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Which Fork Does One Use at a Board Meeting?

by Michelle Marie Kinney

In the movie “Pretty Woman,” there was a memorable scene in which the street wise (but uncouth) woman played by Julia Roberts was patiently taught table manners, including which fork to use for each course of a formal meal. At some level, we can all relate to this. Sure, we all know how to eat. But there is no shame in not knowing which fork to use when dining in a formal manner. Likewise, there is nothing wrong in not knowing how to behave at a meeting. Fault can only be found if one refuses to learn.

Homeowners often go to a Board meeting with the misconception that it’s a time for them to raise issues, voice opinions, speak out, air complaints, or just “give ‘em hell”. All of the above is wrong! It’s as wrong as eating a steak with a shrimp fork!

Recent State law may have added to the confusion. Only with the exception of Executive meetings held for limited purposes, state statute insures that homeowners may attend all HOA meetings. While homeowners may attend meetings, they may not interrupt. Statue also allows homeowners the “opportunity” to voice their views on matters the Board may take action on. However, the statue allows the Board chair to set reasonable time limits. Not every homeowner has a right to air every thought about everything! As an example: If the Board was to vote on a particular project, and there were 10 homeowners with varying views in favor of and opposed to the project. The

board could limit comments to 3 in favor of and 3 opposed to, limiting each comment to 2 minutes.

Homeowners may know what is going on at the meeting by reading the agenda. Statute requires that if an agenda is prepared, homeowners must be provided a copy. Homeowners should read and follow along!

In fact when a homeowner attends a Board meeting, he is an observer, and not a participant. It's a meeting of the Board of Directors, not a meeting of the homeowners. A Board meeting is neither a jam session, nor a town hall meeting. Homeowners should not disrupt the meeting in any way. Shouting out, interjecting comments, gesturing or acting out in any other way is just plain rude. Doing so will cause one to look like a bumpkin. The chair should call the homeowner out of order, or simply ask the homeowner to leave the meeting room.

If a homeowner has a specific concern and he wishes to address the Board, he should contact the Board well prior to the meeting. He may make a request that the item be added to the agenda. Homeowners would be well advised to remember; request, don't demand! Also, don't be too discouraged if the request is denied. It may be that the Board has time constraints, or feels that the topic is not germane. A homeowner may always write a letter to the Board to address a specific concern in a formal manner.

At any meeting, it's disrespectful to arrive late or leave early. But if it's unavoidable, homeowners should do so with as little disruption and drawing as little attention to themselves as possible. Just like leaving a movie theater during the movie – be quiet!

Don't forget good manners. Most HOA meetings have agendas, structure and protocol to follow. However, since the Board and homeowners are neighbors and known to each other, there is often a fairly informal manner among those present. An informal atmosphere can be comfortable, but it will never excuse bad manners.



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