

# APRA Advisor

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The **APRA Advisor** is a bimonthly publication designed to expand the understanding of reserve planning and increase awareness of **Professional Reserve Analysts**.

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## 8 Ways to Green Your HOA

With Homeowner Associations (HOAs) becoming a larger part of many lives, making sure that they follow eco-concerns is just as important as making sure individual homes are up to environmental code. If your HOA was to be evaluated for its level of eco-consciousness, how would it score? If you believe your HOA could be greener, here are 8 ways to make it so:

**1. Encourage eco-landscaping.** Take a look at the HOA's landscaping. Green landscaping puts to use water-saving techniques, including irrigation systems and strategic plant selection to conserve water and reduce need for chemical fertilizers. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) is a great resource for environmentally friendly landscaping. Use drought-resistant and indigenous plants to create natural spillways or irrigation systems and also utilize sprinklers with timers and water-efficient spray heads.

**2. Clean up the equipment.** Make sure that mowing equipment is green too! Instead of gasoline-powered tools, encourage your landscape contractor to use mowers, blowers and weed-eaters that run on cleaner fuel. According to the EPA, gasoline-powered mowers are responsible for nearly 5% of our air pollution. Nontoxic propane mowers are a great alternative.

**3. Conserve water.** HOAs everywhere can probably stand to improve upon their water-saving techniques. Using rainwater capture and filtration systems to water common area landscaping is a great way to increase water efficiency and cut costs. HOA sprinkler systems with rain sensors and gray water irrigation systems that use recycled water sources instead of city water supplies reduce HOA water usage.

**4. Find an alternate power.** Let your HOA see the light...solar-operated light,

that is. The availability of solar-generated lighting, fixtures and appliances is greater now than ever and can be purchased at any home improvement store. Have your HOA install low energy, infrared and ultrasonic fixtures and appliances for common area buildings. HOAs with pools can use solar power generation or water heaters to heat pools. Timers and low energy bulbs for outdoor lighting, along with energy-efficient thermostats for community centers also

**5. Go paperless.** Stop the presses! (And the office printers and copiers.) To ensure your HOA doesn't waste paper, use a website and email for communications. Many HOAs are using the internet for HOA fee transactions which streamlines and improves collections.

**6. Build it green.** Is your HOA considering renovation projects? Make sure your HOA uses energy-efficient materials and designs. They often cost no more or little more than traditional construction. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), or Green Building Rating System, was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org) to provide a framework of standards to builders who are interested in green building and maintenance. Some greener construction options include:

- Energy STAR appliances
- LEED-certified fixtures and materials
- Low volatile organic compound paints (VOC)
- Multi-zone Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) designed to distribute air at pre-programmed temperatures in different zones throughout the home building

**7. Get schooled.** Help organize HOA events and programs that will help encourage other HOA members to recycle, practice eco-friendly lawn care and learn energy-efficient activities. Some HOAs assist in the recycling of paint, batteries, pesticides, tires and other hazardous materials as well. To

reduce waste, HOAs can encourage residents to use lawn clippings as compost.

**8. Try some positive reinforcement.** Suggest that your HOA encourage homeowners to meet green standards like retrofitting their homes with low-VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) emitting cabinets, countertops and carpets, low-flow toilets and other plumbing fixtures, energy-efficient ventilation systems, low-e doors and windows and fluorescent LED lighting.

While these eight are a good start, there are many other environmentally friendly ways to green the earth and cut costs. Green up!

By *Becky Hammad* **APRA**

## SHARE THE LOVE!

The APRA Advisor is published every other month and available free to anyone that would like to receive it. Share it with the entire board or office. To be added to the list, simply email [APRA@teamwi.com](mailto:APRA@teamwi.com)

## Trips & Slips

Tripping and slipping can involve both embarrassment and serious injury. The ubiquitous banana peel slip always gets a chuckle but too often the gravity (both the law and seriousness) of the situation can cause real and lasting injury. Then there is the issue of blame. In the Third World, if you trip or slip, you have no one to blame but yourself. But in the Land O' Plenty of lawyers and insurance, the blame and financial consequences often gets hung on the homeowner association.

HOAs have the duty to maintain trip and slip-free conditions in the common area. These conditions can be triggered by a number of causes:

1. Weather (snow and ice)
2. Landscape Related (overgrown bushes, moss, tree roots)
3. Poor Construction (lack of handrails, improper material and design)
4. Mechanical Failures (car oil leaks)
5. Normal wear and tear (raised or sunken slabs, potholes, etc.).

The following conditions create

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conditions ripe for trip and slip:

1. Raised edges over 3/8 inches. Driveways, patios, sidewalks and parking lots crack and move, sometime up and sometimes down. Tree roots or inadequate compaction are usually the culprits. Raised concrete can often be ground down without having to replace it. Sometimes it requires removal and replacement.
2. Step of unusual height, like 3-4 inches. Normal steps are 6-8 inches tall. These kind of steps benefit from yellow edges which can be easily seen.
3. Walkway slopes that are slippery when wet, icy or mossy. Consider installing non-skid surfaces.
4. Inadequate lighting (too dim, too few fixtures, improper placement). Increase lumen output, add or move fixtures.
5. Overgrown landscaping that conceals or overshadows hazards. Prune bushes and trees to allow light through.
6. Lack of stairway handrails. Install on both sides.
7. Oil spots in the parking areas.

Pressure wash or use oil absorbing material to remove.

8. Potholes. Fill them to level.
9. Naturally slick surfaces (like polished marble in entry foyers)
10. Lack of non-skid surfaces where appropriate (stairs, entries, slopes). Add skid resistance runners, carpet or adhesive strips. Replace slick material with skid resistant materials like wood stair treads with concrete.

Regardless of the cause, the HOA should have a budget and plan to deal with slip and trip hazards before someone and his lawyer discover them and the HOA's liability insurance policy. The plan to detect and correct should be consistent and adequate. The program should be even more aggressive in HOAs with senior residents whose injuries are likely to be more serious.

So the next time you hear, "Have a nice trip" or "See you next fall", make sure they refer to holiday travel plans and not a trip or slip. **APRA**

## Roofing Q&A

**Question:** I am the treasurer for a condominium association. We are in dire need of replacing our roofs and need to a special assessment to cover the costs. We are thinking about changing roof type to save money. We are thinking about offering a payment option but we need to make sure we get the money we need to cover the costs. How do other condo associations handle this issue?

**Answer:** Special assessments are unfair because prior owners have not contributed to the costs of the roof as it wore out. The fact that your reserves are inadequate points to an urgent need for a reserve study which takes into consideration all of the common components like paint, paving, fences, etc. (not just the roof), provides a 30 year schedule for those various renovations and a funding plan to accumulate the money needed systematically through regular (usually monthly) assessments instead of special assessments.

There is more than price that goes into a roofing decision. What kind of roof do you currently have? Is a kind you want to duplicate. For example, wood shingle/shake roofs popular in the 70s and 80s are both a fire and maintenance problem and should be replaced with a different design. Flat roofs come in a variety of improved designs like rubberized membrane which are easier to maintain and last longer than traditional built-up types. It makes sense to hire a roofing consultant to lay out the options and costs so the board can make an informed decision. A roofing contractor may specialize in a certain kind of roof and not provide the full range of choices, only the ones he feels competent to do.

From an appearance standpoint, changing roof types (like paint colors) is highly emotional and should be handled carefully. Changes should be discussed in open meetings with samples available for show and tell. Experts should be available to comment on the relative merits of each. Have a roofing consultant come to the meeting.

**Question:** I live in a condominium and

a roof leak damaged my ceilings. Should the HOA repair the damage?

**Answer:** The answer is “it depends”. If the HOA is responsible for roof maintenance and is negligent in keeping the roof in good repair or fails to respond in a timely way to repair it when you’ve made the board or manager aware of it, the HOA should pay for repairs to your ceiling. If, however, the roof leaks and the board or manager has it repaired as soon as possible, the HOA would pay only for the roof repairs but not your unit repairs. **APRA**

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## Role of the President

Homeowner association presidents fill many roles but the primary roles are leader and manager. Different situations will determine which role the president assumes. Sometimes the president must set aside other roles, such as neighbor or friend, to accomplish a task or make a decision.

HOA presidents gain their authority to lead from the HOA’s governing documents, rules and regulations. Therefore, presidents must understand the HOA is both a community which should operate as a representative democracy as well as a business that

often manages and maintains millions of dollars of member assets.

Important tasks for the president include:

**Oversee Operations.** Presidents must adhere to budgets, formulate and enforce rules and policies, conduct meetings, prepare agendas and work with committees.

**Speak for the board.** The president is the official spokesperson for the board, to the members, the manager, vendors general members.

**Seek Knowledge and Understanding.** Learning how to be president of an HOA often comes from on-the-job training. However, educational resources are available in books, seminars, periodicals, and networking offered by groups that serve HOAs, such as Community Associations Institute.

**Works With Volunteers.** The president is the leader of the board, a body that typically includes: The vice president, who substitutes for the president in her absence, the secretary, the official recorder of the HOA’s business activities and the treasurer, the chief financial officer.

It’s in the president’s best interest to encourage the officers’ participation in HOA affairs and to develop their skills as team members. The president should also attempt to identify and train potential leaders, encourage them to join the board, and orient them to their new responsibilities.

**Works with Professionals.** Many HOAs employ a professional manager who directs HOA operations based on policy set by the board. The president acts as liaison between the manager and the board. Seeking the services of professionals like attorneys, architects, engineers and reserve study providers is in the best interests of the HOA. Experts provide information and expertise that board members don’t normally have. For example:

- Reviewing legal contracts requires advice from an attorney.
- Managing reserve funds requires

guidance from an investment advisor.

- Correcting design defects requires an architect or engineer.

**Protects the Assets.** The president has a fiduciary obligation to protect the HOA by:

- Preparing and adhering to the annual budget that protects and enhances the members' property.
- Adequately funding reserves and educating members about the importance of reserve planning.
- Collecting fees from homeowners.
- Seeking the advice of an insurance specialist and protecting the assets with appropriate levels of insurance.

The position of a homeowner association president is not for everyone, but the president has a board from which he can draw support. As long as the members recognize and support the board that works on their HOA's behalf, the role of president can be very satisfying. [APRA](#)

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## Refining HOA Design

One of the most influential committees often found within a homeowner association is the ARC (Architectural Review Committee). This committee's mandate is to oversee modifications to member units/homes that are consistent

with approved policy and to preserve or enhance property values.

For it to function properly, the board should provide clearly written guidelines for the committee to follow. If the guidelines are complete, it will save both the ARC and members an enormous amount of time in sorting out what's what.

The Architectural Design Policy should be easily accessible to all members, ideally, on the HOA's website. Regular reminders of the policy should be noted in newsletters with something like "The HOA has appearance and design standards which must be approved by the Architectural Review Committee."

It is common for governing documents to reference architectural design or restrictions but the details are far from complete. The board has the authority to expand the criteria as long as it's in line with the governing documents. There may be design changes that are needed in order as years go by. For example, cedar shake roofs may have been dictated as the original standard. However, cedar shake roofs are very expensive, difficult and costly to maintain, have a short useful life and a higher fire risk. Alternatives like 40 year architectural composition roofing that mimic the shake look make sense, reduce cost and maintenance plus increase fire safety. There are other design changes that may make sense like this one.

Another reason for design change is to achieve contemporary styling. Paint color, in particular, can make a tremendous difference in curb appeal and resale value. While that chocolate brown looked groovy in the 70s, it really drags buyer appeal down now. Color palettes should be reviewed at least every five years to make sure the community is keeping pace.

Fences have also undergone vast improvement in both material and design. That privacy wall sided to match the building should be replaced with a contemporary design that achieves privacy with cheaper and easier to maintain materials.

One of the most significant design

values is landscaping. Developer installed landscaping that looked great during the sale phase overgrows or otherwise becomes unsuitable to a mature landscape look. There are new plant and bush species available that improve appearance while reducing maintenance and water requirements.

The landscape design requirements should give specific guidance for practical, aesthetic and integrated results, rather than each homeowner installing a hodge podge of plantings. In common wall communities, resident plantings should be restricted to patios, decks and balconies. Allowing common area planting makes it very difficult for the landscape contractor to maintain a consistent look and entices some residents to commandeer an ever expanding amount of common ground.

While the ARC has a fair amount of power to review and approve requests, the board has the ultimate responsibility for decisions. There should always be an appeal process. Appeal can be simplified if the board also acts as the ARC since the issues are pretty much already understood by all parties. The appellant is simply being given one more chance to convince the board of why that lime green paint really will dress up the neighborhood.

One important ARC philosophy is to promote good design rather than block creativity. Pay close attention to this one. The attitude of the ARC should be considerate, compassionate and helpful. Remember, members are often emotionally invested in their ARC requests. It's extremely important to guide the process carefully and not alienate a neighbor. Compromise if possible. If the request is just too far off base, an expression of empathy softens the blow. Or, if the request has some merit in the overall design policy, suggest trying to get it approved at the next Annual Meeting as a new option. That leaves the door open to a "maybe" if a majority of the members agree.

Refining HOA design takes time like a fine wine. Be flexible and recognize that tastes do change. The wise ARC keeps a finger on the pulse of design and anticipates the coming tide. [APRA](#)