

## Making the Appearance or Calling it in? A Decision-Making for Wisconsin Condominium Boards

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Practice Area: Community Associations

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*Do in-person meetings enhance decision making? Many think so.*

When asked, we say, yes, it is legal, under most circumstances, to have directors meet electronically, provided that all members can speak to and hear each other simultaneously. But board members should know there is a price for remote participation.

The price may be subtle, but it should be considered. There is substantial evidence that better decisions are made when the members meet together, in the same room. So, don't call in from the other room, electronically or otherwise, if you have a choice.

True, we are grateful for the busy director who volunteers and can appear only remotely. And of course there are useful technologies such as video chat, Skype and conference calling. But the limitations of technology, subtle and otherwise, should be considered.

The dynamic of decision making has not changed even with new technologies. Court rooms are still built with the jury situated next to the witness box, better to observe demeanor and other non-verbal evidence. Board rooms are still built for in-person meetings. Most people understand that email and telephone are not good tools for important communications, whether with your significant other or a fellow board member.

Even if we cannot explain it exactly, we know that more goes in to persuasion, intuition and decision making than just words. There are other, perhaps unnamable factors which contribute when people meet together. Here are some possibilities of why in-person contact is superior for important meetings, as suggested by various writers:

- Face-to-face builds better personal relationships.
- Candor is encouraged, nuance is observed and brainstorming is more effective.
- One person's enthusiasm can inspire others. ("She cares about this, too!")
- Body language and facial expression can offer clues.
- There is less distraction and it is easier to concentrate on the issue. (Forbes Insights, 2009.)
- We may have some subconscious reactions to certain smells. (Seriously!)

Wisconsin law, subject to certain limitations, allows a Board of Directors to meet remotely, as long as all the directors can hear and speak to each other simultaneously. But our enjoyment of technology should not obscure that its overuse can have a subtle cost.

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