

Vinyl Fence *Tip*

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From your friends at National Vinyl Products

How to work with homeowners' associations



Working with a Homeowners Association (HOA) can be one of the most challenging situations a fencing company can encounter.

HOAs have the property owners' best interests in mind and want to make sure all fencing meets their guidelines.

The reality is that a fence can have a significant impact on homeowners' lifestyles and property values. For example, a fence that obstructs views or does not complement the architecture of the homes can be a big problem for everyone involved.

However, some HOA requirements may seem restrictive from a fencing company's point of view.

To help you work with HOAs, we offer the following guidelines. First, we'll look at what is important to an HOA. Second, we will focus on how you can approach an HOA. Third, we will discuss how you can work with architects and specifiers.

What is important to an HOA?

Homeowners Associations carefully consider their budgets when selecting fencing. Like any customer, they want to make sure they are getting a good value for their money.

Here are the factors that are uppermost in their minds:

- **Cost**

Competitive pricing is key to getting the attention of an HOA. Members are charged with using property owners' money wisely, and you can be sure they will be comparing your price with your competitors' best offers. While HOAs often have the reserve funds for projects such as fencing, they usually have to "sell" the project to owners.

- **Maintenance**

It is not just the upfront costs that an HOA considers. Members will want to know about fence cleaning and maintenance. HOA members will compare what they have spent on prior maintenance with what you tell them about a new fence.

- **Appearance**

Typically, HOAs want fencing that is similar to a property's current fence. That way, any resident issues with "change" are minimized. If there are changes that are desired, it is essential that you offer some design flexibility.

- **Installation**

Process HOAs want their residents' lives to be impacted as little as possible by fence installation. Have a detailed plan to give members for tear down, removal, any temporary fencing and all other aspects of the installation process.



How to approach an HOA?

There are two HOA groups you are likely to encounter: independent HOAs with an individual property manager or HOAs that are governed by management companies.

Independent Property Managers typically have an office at the community. Management companies might oversee hundreds of communities and have multiple property managers at an off-site office.

Attend the HOA meetings

We highly recommend that you attend most, if not all, HOA meetings. Many times, the HOA board will choose a fencing company they like rather than the lowest bidder. Yes, showing up can get you more jobs.

Be prepared to attend multiple sub-meetings. Of course, you do not want to miss the full board meetings. But it is imperative that you attend the fence subcommittee or the landscape committee meetings. The topic of fences may come up in multiple meetings.

Stay on your toes for board member changes. Sometimes the current board members terms will end and the project has to be “re-sold” to the new board.

Be prepared at every meeting with your visual aids and show other complete jobs. It is always easier to show and tell. Let them see, rather than imagine, the finished look.

Join other groups

In addition to traditional HOAs, consider joining local and state HOA organization. For example, there is the Community Associations Institute (CAI) that might be worth your time. You can learn more here: www.caionline.org

Again, do not forget: most business decisions are made at the personal level. The members of these organizations are people who care about their community. Your visits, your attendance at their meetings, your sincere interest in their community—all these things help you get more jobs. Look for every opportunity to interface with the individuals responsible for managing projects like new fencing.

Here are the most common topics you should consider when proposing a new fence to an HOA.

• Wind and storm-resistance

Depending on the location where you are installing, some HOAs may require fences that have narrow metal bars, cables or other methods that offer little wind resistance. HOAs also may give you requirements for the depth of the fence posts and the construction/style of hardware to ensure durability.

• Height restrictions

HOA height restrictions usually are related to aesthetics, safety and visibility issues. Fence height and location are key factors for owners who want to maintain the look and value of their homes.

• Style and uniformity

Some HOAs provide very specific and detailed directives for fencing. Since each community is unique, be sure you understand these guidelines in advance.

As you can see, working with an HOA is an ongoing process. The more prepared you are in advance, the more smoothly, this process will go. It helps to keep in mind that everyone has the same goal in mind: a beautiful, durable fence that will add to the property owners' pleasure and security.



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