

Homesaturday

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Board has
the right
to charge
for minutes

Q. After years of providing our condominium homeowners with copies of approved meeting minutes, owners are now being advised that we must make an appointment and drive 20 miles to the property management office, pay an hourly sum to sit and watch someone make copies of the minutes, and pay ten cents a copy. The other associations in our complex automatically provide minutes of meetings to their homeowners at no charge. Is this proper? Can

minutes simply be mailed directly to me from the property management office?

A. The board of managers of a condominium association must keep and maintain minutes of all meetings of the association and its board for the prior seven years (or true and complete copies of these records), at the association's principal office. Any member of the association, in person or by agent, has the right to inspect, examine and make copies of such minutes.

In order to exercise this right, a member must submit a written request to the association's board of managers, or its authorized agent, stating with particularity the records sought to be examined. The actual cost to the association of retrieving and making requested records available for inspection and examination may be charged by the association to the requesting member. Similarly, the actual costs to the association of copying the records may also be charged by the association to the requesting member.

If an owner makes a request for a specific set of minutes, many associations will simply mail them to the owner and charge the copying cost and a modest sum to retrieve them, rather than requiring an owner to physically appear at the management office.

Q. Can my condominium association force me to have the windows and sliding door serving my unit replaced? Who pays for this work?

A. The board of managers of the condominium is ultimately responsible for the maintenance, repair and replacement of the common element windows and sliding glass door serving the individual units. This permits the board to determine the need for such work, and when and how such work will be performed. These decisions should be made with the input of the association's engineer or similar consultant.

In general, the association is responsible for the cost of maintenance, repair and replacement of the common elements. However, the declaration or bylaws of the association may provide for the assessment, in connection with expenditures for the limited common elements, of only those units to which the limited common elements are assigned. If your condominium instruments includes this language, the association could charge the cost of the windows and sliding glass doors to your unit, as they are typically limited common elements.

Q. I am on the board of our self-managed condominium. The association conducts an annual accounting review every year, but not an audit. My question is how often is considered reasonable to conduct an actual audit?

A. The Condominium Property Act does not require an annual audit. Rather, this law requires the board of managers to provide an annual accounting to all unit owners. This means an itemized accounting of the common expenses for the preceding year actually incurred or paid, together with an indication of which portions were for reserves, capital expenditures or repairs or payment of real estate taxes and with a tabulation of the amounts collected pursuant to the budget or assessment, and showing the net excess or deficit of income over expenditures plus reserves.

That said, some association's governing documents require an annual audit, not just an accounting. In the absence of the requirement for an audit in the association's governing documents, the board should consult with its accountant as to the need for and frequency of an audit.

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Minimalist desks simply
get the job done

BY MEGAN BUEGER
Special To The Washington Post

Is the home office doomed? Laptops allow us to work almost anywhere, paper storage has gone digital, and for a growing number of apartment-dwellers, the notion of having the square-footage for a home office is a pipe dream.

Yet, for some, the ease with which we can now work from home has made a designated work space even more important.

"When I talk to customers, they often talk about wanting a special place to work in their home, even if they're low on space," said Lisa Scroggins, the retail market manager of Room & Board (www.roomandboard.com) in Washington, D.C. "Because so many of us can work from home these days, it's nice to have a little area to focus."

Scroggins said the majority of Room & Board's customers are urbanites living within five miles of the store. Because of that, she said, it's virtually unheard of for shoppers to request the clunky, executive-style desks of yesteryear that would span more than 65 inches wide and weigh about 200 pounds.

"People want something thin, light, minimalist and multi-functional," she said. "We talk a lot about the concept of 'office anywhere,' which

means catering to people who are more mobile."

Finding such a piece sounds easy enough, but desks can be surprisingly expensive, particularly when they come with a bunch of cabinets, drawers and shelving. The trick, Scroggins said, is to keep it simple. Think of the desk as an apartment hack: Just about any small table near an outlet will do.

Consoles are easily swapped in for desks because they're closer to dining height than coffee tables and are often underused. Place one against the back of a sofa. If it's high enough, tuck two stools or a bench underneath to be pulled out for seating. A vase and picture frame make for nice around-the-clock display items, so when it's time to work, all you have to bring is your laptop.

If a table doesn't offer enough storage, desks are still a viable and stylish option. Interior designer Lauren Liess, who is based in Great Falls, Virginia, suggests looking for something "clearly desk-ish" and placing it wherever you have space, whether it's in the living area or by the kitchen. Hang a bulletin board with personal cards and photos nearby to make the area feel special, and accessorize the desktop with a lacquer tray to keep clutter organized. Extra points if the chair can be used for extra seating in the living or dining room, she said, and no matter what, "always finish with a great lamp."

Different desk styles offer different benefits. Bookshelf-style desks, such as the Gallery Leaning Desk from Room & Board (\$499), emphasize the ceiling and make a room appear taller. Roll-top secretary desks are master clutter



COURTESY OF CRATE & BARREL
Different desk styles offer different benefits. Crate & Barrel's Sloane leaning desk, above, is sleek and stable. At right, the top on CB2's Intimo Secretary desk, \$399, closes to quickly conceal clutter.



COURTESY OF CB2



COURTESY OF ROOM & BOARD

The Gallery Leaning Desk, \$499, draws eyes to the ceiling and makes a room appear taller.

concealers. West Elm's modular Mid-Century Office Shelving (\$75-\$84) can be hung right onto the wall, serving as a cabinet and fold-out desk. And Sara Harter, director of visual merchandising for CB2, said not to discount desks with wheels. Mobile and adaptable, they can sit against a wall or sofa and be pulled out to use as a small

dining table or buffet when company is over.

Clean lines are crucial, she added, so that the piece doesn't visually overwhelm the room. The Intimo Secretary Desk (\$399, www.cb2.com), which was designed by Jannis Ellenberger, is just 33 inches wide and has a flip-down hinge top that conceals the desktop when it's not being used. Tucked underneath the body is a hidden shelf to stash phones and laptops.

"As paperless as we are, there always seems to be something to file and cords to hide," Harter said. "A single drawer can be a huge help in hiding clutter."

Of course, there's always something to be said for thinking outside the box. Ben Homola, who co-founded the Washington and Baltimore furniture shop Trohvi with his wife, Carmen, said there's a widespread misconception that small spaces call for small furniture.

"It's more about the room as a whole," he said. "The truth is, if you can find a large, versatile piece — say, one gorgeous industrial dining table instead of a tiny table and a tiny desk — you might be better off. Sometimes, to really avoid clutter, bigger is better."



COURTESY OF ROOM & BOARD
Room & Board's light, airy Float Desk can be adjusted by your height. Different versions range from \$2,199 to \$2,799.

Industry Insider

Larger, luxury condominiums in high demand

BY JEAN MURPHY
Daily Herald Correspondent

Jamie Smith joined the family business, Smith Family Construction of Wheeling, in 2009. He had just earned a degree in communications from Northwestern University and he was forced to use everything he had ever learned about communicating effectively during the worst housing recession in a generation.

"The market was atrocious then, so selling units in our Prairie Park condominium project wasn't easy. After that experience, I have learned to not take the good times for granted. Appreciate everything," the 27-year-old Smith said.

Today, by comparison, units are "flying off the shelf" at Prairie Park, located on Wolf Road, just west of Milwaukee Avenue. Only six units remain to be sold in the developer's existing buildings so Jamie and his parents, Mark and Vivian Smith, are hard at work drawing up floor plans for units in the fifth and final building in the complex.

"It has been a great experience to see things shift so much," Smith, now the firm's vice president of operations and admitted "jack

Focus on:
Jamie Smith, Smith
Family Construction

of all trades," said. "It has been incredible how quickly things have come back. One buying couple told us they had sold their house in only eight hours."

We sat down with Smith to discuss the family business and current real estate market.

How did Smith Family Construction successfully weather the recession?

"Buyers realized that ours was a high-quality product. Many of them are downsizing from large, custom homes and they quickly recognized our high-end finishes and the quality of our construction. They also appreciated the beauty of the site and how comfortable the units are."

Tell us about your company's philosophy.

"We refuse to cut corners, even when it is costing us money. We want people to be happy so we treat them right and we do good work. We live in this community,



BOB CHWEDYK/bchwedyk@dailyherald.com
Jamie Smith, vice president of operations for Smith Family Construction, said the company will soon build a fifth building at Prairie Park in Wheeling.

so we want to add good properties to it and we don't want to run into unhappy buyers.

"In fact, my favorite part of working in the business is interacting with the clients. I enjoy running into people and having them tell me how happy they are. I like being a part of their lives since I also live at Prairie Park."

What is the biggest problem builders face today?

"For multifamily developers, the biggest problem is the lending restrictions that have been imposed. It is extremely difficult to start a new project today. That is why there are currently so

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