

Layers of Protection: Developing Community Association Security

As homeowners volunteer to be a part of their community associations, their range of knowledge on a variety of topics must immediately grow. Those tasked with security for their association are well aware of one very important thing...they want a safe and secure community. But how to go about establishing that can be a challenge. If it is a new community, the association members will draw on past, and hopefully positive, experiences. With an existing community, new members may prefer to stick with whatever the standard was in the past.

But whatever the situation, it is important for homeowners, and more specifically the community association board members, to realize the importance of a comprehensive security program. The old notion that the better the neighborhood, the lesser the security concern, is no longer appropriate. Every community, of every size and location, needs to make security and safety a top priority.

The security options and strategies are many – there are security officers, technology based systems, security minded landscape designs, and specialty lighting just to name a few. So, where do you start?

A quality security company can work with you to determine your true needs – not just what will benefit the security company. And, don't be afraid to head down this path. A security upgrade could be as simple as changing the position of the reception desk for increased visibility – but you won't know until you evaluate. While every community differs in terms of layout, geography, type of homes and size of community, there are some principles that will apply across the board. A comprehensive program incorporates personnel and technology, proactive programs, homeowner involvement and a community-wide commitment.

Many residential communities will benefit from creating layers of protection – both in terms of the personnel and physical security elements. Layers of security can be developed regardless of the size of the community. Some of these layers may already exist (exterior fencing for example) but once they are officially regarded as part of the security program, their maintenance and importance will be given greater priority. For example, if a homeowner sees a damaged fence on remote part of the property, they may not see a need to report it. If it is clearly communicated, however, that the fence is an important layer of security, the homeowner would be much more likely to report the problem.

Exterior Layer

The outermost layer of security can encompass a number of items including exterior fencing, landscape items preventing entry such as large boulders, No Trespassing signs, lighting, gates, intrusion detection sensors and security officers who patrol the perimeter of the community. Crime prevention through environment design can be an important part of the exterior layer of security.

Middle Layer

The middle layer can include a manned gatehouse or reception area, locked main doors, elevator controls, access control systems, delivery/package reception and logs, CCTV, and visitor identification systems. The middle layer of security should also consider non-residential items such as storage closets and maintenance sheds. Not only could theft be a possibility here but these areas could also create shelter for intruders and therefore should be locked and monitored. Utility or electrical closets, server rooms and stations for water, gas and sewage service should also be locked and access controlled. The middle layer of security offers protection closer to the interior of the community – the residences.

Interior Layer

This is the most critical layer. This is the final step between the residents and potential dangers. Residence doors and locks, access controls for primary parking areas, security officer patrols, motion activated lights and emergency procedures all play a role in interior security. This includes anything involving entrance or access to residences.

