Architectural Review Committee Duties and Responsibilities

The primary role of the homeowners' association is to help maintain property values. An important aspect of this is ensuring that homes look reasonably uniform in style and construction that fits the natural settings of the community.

In pursuit of this goal, most associations have a review process in place. Essentially, this is the group that is tasked with enforcing the community's architectural standards. Before taking the first steps to begin the construction or making external changes to their home, homeowners may be required to gain approval from the architectural review committee. Basically, this allows the HOA to maintain some level of control over building standards and modifications that people make to their homes.

The architectural review committee can play a significant role in guiding community life and in helping the community association to fulfill its mission. It is crucial for our homeowners' association to understand the responsibilities and the limitations of its architectural committee.

"The function of the architectural committee is to see that homes in the community comply not only with relevant safety guidelines but also with architectural guidelines that have been agreed upon by the community. In our case, the committee is made up of one board member and two volunteer association members."

What Does the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) Do?

Basically, the architectural committee oversees the process involving architectural review prior to construction of new homes and other types of structures, as well as any changes. Before construction begins or in making any changes to the exterior of their home, members of the HOA must file an ARC application, which is assessed by the members of the committee to ensure it complies with the architectural guidelines. Again, the purpose of this review process is so that the HOA has consistency through the community and control over major home additions or modifications, and that they can prevent anything that will have a negative impact on property values.

Members of the architectural committee may be tasked with processing ARC applications, as well as reviewing and approving them. Additionally, the committee may make recommendations to the Board to adopt new rules or to refine existing architectural guidelines to make the ARC process more efficient; they also can play a role in determining how ARC denials may be appealed by homeowners.

What Does the ARC Application Process Cover?

For homeowners preparing to submit an application to the architectural review committee, it may be helpful to know more about what the ARC process entails. Basically, when submitting an application for architectural review, homeowners will need to supply the following information:

- The type construction or alteration they are proposing
- The purpose or function of any new structures or additions to their home
- The types of materials they will use for the construction or modification
- Paint colors or finishes that will be used for the modification
- Blueprints, plans, or other detailed drawings
- Credentials for the contractor or remodeler
- Any permits that are required by the city or municipality
- A rough/estimated timeline for the project's completion

The members of the architectural review committee will review all of this information, evaluating it thoroughly to determine that the proposed modification or addition meets the community's architectural guidelines.

How Much Power Does the Architectural Committee Have?

Homeowners and HOA Board members should have a clear understanding of the architectural committee's scope of power; that is, what this committee is authorized to approve or to reject.

The powers of the committee are limited to the specific covenants and land use restrictions. The architectural committee is generally authorized to make decisions about any exterior materials or modification that could impact the overall look or aesthetic of the neighborhood, including any additions or modifications that would compromise uniformity or look out of place.

What's Included in the Architectural Guidelines?

A community's architectural guidelines can provide a lot of important information to homeowners and to committee members; these guidelines, outlined in the covenants and the land use restrictions, are intended to streamline the ARC process and to be certain that architectural standards are upheld and enforced fairly and uniformly.

For example, the guidelines will usually indicate the time frame committee members have to review new ARC applications; the standard is 15 days. The guidelines may also indicate how the committee is to inform applicants as to whether their request has been approved or denied (e.g., by mail).

The guidelines stipulate that, when a request is denied, the committee must include detailed information about why the request was denied. The purpose of this is not only so that the rules are enforced fairly, but also so that homeowners have the opportunity to amend their plans in order to meet the committee's approval.

In rare instances, a homeowner may make changes to their home without seeking approval or they may move ahead with a modification despite their ARC application being denied. Such matters should be addressed with hearings and potentially with disciplinary actions. This may require the guidance of the HOA Board of Directors or the HOA attorney.

One final note is that the committee members, as well as the HOA Board, have a responsibility to communicate clearly and honestly with the HOA membership. It is important that everyone in the community understands why these guidelines and approval processes exist, and that they see how the existence of architectural committees is ultimately in their best interests as property owners.