



By Sabrina Hilliard Hamm

Sabrina Hilliard Hamm is the Owner and Founder of The Professional Documents Service (PDS), a transcription and meeting minutes company headquartered in Washington, D.C. The team from PDS serves cooperatives, condominiums, homeowners associations and other groups throughout the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area.

Every Minute Counts

Have you ever considered the tone, tempo and content of your board meetings from the perspective of your recording secretary? I have had the honor of leading a minute-taking firm for the past 10 years and as a result, I, and the members of my team have pretty much seen it all. Our job as the Recording Secretary (or “Minute Taker” or “Note Taker,” as some people refer to us) is to draft your minutes in a concise and accurate manner. This ensures you have a valid record of all decisions and action items expressed during your sessions. Perhaps you’ve never thought about some of the things done during your meetings – unintentionally, of course – that leave your minutes either incomplete or inaccurate. Can you recognize your board in any of the following scenarios?

- Not following Robert’s Rules of Order; not designating a Parliamentarian or other individual to manage your meetings so they remain on course.
- Allowing residents and non-board members to interject throughout your meeting. This can lead to confusion for the minute taker, and results in board meetings that are unnecessarily long. Consider limiting residents’ comments only to an Open Forum.
- Failing to provide the recording secretary with a copy of the board packet. We understand that some information is confidential. However, it is difficult to follow along when we cannot see what you are seeing. Perhaps requiring that your recording secretary shred the information from your board packet after each set of minutes has been drafted will alleviate any concerns you have with confidentiality.
- Not following the meeting’s agenda (or failing to have an agenda at all). It is difficult for the note taker to remain on the

same page with you if the discussions do not follow an agenda.

- Discussing topics in a vague manner. Management and members of the board often have the benefit of months or even years of history when discussing a topic. However, imagine your minute taker’s confusion when someone makes a statement like, “Hey, I spoke with John. He’s agreed to take care of that sign for us.” Our brains immediately wonder, “Who is John? To what sign are they referring? How can we accurately reflect this information in the minutes?” Aim to be as transparent as possible when discussing topics during your meetings.
- Stating motions in unclear terms. Simply saying “I so move” or revising a motion multiple times will likely result in an inaccuracy in your minutes. State motions and action items as clearly as possible.
- Board members failing to vote on a motion. We have noticed that board members sometimes fail to vote in favor, in opposition to, or abstain from a motion, thus making the vote count on that motion unclear. For the sake of the minutes, be as clear as possible when expressing your vote concerning all motions.
- Mumbling, speaking too low or speaking too fast. Our goal is to accurately capture your decisions. However, we are unable to do that if we cannot hear or understand you.
- Failing to identify guest speakers. Presenters are often introduced in this way: “This is Susan from the tree company.” What is Susan’s last name? For what tree company does she work? What is her title there? This is vital information that should be captured in your minutes.
- Discussing topics ad nauseam. Your minute taker understands that every matter must be fully considered before a decision can be made. However, it may not

be necessary to exhaust every possible scenario on every topic, as it may lead to confusion for your recording secretary, especially if he/she cannot distinguish whether an action was actually taken as a result of the discussion. As a reminder, the minutes are a record of the actions and decisions taken by the board, not a transcript of the meeting.

- Failing to be aware of background noises and disturbances. A major part of a minute taker’s job is listening. Imagine how simple things like having personal conversations, crunching potato chips and clicking pens during the midst of a meeting can prove to be distractions.
- Requesting that the minute taker alter information in the minutes to reflect personal preferences. We sometimes receive requests from board members to change language in their minutes because they cannot recall making a particular statement or voting in a certain manner. As long as there are no prohibitions from the state, the county or your association’s bylaws, encourage your Minute Taker to use an unobtrusive recording device during meetings for the purpose of memory recall. If there is ever a discrepancy, the recording can help ensure the minutes are accurately drafted. (Note: Your minutes are the official record of your Board meeting, not an audio recording.)

Most of all, remember that the recording secretary is an unofficial, but important member of your team. Following these guidelines and suggestions will ensure that you receive accurate minutes for your meetings each and every time. 📹

(PDS team members Christy Fase, Terry Hairston, Jeron Hamm, Celena Owens, Ivory Randall, Ruth Shirley and Billie Smith contributed to this article.)