". This is a major step and we want to make sure we do it right. To that end we are interviewing several candidate companies and asking lots of questions.

The big questions for our residents are probably "what will we get from a community manager?" and "what will it cost?"

On the first question, the biggest advantage will be that **the management company will take over much of the day to day work of the Board and committees**, leaving the Board and committees to continue exercising community oversight and to be responsible for all final decision-making on both operations and policy. This should make it easier to involve more residents as Board and committee members, a task that has become increasingly difficult.

A community manager would also give residents and property owners a **"one stop" contact for all issues involving the community**. Customer service representatives would be trained in Taberna policies and would be able to answer questions, initiate actions, or refer questions to the manager or to the Board or committees where applicable. **Systemic recordkeeping** of all contacts would let us look back and see where we may have continuing problems. We could know if this was the third or fourth complaint about a covenant violation, for example.

A major assist would be on **the financial and collection side**. A positive enhancement for many residents would be that **dues could be paid on line and by credit card if you wish**. The manager would take over all dues billings and collection follow-ups, including going through the fairly exacting requirements to place a lien on a property when dues have long gone unpaid, or to seek a judgment if non-payment continues.

Notices of covenant violations would also be handled by the manager, diffusing the sometimes delicate resident-to-resident interface with our current method. Of course the Board would continue to have final authority over any sanctions.

The manager would **also manage our vendors**, (landscapers, electricians, etc.) checking up on performance, insuring proper and timely payments, and working on selection processes. With considerable experience at hand, the manager could handle solicitation for bids on insurance, repairs and improvements.

In addition, the manager could develop a more complete confidential e-mail list of residents and property owners solely for the use of the Board to **communicate with residents via flash e-mail on emergency or important policy issues**. This could help better inform residents of community issues and activities.

Currently a mailing to all residents costs over \$800 in postage and stationary, so we pretty much limit mailings to one a year.

With a professional manager, we would be better advised about **any legal changes** that affect our community. A homeowners association is a “mini-government”, governed in turn by extensive state law and regulation, which are subject to continual change. A professional management company must continually monitor relevant agencies and the legislature for any changes in legal requirements affecting communities such as Taberna, a task few residents can handle.

In addition, if we requested, the manager could assist the Architectural Control Committee with requests for approvals, and construction oversight. The manager could also provide additional services and benefits we do not now have.

On the question of cost, we have received quotes of around \$3 to \$5 per property per month. We need to dig more deeply into those figures and understand what they do and do not cover. Part of that cost would be offset by amounts we are now paying for accounting and bookkeeping service. It appears we could have professional management assistance at between a \$30 to \$40 increase in annual dues per home or lot.

I know there will be some who object, either on the basis of cost, or on the general principal that we ought to be able to continue to operate a 783 lot home community as we always have. We have a great community in Taberna but it has a value of nearly a quarter billion dollars. How long can we continue to rely on the good will and volunteer labor of those relatively few willing to volunteer to serve on committees or on the Board? But for less than the cost of one meal for a couple at your favorite restaurant a year, we can greatly increase the community management expertise we can bring to assist in keeping Taberna the best place to live in Eastern Carolina.

As we continue this process, and if we conclude it would be worthwhile to do, before we make any final commitment, we would expect to hold a town hall type meeting to allow for discussion and input by the community.

The Board welcomes your comments on this issue. **Please contact any one of us** or send comments to the “question for the board” section on the Taberna Web Site. www.tabernahoa.org.