



The Elite Insider

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Top 10 Ways to Enhance Curb Appeal



Curb appeal is more than a catch phrase these days. Homeowners are looking for ways to give the front of their home a makeover. They realize that first impressions are lasting. Whether its guests arriving for a special event or someone that's selling their home, that first look can make the difference between "wow" and "ow"! And a great first impression can add up to 5% to the value of a home. How can homeowners dress up the front of their home without breaking the bank? Here are some of the top suggestions:

- ◆ Add an upscale address plaque. Nothing can freshen up a front entryway faster than, and as economically as a nice cast address plaque. The address numbers are the first thing that visitors notice when approaching your home. These classy markers made of cast aluminum and painted with upscale finishes quickly become part of the home's personality.
- ◆ Replace the mailbox. How many homes do you drive by

that have a run down dilapidated mailbox? Visitors see your curbside mailbox before they even turn up your driveway. Distinctive mailboxes with nice cast address plaques gracing the sides are becoming the upscale standard. What does your mailbox say about your home?

- ◆ Floral additions. You don't have to do an extensive planting. Try using some nice flower pots or baskets.
- ◆ Add a nice welcome mat. It's a great way to show that you care about the impression that you make as well as keeping your entryway clean and neat.
- ◆ Top off your house with a decorative weathervane. The roof line is one of the most ignored and forgotten aspects of curb appeal. A nice decorative copper or aluminum weathervane distinguishes your home from others.
- ◆ Clean your roof - See #5. It may seem simple but people forget to get the leaves and debris off their roof. It makes a huge difference.

Just be careful when climbing the ladder!

- ◆ Clean up or replace your door hardware. Many times you can use a tarnish remover and special polish for nickel, brass or bronze. If that doesn't clean up your door hardware, you should replace it.
- ◆ Check door side lighting - if your light fixture finishes are worn, you may clean them up or replace them. If the fixtures have a dated look, change them to something more classic.
- ◆ Paint your front door - You may not need to replace your front door but a fresh coat of paint or stain can sure make a difference.
- ◆ Clean the windows. It may sound simple but 75% of people who view a prospective home online will drive by before making an appointment.

Curb appeal is a real factor in how others view your home. Be sure your home has the items needed to make that great first impression.

Elite Management Professionals, Inc. AAMC

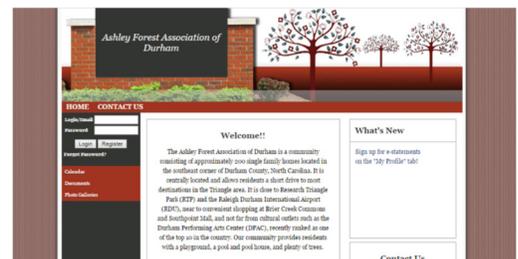
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New Community Website Layout!

Speaking of curb appeal, Elite Management has updated the appearance of all community websites. We hope you enjoy the fresh new look when you log into your homeowner account!



Need Help for Bank “Zombie Foreclosures” in Homeowners & Condominium Associations? *By: Jim Slaughter*



A huge problem for HOA and condo associations over the past 5 years has been “zombie foreclosures.” That’s where a bank starts the foreclosure process on a property and the owner moves out, but then the bank doesn’t complete the foreclosure (no state law requires banks to complete foreclosure within a timeframe). We have seen properties where the bank has taken years to complete foreclosure! Because the home is unoccupied, the lot or unit falls into disrepair and the yard goes wild. While the owner is gone, the bank doesn’t yet own the property, so there is no one for the association to approach about the problem. Community associations typically have no right to enter the property and physically fix things as they do not own the property. (And for that matter, should they, since that would be using other owners’ dues to improve someone’s private property?)

The result is that the zombie property falls apart, income to the association goes down (due to neither the owner nor the bank paying assessments), other owners’ assessments go up (to cover the lost dues) or association services are reduced, and all property values fall due to the neighborhood eyesore that no one wants to live near.

Nationally one in every five homes in

foreclosure is a bank zombie property. According to the *Business Journal*, last year North Carolina ranked 10th in the country in number of zombie foreclosures. Charlotte, Greensboro and Raleigh saw some of the largest increases in 2015 for zombie foreclosures in the country. Interestingly, I know of no state legislator really trying to address this ghastly situation for associations and other owners, which could likely be solved by requiring foreclosures to be completed within some reasonable time.

We lawyers have tried everything, but have pretty much had our hands tied as to zombie foreclosures. After all, if neither the owner nor the foreclosing bank is touchable, what does the association do? Lawsuits brought by attorneys to require banks to complete foreclosure typically fail, because there is no state statute requiring that.

Well maybe the new CFPB regulations may help. As you may know from our past blasts and seminars, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and issues surrounding Non-Public Private Information (NPPI) as to owner finances have become highly regulated. The CFPB provides that private information in the way of “personally identifiable data” needs to be protected, and there are high fines for violations. FYI, one of our Charlotte attorneys, Elizabeth Holloway has been an expert on the CFPB for years and regularly speaks to lawyers and other professionals on the new requirements and best practices.

The Community Associations Institute (CAI) has now posted information online that CFPB regulations may be of help in the fight against

zombie foreclosures. That’s because the CFPB has built-in protections for homeowners when dealing with banks and other financial providers. Those protections may also be available to community associations. Without getting even more complicated here, any property that has a mortgage backed by mortgage servicers Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac must provide timely service and expedite foreclosure proceedings to the greatest extent under applicable law.

If you have a zombie property in the neighborhood and other approaches have not worked, you may want to consider filing a complaint about the property with the CFPB. CAI has provided a helpful link at <http://bit.ly/CFPB-Complaint>. Any filed complaints get submitted to the CFPB, the CFPB then forwards the complaint to the problem financial institution, and all of the information is public and could influence congressional action. It’s too early to know if this new attack on bank zombie foreclosures will succeed, but there’s little to lose. So consider filing a CFPB complaint. And in the event you need any help, contact one of the attorneys at our firm.



Calendar of Events and Office Closings

MAY

May 30th– Memorial Day All Offices Closed

JUNE

June 30th– 6:00– 8:00 pm– **Board Education Seminar** held at Elite Management Professionals Raleigh Office

Come join us to review the important role of serving on the Board, how to review the financial statements, governing documents and review your community websites. Please contact Dawn Hatcher to register.

JULY

BOARD APPRECIATION MONTH

July 4th– All Offices Closed

SEPTEMBER

September 5th– Labor Day All Offices Closed

September 27th– 2016 Fall Festival

10 Things Your Homeowners Wish Your HOA Board Knew

Homeowners choose to buy a home in a managed association for a combination of reasons. They like the standards that maintain property appearance and values. They have access to amenities they might not be able to afford on their own. They lack either the time or skill needed to address exterior maintenance and repairs. Homeowners have high expectations of their HOA Boards. How does your Board rate among the ten things homeowners which you knew?

1. **Keep homeowners informed.**

Homeowners grow suspicious when they feel like they aren't clued in about association business. Transparency is vital for HOA Boards. Make your meetings as open and accessible as possible. Have financial records available for review. Communicate news to homeowners via newsletter or website. Creating a glass house for your HOA Board builds homeowner trust.

2. **Avoid playing favorites.**

Selective rule enforcement rarely escapes notice. It pits neighbor against neighbor. Homeowners lose respect for the Board. Every member of the association is subject to the same rules, assessments and penalties. Violations become less personal and generate fewer complaints when rules are consistently enforced. It's the HOA Board's duty to enforce all rules fairly—for other Board members,

neighbors and family.

3. **Present a united front.** Board disagreements cause conflicts in the community. Everyone has their own idea on how to run the association, so differing opinions are common. It's okay to disagree behind the scenes, but communicate with a united voice within the community. It's difficult for the community to have confidence in a Board that is publicly divided.

4. **Clarify communications.** Unclear messages from your Board create more questions than answers. Long-winded details and statistics are only good for bedtime reading. Keep homeowner attention focused by communicating clearly and concisely.

5. **Don't rely on special assessments to balance the budget.** Homeowners recognize that unexpected major expenses create the need for a special assessment. But, homeowners resent Board members passing an insufficient budget that will ultimately require a special assessment or assessments to make ends meet.

6. **Seek to understand before acting.** Avoid hasty decisions when assuming your board responsibilities. Take time to understand how things work (or why they don't) before attempting

changes. Understanding is the first step to better decisions.

7. **Don't abuse your power.** Rule No. 1 is that Board members act as a team, not individually. It's essential for every member to understand what he or she can and cannot do legally.

8. **Be responsive to homeowners.** If a question or comment requires investigation, let the homeowner know. Acknowledge receipt of all homeowner communication, and follow-up. This encourages both trust and confidence.

9. **Implement scheduled maintenance.** Routine maintenance requires less expense and time than major replacements costs. Don't allow the community to slide in a state of disrepair.

10. **Maintain personal ethics.** Individuals shouldn't derive personal gain from serving on the Board. Not only is this an ethical problem, but many situations are illegal.

