



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.

2025 CAI-NJ PRESIDENT

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Community Associations Institute New Jersey Chapter (CAI-NJ) by-laws provide that the elected Vice President of the Board automatically ascends in lockstep to the positions of President-Elect, and then President, over a three-year period. For the last three years, therefore, I have been dreadfully counting down the minutes to when I had to begin writing these articles each month. Well, as Bruce Buffer would say, "IT'S TIME!"

These articles notwithstanding, I could not be more grateful for the trust that the members of CAI-NJ and its Board of Directors have placed in me. As I mentioned to our over 200 volunteers (more on this later) at CAI's recent Annual Retreat, CAI-NJ has given me so much more than I could possibly ever give to it. It is an organization that reminds us that you can have business competition without business ruthlessness. Our members are encouraged to share ideas and thoughts without fear of ridicule or ostracization. CAI-NJ has proven the hypothesis that "a rising tide lifts all ships."

While I will try to tailor my future articles to a specific theme addressing the common interest community (CIC) industry, I must ask for your indulgence in allowing the theme of this article to simply be *gratitude*.

I must start with a thank you and congratulations to my friend Chris Nicosia, CMCA, AMS, PCAM for his tireless efforts as CAI-NJ's 2024 President. During Chris's leadership, CAI-NJ made significant advances in terms of its legislative initiatives; membership, retention and sponsorship growth; increased attendance at its marquee educational and networking events; and the modernization of its annual awards voting. I want to draw significant attention, however, to the great work that both Chris and incoming President-Elect Ryan Fleming, CIRMS, EBP undertook over the course of many months to procure and partner with a well-known and respected marketing company. This initiative is intended to help make CAI-NJ a household name in our industry and to expand our geographical reach to all parts of New Jersey, beginning with Northern New Jersey. In doing so, the goal is not simply for the marketing company to assist in search engine optimization or advertising campaigns, but to work directly with the board and our amazing staff to develop long-term marketing strategies. I look forward to working with Ryan and the board to begin implementation of these strategies in 2025.

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from page 5.

Second, to our amazing team led by the incomparable Angela Kavanaugh, thank you! Angela, Robin, Jackie, Brooke, Helen, and Jocelyn, are all committed to CAI-NJ in more ways than most of us know. Our staff members are truly the reason for our nationally recognized success. While the most dangerous phrase in business may be, "we've always done it this way," I propose that the safest phrase in business may be, "don't fix what isn't broken." With Angela and her team at the helm, my biggest challenge this year will be to not get in their way!

Finally, a thank you must go out to our over 200 committee volunteers! At CAI's National Conference that is held each spring, entire seminars are dedicated to brainstorming ideas for how Chapters can get its members to volunteer on committees. They look at us as if we are crazy when we tell them that not only do we have over 200 committed members volunteering each year, but we actually have to enforce strict limitations on how many members of an organization can volunteer! So, we thank each and every one of you that step up to the plate for our industry.

At the CAI Retreat, I was also excited to announce that the Board of Directors' task force to develop the New Jersey Online HOA Board Essentials is in the homestretch of developing the content to what will become a first-of-its-kind educational resource among CAI Chapters. What began as an initiative aimed at responding to proposed legislation that would require all elected and appointed board members to undertake at least three hours of board leadership development training, quickly evolved into something that the board recognized would be a meaningful value-add to our existing members regardless of whether such legislation was adopted. The board has committed the resources necessary and has identified the right online educational platform provider to partner with to provide the program by mid-2025. Stay tuned for more information.

So, in closing, over the course of the next year, please do not be shy. Come up to me at events and say hello. Let me know what you believe are issues that CAI-NJ should be addressing. Share your ideas and goals. Let's work together to "rise the tide." I greatly look forward to this year and all it has to bring. Just not these articles. ■

END NOTE:

1 Outgoing CAI-NJ President Chris Nicosia would prefer I use a Disney® quotation instead whenever possible, so we can instead quote Rafiki: "It is time!"



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Casey Noon,
Editorial Chair

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This month, we look at high-rise communities and the unique issues that a “rise” in those communities. Yeah...sorry about that.

While the laws and regulations are no different in high-rise communities than in any other condominium association, with a few exceptions, there are a host of issues that are either unique to high-rise communities or at least more prevalent within them. This month's issue will examine many of these issues including Casey Sky Noon's article on *Embracing Central Plant CO2 Heat Pumps: A Sustainable Solution for Community Association Buildings*, Marian Miawad, Esq. & Glenford W. Warmington, Esq.'s article on *High-Rise, High-Delinquencies? – Collection Strategies for New Jersey High-Rise Condominiums*, Michael Mezzo, CPA, MBA's article on *Don't Miss Out! Hidden Savings on Energy Efficiency Upgrades*, Damon Kress, Esq. & Andrew Newman, CMCA, AMS, PCAM's article on *Maintenance Resolutions in Aging Communities*, and Vincent Rapolla, AMS, PCAM's article on the upcoming *High-Rise Site Tour*.

As a common-interest-community (CIC) attorney, I come across situations that while applicable to all communities, are usually implicated more often in high-rise communities. Take for example the Service Worker Retention Law (“SWRL”). The SWRL applies to a “multi-family residential building with more than 50

units”, which is likely only applicable to high-rise communities as non-high-rise communities with more than 50 units are typically spread out among multiple buildings.

The purpose of SWRL is to grant protections to certain service employees when there is (1) a change in the contract service provider; or (2) a change in

ownership at an enumerated covered location. The service employees covered under SWRL include any individual who (1) is employed for at least 60 days; (2) works at least 16 hours a week at the covered location, whether it is on a parttime or fulltime basis; (3) is not a managerial or professional employee; and (4) performs work such as care or maintenance of a building or property, among other things. This kind of work can include landscaping, security services or snow removal services among other work that can be performed at the community.

Because of SWRL, high-rise communities have an extra layer of compliance when deciding to terminate a vendor or service contractor that falls under SWRL

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“As a common-interest-community (CIC) attorney, I come across situations that... are usually implicated more often in high-rise communities.”



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protections. Under the law, at least 15 days prior to the termination date of the contract, an association must (1) request a list of the names, dates of hire and job classification for each employee from the terminated contractor; (2) provide this list to the new vendor; and (3) post a written notice for all of the effected employees alerting them of the termination of the current contract, contact information of the new vendor and their rights under SWRL. If there is a union involved with the terminated contractor, boards must also ensure that the union is sent notice in writing of the termination and provided with the contact information for the new vendor.

In this edition, you'll learn about similar type issues and situations most likely to be associated with high-rise communities.

In closing, I hope to see everyone at this year's CAI-NJ Awards Celebration on Wednesday, February 19th at the Hyatt Regency New Brunswick. This year's theme is *"Tides of Celebration – An Underwater Oasis."* Last year, the CAI-NJ Board of Directors instituted new voting procedures for the Awards with the goal of increasing the prestige of the Awards and establishing a fair, competitive process providing each member having an opportunity to participate in the winner selection. I greatly look forward to the event this year and hope to see you there. ■

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As we age, the “years get shorter, but the days get longer.” Parents know this all too well. Just yesterday I remember bringing our daughter Mia home from the hospital. Now it seems that I’m being asked to chauffeur her around to Sephora, Ulta, and Bath and Body Works weekly! (And yes, I did have to look up how to spell “chauffeur”). Well, just as it feels that Mia was born yesterday, so too does it feel that I just wrote last month’s article yesterday and now this one is due! Fear not, loyal readers. I’m here for you.

This month, I want to take a minute to expand upon the importance of board member education, the current resources available to board members that are members of CAI, and the steps that CAI-NJ is currently taking to bring board member education to a whole new level this summer.

Volunteer board members play a pivotal role in overseeing the management and operation of a community association. While these individuals are often residents with a shared interest in their community’s well-being, their responsibilities extend far beyond casual involvement. It is essential that volunteer board members be trained on a range of important topics to ensure the effective, legal, and ethical governance of the community. Training in areas such as applicable laws, proper meeting protocols, the fiduciary duty, ethics and conflicts, and the relationship between the board and property management, not only protects the association but also upholds the interests of the residents they serve.

One of the most critical reasons for board member education is to ensure they are knowledgeable about the laws governing common interest communities. Associations are subject to a complex web of local, state, and federal regulations that can significantly impact how associations operate. These laws cover a wide variety of topics, including:

- New Jersey-Specific Laws: Including the Condominium Act, the Radburn Act, and the Non-Profit Corporations Act.
- Contract and Procurement Laws: Board members must understand how to properly negotiate contracts, including those with service providers, and ensure the association follows best practices in terms of procurement of vendors and project oversight.

“Volunteer board members play a pivotal role in overseeing the management and operation of a community association.”

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- **Insurance Requirements:** Ensuring that the association has the correct types and amounts of insurance to protect against potential liabilities, and most importantly for board members, that they understand what their Directors and Officers Insurance covers, and what it does not.
- **Fair Housing Laws:** Ensuring the association is compliant with federal and state fair housing regulations to prevent discrimination against residents.

The role of a volunteer board member in a community association is far more complex than many realize. Board members are responsible for making critical decisions that affect the financial, legal, and social aspects of the community. Without proper training, board members risk making decisions that could expose the community to legal liability, financial loss, or conflict. By providing training in these areas, associations can ensure that their boards are well-equipped to govern effectively, ethically, and in compliance with the law – ultimately promoting the success and well-being of the entire community.

Right now, there is no legal requirement in New Jersey that board members undertake a specific level of training to hold their position. There is however legislation pending in the General Assembly that, if adopted, would require every volunteer board member to undertake at least three hours of board member training provided by an organization such as CAI. This training would be required to be completed

within 180 days of each board member's first term following enactment of this legislation.

Regardless of whether this bill passes, CAI's core mission of education is one that our Chapter in New Jersey takes seriously. On March 19th and 20th, CAI-NJ will host its very popular Board Leadership Development Workshop, a two-day workshop that is geared towards new and experienced board members alike. And best of all, it is FREE for all CAI Members. In addition to this workshop, CAI-NJ hosts educational seminars, workshops, and webinars throughout the year, nearly always for free. I encourage you to check out the list of upcoming events on page ____ of this issue.

Despite the success of our two-day workshop, the CAI-NJ Board of Directors and the members of our New Jersey Legislative Action Committee (NJ-LAC) understand that a requirement that all board members undertake two full days of in-person training would not be practical and would seriously threaten many associations' ability to recruit committed candidates to serve on a board. Therefore, CAI-NJ is currently far along in the preparation of a free online-based educational program for board members to take. The program would include baseline training on all the relevant laws and regulations a board member should know, as well as best practices to ensure the sound governance of an association. We are excited for this program and expect it will be something that other chapters around the country will want to emulate. The program is expected to launch in Summer 2025.

With that, I am off to Sephora. ■

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY...

from page 20.

ties facing the industry due to factors out of our control, it's important to make sure that your contracts include clear language that will help both parties be protected in the event of unforeseen cost increases.

4. KNOW YOUR MATERIALS

Understanding where your materials are sourced and manufactured can help you gain more insight into potential price fluctuations. Talk to your contractors to learn more about what raw materials are used to make

the building products they purchase and how those materials and finished products get from Point A to Point B around the world. Knowing more about these supply chains can help you stay updated on market trends so you can anticipate and be prepared to manage potential disruptions.

As we look ahead to a potentially turbulent 2025, the projections and strategies shared in this article hopefully can help you stay educated about where costs may be headed and how community associations can work with your partners in the construction industry to successfully navigate these uncertain times. ■



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Who can believe we are in April already? I still have people wishing me 'Happy New Year!' With Spring arriving, now is the time that many community associations are beginning to tackle the necessary upkeep and commencing capital projects—large and small. It's also the best time for associations to begin formulating a vision for how they can help improve the property values of the community and the morale of its residents. This month's issue centers around the, "Glow Up!"—a phrase way overused by my wife to describe Chris Pratt post-Parks and Recreation.

In the world of real estate, first impressions are everything. Imagine driving through a neighborhood that's bursting with curb appeal—freshly painted fences, tidy lawns, and flowers that practically wave hello. You'd think to yourself, "Now this is the kind of place I want to live." Just like how a person's outfit can make them look polished and put-together, a community association's investment in the aesthetic appeal of its exteriors and landscaping does the same thing for a neighborhood.

Think about it: When you walk into a room and someone's dressed to impress—sharp suit, stylish shoes, the whole nine yards—there's an immediate sense of confidence. You think, "This person has their life together." Or you can walk into the room and see someone dressed like Adam Sandler at the Oscars. Well, the same applies to a community association. When a neighborhood invests in landscaping and attractive upkeep, it gives off the same vibe.

No one wants to live in a place where the grass is as long as the neighbor's Wi-Fi password. Investing in clean, manicured lawns, fresh paint, and vibrant flowers isn't just about looking pretty; it's about sending the message, "We care about our community, and we're ready to take on the world." That's the kind of confidence we're talking about.

I invite you to take advantage of the advice provided this month by these informative articles about beautifying your community, "Let's Get Glowing! How Revitalizing Your Common Spaces Can Enhance Property Value and Build a Strong Community," Carrie Fusella, Design Alternatives Group, LLC, "Creating Value with Curb Appeal," Chris Merkler, Down to Earth Landscaping,

"When you walk into a room and someone's dressed to impress... there's an immediate sense of confidence."

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from page 5.

Inc., "How Paint Maintenance Impacts Your Community's Appearance and Longevity," Lindsey Champagne, CertaPro Painters, and "Beautify on a Budget," Erin Spiliotopoulos, CMCA, AMS, Matrix Property Management Group, LLC.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the passing of a dear friend to CAI, Charles "Charlie" Lavine. Charlie was a founding member of the Board of Directors for Traditions at Federal Point Condominium Association over twenty years ago. He served multiple terms on that board, fulfilling roles as both Vice President and President. Charlie was also an active participant in our CAI chapter for over ten years, regularly attending educational programs and networking events. Additionally, he joined the first CAVL Committee of CAI-NJ, where he served as Vice Chair and completed two terms as Chair. For the past five years, I had the privilege of serving alongside Charlie as a member of CAI-NJ's Board of Directors. Charlie was a passionate advocate for fairness and represented homeowner leaders on the Board with a strong voice. He was a cherished friend to many within our chapter, and his absence will be deeply felt. ■

"...it is important to acknowledge the passing of a dear friend to CAI, Charles 'Charlie' Lavine."

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Spring is finally in the air. The long winter has come to an end. The smell of fresh mulch permeates – albeit 18 inches away from any combustible building material this year.

The theme for this month's *Community Trends*® is "The Art of Community Associations." While I don't believe anyone truly knows what that means — trust me, I asked — it is this ambiguity that separates art from science. As Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously wrote in a concurring opinion in 1964 when trying to answer the question of what constitutes art as compared to obscenity, "I know it when I see it."

At first glance, serving on a board or managing a community association might seem like a matter of numbers and rules – budgets, bylaws, maintenance schedules. But anyone who has ever done so successfully knows the truth: the real business of a community association is more of an art than a science.

Yes, there are financial reports to review, legal requirements to follow, and policies to enforce. Yet none of these elements exist in a vacuum. Behind every decision are people — residents with different needs, expectations, and personalities. Balancing these human elements requires diplomacy, intuition, and creativity.

No formula can tell you how to handle a disagreement between neighbors or how to inspire community engagement. There's no equation that explains how to build trust after a controversial decision or how to turn a routine annual meeting into a meaningful gathering. These situations call for emotional intelligence, active listening, and sometimes a bit of improvisation.

Effective board members understand that while structure is important, flexibility is key. The art lies in reading the room, adapting to change, and creating a sense of belonging. It's about knowing when to hold firm and when to compromise, when to follow precedent and when to try something new.

Strong community associations are built not just on policy, but on connection. They thrive when board members approach their roles as caretakers of both infrastructure and relationships. In the end, the business of a community association is about more than maintaining property — it's about fostering harmony. And that, without question, is an art. ■

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This past November, I had the honor of joining CAI-NJ and our esteemed F.A.S.T. Committee at the Samuel & Josephine Plumeri Wishing Place in Monroe, New Jersey, also known as the "Make-A-Wish Castle", to present CAI-NJ's latest charitable donation to Make-A-Wish New Jersey. This most recent contribution brought CAI-NJ's total donations to the organization to over \$100,000 since 2015. During our visit, the dedicated staff at Make-A-Wish organized a special event where we were able to witness the granting of a wish to a young boy named Avory using CAI-NJ's donation. This moment, together with the tour of the "Castle" and its various "Wishing Rooms," meant for a profoundly moving day.

For those unfamiliar, Make-A-Wish is a nonprofit organization that grants transformative wishes to children with critical illnesses, aiming to bring hope, strength, and joy during their challenging times. Founded in 1980, the organization collaborates with volunteers, donors, and medical professionals to create personalized experiences—ranging from meeting celebrities to traveling to dream destinations—that uplift both the child and their family. These wishes enhance emotional well-being and can contribute to the healing process.

CAI-NJ's capacity to support this cause is a direct result of the significant efforts of CAI-NJ's F.A.S.T. Committee. While the name stands for the "Future All Star Team," the committee members are already recognized as All Stars within CAI-NJ. Historically regarded as unsung heroes of our Chapter, it is gratifying that F.A.S.T. is now receiving national recognition for its contributions.

In the past month, at CAI's Annual Conference, CAI-NJ was awarded an Achievement Award in Public Affairs for our partnership with Make-A-Wish New Jersey. This award serves as a reminder that while CAI-NJ's primary focus is on education and advocacy, service remains the cornerstone of all our activities. Congratulations to our F.A.S.T. Committee, all its members, past and present, and to CAI-NJ's outstanding staff, whose support made these achievements possible.

On July 9 F.A.S.T.'s premier fundraising event, the CAI-NJ Olympics, will be held at Thompson Park in Monroe Township. The event is a unique and entertaining activity that, to me, is the most fun event on the CAI-NJ calendar each year. What other event provides the opportunity to "slime" the CAI-NJ Board Members! The goal is to continue setting records annually to maintain our partnership with Make-A-Wish New Jersey. We hope to see you out there this year. ■

"...F.A.S.T. is now receiving national recognition for its contributions."



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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.
2025 CAI-NJ PRESIDENT
GREENBAUM, ROWE, SMITH & DAVIS, LLP

As anyone who has ever served on a community association board can attest—this is not a spectator sport.

Board members are expected to navigate a maze of legal requirements, budgetary responsibilities, resident concerns, and long-term planning. And while most board members volunteer with the best of intentions, good intentions alone don't balance a budget, interpret state law, or resolve an architectural dispute. That's why education is not just a "nice-to-have" – it's essential.

That's also why I'm thrilled to share that CAI-NJ is launching our brand-new Board Leadership Development program this summer – created for New Jersey board members, by New Jersey professionals – and best of all, it's available at no cost to our members.

This web-based course is designed to provide board members with a clear, practical foundation in everything they need to know to serve effectively. Clocking in at about three hours total, the program is broken up into short, manageable chapters that users can complete at their own pace. Whether you're fitting it in over coffee or knocking it out in one sitting with a fresh legal pad and a determined mindset, the structure is flexible and entirely user-friendly.

Each chapter wraps up with a quick "Knowledge Check" to reinforce learning and make sure users are absorbing the most important takeaways. Upon completing the program, participants will receive a Certificate of Completion – a small but meaningful badge of honor that shows their commitment to responsible governance.

We strongly encourage all associations to incentivize their board members to participate in this program. An informed board makes better decisions, runs more efficient meetings, and avoids costly missteps. And that benefits everyone.

To be clear, this program isn't a replacement for the national CAI Board Leadership Development Workshop, which remains a fantastic, in-depth two-day course. Rather, this new initiative is a complement to it – offering a New Jersey-specific focus, tailored to the laws, challenges, and best practices of our Garden State communities. Think of it as the CliffsNotes for everything uniquely NJ, designed with accessibility and relevance in mind.

"I'm thrilled to share that CAI-NJ is launching our brand-new Board Leadership Development program this summer..."

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

from page 5.

At CAI-NJ, we believe education is the foundation of successful, thriving communities. By making this resource freely available to our members, we're investing in the long-term health of associations throughout the state.

So, whether your board is full of seasoned trustees or newly elected volunteers wondering what they just signed up for, this program is for you. Let's equip our leaders with the tools they need to succeed – and show them that knowledge truly is power (and in this case, certificate-worthy).

This program has been over a year in the making and could not have happened without the tireless efforts of our amazing staff, led by Angela Kavanaugh, and so many CAI-NJ volunteers including, but not limited to, my fellow BLD Task Force Members (Michael Flippin, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, Bob Travis, CIRMS, Mary Barrett, Esq. and Kristina Munson, CMCA, AMS, PCAM), and the members of our amazing New Jersey Legislative Action Committee (NJ-LAC) and Homeowner Leader Committee. Also, a big thanks to our two voiceover wizards, Helen Kiechlin and Bob Travis, CIRMS, whose vocal acrobatics turned material that could have been snooze-inducing into an engaging program. Audible should be contacting you both soon.

Stay tuned for the official launch soon – we can't wait to see our members take advantage of this exciting new opportunity.

Here's to smarter boards and stronger communities! ■

BASKETBALL...

from page 32.

heartbeat of the community. Their passion and engagement are what drive interest and progress. Even though criticism can sometimes be tough to hear, it often comes from a place of wanting the best for the community. One thing I have learned is that, just like in sports, success and positive outcomes tend to ease much of that criticism over time.

The interesting part of community management is that the residents are just as important as fans are to sports. Residents are elected board members, and management teams are hired to serve. While management teams often spend a lot of their time managing unrealistic expectations from a small portion of the community, they are still part of the community. I have also learned that, just as in sports, winning in community management quiets a lot of complaints. Winning in community management can mean solving a problem for a resident in need, helping a homeowner with an issue in their home, or simply making a community member's day by opening the door to the clubhouse. Anyway, we do it, and we win together! ■

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.

2025 CAI-NJ PRESIDENT

GREENBAUM, ROWE, SMITH & DAVIS, LLP

Over the past several months, CAI has experienced a remarkable period of growth and achievement, thanks in large part to the exceptional dedication of our staff and the tireless efforts of our committed volunteer leaders. There have been numerous highlights that stand out and demonstrate the collective impact of our community.

One of the most significant developments has been the successful launch of our online Board Leadership Development course. This invaluable resource is available free of charge to all of our members, a milestone made possible by the countless hours generously contributed by our CAI-NJ Board of Directors as well as the members of our New Jersey Legislative Action Committee (NJ-LAC) and Homeowner Leader Committees. Their unwavering commitment to supporting and empowering the education of our members is evident in the quality and accessibility of this program. For those interested in exploring or enrolling in the course, additional information can be found on our website at www.cainj.org.

In legislative news, our NJ-LAC achieved a noteworthy victory with the unanimous approval of S3992. This important bill addresses and clarifies some of the more misunderstood aspects introduced by the recent capital reserves funding legislation that came into effect last year. To gain a deeper understanding of the bill's impact and its implications for our members, I encourage you to read the insightful article by NJ-LAC Chair Matthew Earle, Esq. which is featured on page 8.

Our calendar this summer has been filled with a series of vibrant and memorable events, each contributing to the dynamic spirit of our organization. Both June and July saw the successful execution of beloved gatherings, including the annual Dennis R. Casale Memorial Golf Outing, the lively PAC the Haus fundraiser in Belmar, the New Member Open House offering a warm welcome to newcomers, the educational High-Rise Site Tour, and the eagerly anticipated F.A.S.T. Olympics. This last event, in particular, is a personal favorite of mine each year, and I was genuinely disappointed to have missed it this time. The success of these events is a testament to the hard work and enthusiasm of our outstanding staff and the dedication of our amazing community leaders, all of whom make these moments possible.

"Our calendar this summer has been filled with a series of vibrant and memorable events..."

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

from page 5.

On the national stage, CAI has recently undergone an exciting and transformative change in leadership. After an impressive 23 years of devoted service, our longtime CEO, Thomas Skiba, has chosen to embark on his much-deserved retirement. In light of his departure, I am delighted to share that Dawn Bauman, CAE, a lifelong advocate for CAI, has stepped into the role and will undoubtedly rise to the occasion, continuing the legacy of excellence established by Tom. In addition, there has been another notable promotion within our ranks: Phoebe Neseth, Esq. has been elevated to the position of Vice President of Government Relations, Public Affairs, & Legal. Phoebe has distinguished herself as a remarkable leader for CAI, continuously working alongside our NJ-LAC to advance some of our most influential policy initiatives. Her dedication and effectiveness have been crucial to our ongoing success. Congratulations are certainly in order for both Dawn and Phoebe as they take on these new and important responsibilities!

As we reflect on these recent accomplishments and transitions, it becomes clear that our organization is well-positioned for continued progress and innovation, thanks to the commitment and collaboration of everyone involved. ■

MANAGEMENT TRENDS...

from page 43.

and leaders are guiding the way. Leadership ensures the work gets done well. Mentorship ensures that it gets done better tomorrow. As the industry continues to evolve, the companies that prioritize both will not only outperform their competition but become destinations for top talent. And in a field where relationships are everything, that's the kind of asset you can't afford to ignore. ■

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.

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GREENBAUM, ROWE, SMITH & DAVIS, LLP

This may come as a shock to you, dear reader, but I did not grow up dreaming of one day representing community associations. No, my early ambitions were far more glamorous: government, law, and the kind of civic idealism that gets you into campaign offices and student government meetings instead of frat parties (ok, I found time for both).

I spent much of high school and college knocking on doors, dialing up voters, and occasionally running in student elections myself. After law school, I landed what I thought was the dream job — Chief of Staff to an Assemblyperson in one of New Jersey's most fiercely contested legislative districts. I had it all: the title, the access, the barely-above-minimum-wage salary.

There I was, in the thick of it — drafting legislation, hobnobbing with lobbyists, buttering up donors at overpriced fundraisers. I was “making a difference”... and hating every minute of it.

Eventually, reality (and a car that needed gas) nudged me back toward the private sector. I joined a law firm, thanks to two wonderful mentors, Jennifer Alexander, Esq. and Bob Griffin, Esq. of Griffin Alexander, P.C., who took a chance on me. And as they say, the rest is history.

Fast forward to a quiet day in 2013. I was at my desk, flipping through *Community Trends*® when I came across an article about the New Jersey Legislative Action Committee (NJ-LAC). It was written by then-Chair Jim Magid, PCAM and detailed the group's efforts to pass legislation requiring property manager licensure (something we are still working on — read more about our efforts on page 8.) I recognized the names on the LAC roster. These were the CAI all-stars. Despite my short and unremarkable public service stint, my passion for policy hadn't gone anywhere. And I still had a decent Rolodex.

Fueled by a mix of optimism and youthful ignorance, I reached out to Jim thinking I somehow would be offered a seat at the big kid's table. Mind you, my entire CAI résumé at that point consisted of attending the Conference and Expo and maybe grabbing one too many mini crab cakes at the Awards Celebration. I was essentially a spectator in the stands asking for a roster spot on the Yankees.

Yet somehow — and I still don't know why — I got the shot.

My first NJ-LAC meeting was held right before a Community Association Political Action Committee (CA-PAC) fundraiser at Monmouth Park. I expected

“Despite my short and unremarkable public service stint, my passion for policy hadn't gone anywhere.”

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

from page 5.

some light policy chatter. What I got was a masterclass in strategic discourse, legislative analysis, and the careful allocation of political capital. I was hooked. While much of the LAC's work often flies under the radar, it quite literally shapes the landscape in which all of us — managers, board members, attorneys, vendors — operate.

The LAC is CAI's legislative watchdog, advocate, and occasionally, firefighter. It's the group that sifts through proposed bills in Trenton and asks, "How will this affect our communities?" If the answer is "not well," the LAC mobilizes — working with lobbyists, legislators, and other stakeholders to protect the interests of common interest communities, saving us from legislative disaster before you even knew disaster was on the docket.

Our partners at MBI-GluckShaw, a top-tier lobbying firm, bring the political muscle. But it's the dedication and institutional knowledge of LAC members — some of whom have volunteered for quite literally decades — that keep the machine running.

This month's issue of *Community Trends*® focuses on the LAC and its ongoing work on behalf of our communities — and those of us who serve them. I encourage you to read each article and get familiar with the issues at hand. If you've ever wondered, Who's out there fighting for us in Trenton? — the answer is the LAC. ■

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Casey Noon,
Editorial Chair

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.
2025 CAI-NJ PRESIDENT
GREENBAUM, ROWE, SMITH & DAVIS, LLP

This issue of *Community Trends*® marks our annual Conference and Expo edition—a celebration of the largest gathering of common-interest community members, managers, and business partners in New Jersey. For many, the Conference and Expo serves as their first introduction to CAI, and it can understandably feel overwhelming at the outset. As a board, our priority is to ensure that members receive the greatest possible value from their involvement. With that in mind, I'd like to share a few suggestions to help members make the most of their experience.

Joining CAI is an excellent step toward building both professional expertise and meaningful connections in the community association field. But simply becoming a member is only the beginning—your experience will be what you make of it. To maximize the benefits of membership, here are a few key strategies for getting involved and making your mark.

***“Joining CAI is
an excellent step
toward building
both professional
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meaningful
connections...”***

1. Join a Committee—And be Active

Committee membership is one of the most rewarding ways to contribute to CAI. Whether your interests lie in event planning, editing *Community Trends*® or advocacy, committees provide a platform to share your talents and gain valuable experience. But remember, joining is just the first step. The real value comes from active participation. Attend meetings, contribute ideas, and volunteer for tasks. The more you engage, the more others will recognize your commitment and leadership. Turn to page 65 for details on joining a CAI-NJ Committee.

2. Show Up to Networking Events

CAI regularly hosts events that bring together professionals, board members, and service providers from across New Jersey. These gatherings are more than just social outings—they are opportunities to expand your network, exchange ideas, and build lasting relationships. Make an effort to attend, introduce yourself to new faces, and follow up afterward. The connections you form could lead to collaborations, mentorships, or even career opportunities.

3. Volunteer for Projects

Special projects—such as proposing, planning, and teaching an educational seminar, organizing a charitable initiative, or guest writing an article for

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

from page 5.

Community Trends®—are a great way to showcase your skills and make a tangible impact. Don't be afraid to raise your hand when volunteers are needed. Not only will you gain practical experience, but you'll also demonstrate your reliability and initiative to fellow members.

4. Get to Know Your Fellow Members

CAI is a community built on relationships. Take time to connect with others outside of formal events—whether

***"Don't be afraid to
raise your hand
when volunteers are
needed."***

through a quick phone call, coffee meeting, or even a friendly conversation before a program begins. These personal connections help strengthen the collaborative spirit of the organization and can enhance both your professional and personal growth.

5. Take Ownership of Your Membership

Ultimately, your CAI membership is an investment. The more you put in, the more you'll get out. Be proactive, stay curious, and embrace the opportunities available to you.

By engaging fully—through committees, networking, volunteering, and relationship-building—you will not only enrich your own experience but also contribute to the success of the New Jersey chapter as a whole. ■



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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.

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GREENBAUM, ROWE, SMITH & DAVIS, LLP

This month's issue of *Community Trends*® focuses on the "leaders in our community." Here in New Jersey, we have no shortage of committed board members, managers, and business partners that lead the nearly 7,000 community associations estimated to exist in New Jersey. They protect and advocate for our interests, advance our industry, educate and mentor the next generation of leaders, and give back hours of time to causes near and dear to our CAI hearts.

CAI had a tremendous last few months thanks to many of these wonderful people. We recently launched our online Board Leadership Development course that is free of charge to all our Homeowner Leader Members, thanks to the countless hours of work spent by our CAI-NJ Board of Directors and the members of our New Jersey Legislative Action Committee (NJLAC) and Homeowner Leader Committee. Please visit www.cainj.org/bld/ for more information on this course. Our NJLAC was successful in obtaining unanimous approval of S3992, a bill that clarifies some of the pain points of the new capital reserves funding bill that went into effect last year. And all our events have been tremendous successes, including our Summer Pints with PAC and Learn with LAC webinars. All of this was possible because of our tremendous staff and wonderful community leaders.

Speaking of leaders, my earliest mentor in this industry was the now-retired-and-likely-fishing-somewhere-off-the-coast-of-North-Carolina, Bob Griffin. Bob is a gifted attorney and a treasured member of the CAI-NJ Community. In honor of this being the "leaders in the industry" edition of *Community Trends*®, and in recognition of my tenure almost being complete as President so they really can't replace me at this point, I thought I would use this space to lightheartedly argue in support of one of Bob's very important and extremely serious theories surrounding community associations.

Why Every Association Problem Begins with the Letter "P"

Running a community association is a noble calling—equal parts government, kindergarten classroom, and reality TV show. But any seasoned trustee knows that no matter how complex the issue, the root of the problem starts with the letter P. So, for your commiseration, to prove Bob's point, here are the **35 P's of Community Association Chaos**—the problems, people, and peculiarities that plague boards from Paramus to Pennsauken.

- 1. Parking.** Let's start with the perennial favorite. There could be 100 spaces and 40 units, and someone will still claim there's nowhere to park. Especially when "Jimmy with the Commercial Vehicle" insists on using three spaces for his truck, jet ski trailer, and ego.

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CAI-NJ

PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

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2. **Pets.** Whether it's a 40-pound emotional support python or a Chihuahua with the soul of a chainsaw, pet rules are a battleground.
3. **Poop.** A related "P" of #2 to be sure (you see what I did there), who thought 10 years ago that boards would be considering hiring "poop DNA" services for their association?
4. **Pools.** It's closed for repairs. Or cleaning. Or because of "the incident" involving #3.
5. **Paint.** Every spring, someone repaints their shutters "Tuscany Plum" instead of the board-approved "Colonial Eggplant."
6. **Playgrounds.** Beloved by kids, feared by insurance carriers.
7. **Politics.** It starts with just one yard sign.
8. **Potholes.** Residents complain about them but refuse to approve the special assessment to fix them. "Can't we just fill it in with some concrete from Home Depot?" asks Carol from Finance.
9. **Packages.** Instead of breaking down your Amazon boxes, let's just fill our community's entire dumpster with the first 5 cardboard boxes that go in them.
10. **Privacy.** "Why does the board need my email?" Ruth asks, while posting her medical records, voting history, grandchildren's photographs, vacation plans, and sandwich preferences on the community Facebook page.
11. **Power-washing.** Half the community thinks their siding needs it weekly. The other half doesn't believe in soap.
12. **Plowing.** Too early? People complain. Too late? People complain. Salted the sidewalks? Now someone's labradoodle has a rash and you're facing a chemical warfare tribunal.
13. **Proxies.** Nobody knows what they mean anymore since Radburn. I mean, I do. I swear.
14. **Pest Control.** Termites, ants, and that raccoon around the dumpster that the community's nicknamed "Peter PANda" that's practically a board member at this point because of #9.
15. **Puddles.** Drainage issues: the final level of the "Who's Responsibility is it?" game show.
16. **Permits.** "You mean I need a property modification request to build a goat pen out back? Man, HOAs are the worst."
17. **Permissibility.** "This isn't permitted?" asks the owner of the goats in the aforesaid newly installed goat pen.
18. **Power Struggles.** The treasurer wants to be the President. The President wants to go back to a life where no one hated them. The unelected Landscape Chair wants to dissolve the condominium altogether.
19. **Patience.** The most endangered resource of all.
20. **Participation.** "Frankly, this is the first I am hearing of this!" said Beth at the first meeting in 12 years she attended and after 4 letters and weekly e-mail reminders.
21. **Protection (Security).** Some want 24/7 armed guards and biometric scanners. Other want to remove the locks from the clubhouse. Insurance premiums rise regardless.
22. **Protection (Insurance).** When all else fails in trying to balance your budget without increasing the maintenance fees because "that is why you got elected," just increase the insurance deductible by another \$25,000!
23. **Payments.** Need I say more?
24. **Peacekeeping.** Board leadership is less time governing, more time refereeing. On a weekly basis, I often must tell clients that, "yes, you need to provide alternative dispute resolution for that. Yes, I know it doesn't make sense. And yes, Mrs. Lopez did file a complaint against Mr. Greene for 'emotionally mowing' too close to her peonies."
25. **Perception.** Reality doesn't matter. What matters is the photoshopped Facebook photo of the much greener, more elaborate, and certainly not at all more expensive landscaping across town in Del Boca Vista, Phase III.
26. **Pesticides.** "Natural Solutions" suggested as pesticide alternatives by residents include garlic spray, chili peppers, and a shaman.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

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- 27. Pitch.** The art of pitching a much-needed vote to a community. "Increasing your capital contribution charge will actually help keep your maintenance fees down!" The vote fails 7-23 in a community of 700.
- 28. Platform.** The benefits and detriments of social media. The rate at which toxicity can spread on the Nextdoor app should be studied by epidemiologists.
- 29. Planning.** "Why are we planning on funding reserves for a new roof 20 years from now? I'll be dead by then." These were actual spoken sentences at a meeting I attended this month.
- 30. Policy.** "Where does it specifically say that in writing? If it is not in writing, I don't have to do what you say!" asks the man deep frying a turkey on his condo's wooden deck.
- 31. Precision.** "On page 17 of your board package, there is a typo in paragraph 3. Is this what we are paying management for?"

32. Projects. There are the actual projects – roof replacements, clubhouse renovations, etc. – and then there's the committee member who can turn the meeting's lunch order into the Sagrada Familia.

33. Protocol. "Why are we making this meeting so formal and unneighborly? We don't need Robert's Rules of Order!" says the gentlemen who later asserts a Point of Personal Privilege during the financial report.

34. Provisions. Interpreting complex or contradictory provisions in your governing documents. "Does Section 3.5 prohibit tennis after 5 p.m. or declare war on Pennsylvania?"

35. People. The root of all these problems.

Community association governance is not for the faint of heart. It requires thick skin, a sense of humor, and ideally, a background in mediation, plumbing, poop investigations, and paint chip interpretation. But for all the headaches, there's a reason we do it. Behind each P is a Person—someone who just wants a safe, happy, wellkept place to call Paradise.

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MEMBERS \$250 | NON MEMBERS \$500

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MEDIATORS MUST BE CAI-NJ MEMBERS. BY COMPLETING THE PROGRAM YOU WILL BE PLACED ON THE CAI-NJ LIST OF MEDIATORS FOR THE ADR PROGRAM. MEDIATORS WILL RECEIVE A \$200 STIPEND PER MEDIATION COMPLETED.
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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

from page 50.

Paradise, of course, being the 36th P. And probably the most unrealistic.

Please do not take this too seriously. The views expressed herein are solely that of the author. If you liked them that is. Otherwise, my partner Caroline Record, Esq. wrote this.

Have a favorite "P" of your own? Write to me at smlenak@greenbaumlaw.com.

CAI-NJ ADR Mediation Program

CAI-NJ is proud to offer our Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) – Mediation Program to our members as an exclusive benefit. Community Associations are required by state law to offer homeowners a "fair and efficient" solution, outside of litigation. This simple program is designed as quick and affordable alternative to the traditional justice system.



Now, more than ever, community associations need a quicker, more affordable way to solve their disputes.

Now available on Zoom!

What is ADR?

The CAI-NJ ADR-Mediation Program is designed as an alternative to the traditional justice system. It includes negotiation and mediation with a third party. This service is offered to parties who live or work in community associations. Community associations are required by state law to offer homeowners a "fair and efficient" alternative to litigation.

How does ADR work?

ADR involves a mediation conference where the disputing parties meet with a mediator on a voluntary basis to talk about the problem and attempt to reach an agreement. The mediator is selected by CAI-NJ and assists the parties in arriving at a solution but does not impose a decision. The mediator helps the parties look at all aspects of the issues and explore what may be acceptable to both parties as a resolution.

What are the benefits of ADR through CAI-NJ?

The CAI-NJ ADR Program will most likely be less expensive than the normal judicial process because it is a one-time fee rather than court costs and undetermined legal fees. Also, mediation is a confidential process unlike court cases that are adjudicated in public session. Many mediated disputes only require one session to resolve, and those sessions can be scheduled quickly. A filed court case may take months or years to resolve.

Email ADR@cainj.org or call (609) 588-0030 for questions and to utilize this valuable service today!



IMPORTANT:

Community Trends®

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Community Trends® is a monthly publication of the New Jersey Chapter of the Community Associations Institute (CAI-NJ). The purpose of this magazine is for the dissemination of informative and noteworthy information that is relevant to the lives of every person living in or working with community associations throughout New Jersey. *Community Trends®* should not be used to provide the kind of authoritative and comprehensive information that must be tailored to serve individual needs when legal, accounting or other professional advice is required.

CAI-NJ encourages interested persons to submit articles for consideration by the Editorial Committee. Publication in *Community Trends®* is a wonderful opportunity to write about an issue relevant to community associations, and the Editorial Committee will carefully review all submissions. When an article is published, the opinion of the author and accuracy of the facts presented in the article are not specifically endorsed by either CAI-NJ or the Editorial Committee. Neither CAI-NJ nor *Community Trends®* guarantees a placement of any submitted article, and any article can be rejected for any reason at any time by the Editorial Committee or CAI-NJ. All articles should be written in the third person.

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- C. Referral to CAI National for review and possible further sanctions; and/or,
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Authors may submit a photograph with their article. Please note that CAI-NJ has the exclusive right to refuse to publish any photograph for any reason. Permission to reprint any article first published in *Community Trends®* is subject to the single condition that all reprints must include the following ownership acknowledgment, "Reprinted from the (month) 20__ issue of the CAI-NJ's *Community Trends®*."

Community Trends®,

Casey Noon,
Editorial Chair

For past editions from 2017-2024
visit www.cainj.org.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Steven Mlenak, Esq.

2025 CAI-NJ PRESIDENT

GREENBAUM, ROWE, SMITH & DAVIS, LLP

As my term as President of the New Jersey Chapter of CAI comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on a year filled with growth, collaboration, and meaningful progress for our organization and the communities we serve. It has been an honor to lead such a dedicated group of professionals, volunteers, and staff, and I am deeply grateful for the trust and support you have shown me throughout this journey.

This year, our chapter continued to embody the spirit of leadership and service that defines CAI-NJ. Together, we advanced important legislative initiatives, expanded our membership, and strengthened our sponsorship base. Our marquee educational and networking events saw record attendance, and we established the first of its kind virtual Board Leadership Training Program, available for free to all homeowner leader members. For additional details regarding this excellent resource, please visit <https://cainj.org/bld/>. These achievements are a testament to the collective effort and commitment of everyone involved.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the tireless work of our exceptional staff. Led by Angela Kavanaugh, our team, including Robin, Jackie, Brooke, Helen, and Jocelyn, has consistently demonstrated professionalism, dedication, and a genuine passion for CAI-NJ's mission. Their commitment is the foundation of our nationally recognized success, and I am profoundly grateful for their support and expertise. As I have often said, my greatest challenge this year was simply not getting in their way!

I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my fellow CAI-NJ Board Members. Your wisdom, integrity, and unwavering focus on our fiduciary duties have ensured that our decisions always serve the best interests of our association.

Our chapter's strength is further amplified by our more than 200 committee volunteers. Your enthusiasm and commitment are unmatched, and your willingness to step up for our industry is truly inspiring. At national conferences, other chapters marvel at our volunteer engagement, and it is clear that CAI-NJ's success is built on your dedication.

Looking ahead, I am proud of the Board's work this year and have never been more confident that CAI-NJ's future is bright with the remarkable leadership, innovative thinking, and unwavering commitment that define our organization. With

"This year, our chapter continued to embody the spirit of leadership and service that defines CAI-NJ."

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER...

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a strong foundation established through strategic planning and collaborative efforts, I believe we are poised to tackle new challenges and seize exciting opportunities. Our Board's dedication to upholding our values and pursuing excellence ensures that CAI-NJ will continue to thrive, foster meaningful partnerships, and make a lasting impact on the communities we serve. As we welcome new ideas and embrace change, I am certain that the chapter will reach even greater heights, supported by the continued engagement of our members, volunteers, and staff.

In closing, I encourage all members to remain engaged, share your ideas, and continue to lift each other up. CAI-NJ has given me more than I could ever give back, and I am grateful for every moment spent working alongside you. Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your commitment to our shared mission. Together, we have truly proven that a rising tide lifts all ships.

With deepest gratitude,
Steve

ETHICAL BOUNDARIES...

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unauthorized access, especially when using cloud-based tools.

4. Competence – Maintain a working knowledge of the tools used, understanding their capabilities and limitations.

5. Accountability – Professionals remain responsible for the final work product, regardless of how much AI is used.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is here to stay — and it can be a powerful ally in serving community associations. But the essence of professionalism remains unchanged: ethical obligations cannot be delegated to a computer. The challenge for attorneys, engineers, accountants, and property managers is to embrace AI thoughtfully — using it to elevate their practice, not replace their judgment.

By maintaining transparency, oversight, and accountability, professionals can ensure that AI enhances the integrity and trust that are the foundation of the community association industry. ■



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