

UPDATING YOUR PAINT PALLET

or ..."How to keep the development
from looking like the dark side of the rainbow"

By Donald Barry, AMS, PCAM, RS

Almost everyone who lives or works in the HOA industry has heard about the purple home in Seattle which caused such an uproar and cost the owner thousands of dollars in legal fees to defend their actions when the Association advised them purple was not within the approved color scheme for the development. If you didn't hear about the law suit, it was a typical legal dispute where the owner liked purple (it was a sight to behold; purple home with darker purple trim), and the Association and neighbors did not. The Association was successful in their lawsuit, but all of you know what this type of dispute does to a development's property values. Lenders won't lend and no one wants to buy in a development where a lawsuit is active.

What if, unknown to the Board, they happen to appoint someone to the Architectural Committee who is a 60's hippie hang-on and loves weird and "different" combinations? What if this person has also recruited his friends for appointment as well who feel that their community is too sterile and needs some sense of radical change to make it stand out in your community. This could be disastrous for any Association, because not only could the Association be faced with legal fees when the work is completed and the Community is outraged, but because this type of problem always divides the community and causes serious turmoil. There also could be up to a dozen other plans approved by this rouse Committee which are waiting for owner implementation.

My wife and I previously lived in a development where this exact type of thing happened. The new Architectural Committee (and Board unfortunately) felt that the community was dated because of the 80's earth tones. They didn't, however, feel it was necessary to consult with experts to approve new colors which would blend with the original colors (for those owners who like earth tones and consistency and were going to keep them) or colors that wouldn't go out of style quickly because of some current fad.

The Association, which is in California by the way, now has Midnight Blue Trim on a white home, Hunter Green Trim on a Very Yellow Home, two purple and pink combinations side by side, a Southwestern Peach and Aqua home with Peach and Aqua painted on even the fence and multiple other inappropriate combinations. The development has become one that Boards and Managers can use as an example of what can happen when the Architectural Control Committee has no taste and is out for change for change sake.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to enhance the "dated" community. In fact, we encourage all Associations to try to look at their development with the same prospective that a buyer would look at the common area and the homes. If a choice is to be made between a development that looks like an older, dated and neglected community and a new, up to date and fresh development with exactly the same amenities and services, which choice do you think will be made? Assessments, unless outrageous, normally don't make that big of a difference if they know the Association will be taking actions to protect their property values.

What can be done to eliminate these types of problems in your Association and help update the homes in your development?

Three years into the life of one of my favorite single family home associations, a very savvy Board decided that many owners might be wanting to paint and possibly change the colors of their homes. The Board consulted with a well known paint consultant to come up with possible color schemes that would update the homes, blend in with the current homes and not look outdated in a couple of years. The consultant met with the Architectural Committee and the Board to come up with 10 different color pallets for the development. The Committee and the Board were allowed to delete any of the colors which they thought was not within their personal tastes leaving a wide range of colors from which owners could choose. The consultant guaranteed the Board that the colors were guaranteed to remain "current" for up to 10 years.

The consultant then looked at the homes and decided what colors in the pallets should be used on the garage doors, trims, gutters, window trims and basic home exterior walls. A chart was then developed showing where each of the colors should be used. Even after the consultant came up with his recommendations, the Board and Committee suggested additional changes based on the pulse of their development. The Board finally chose 3; one for the base, one for the main trim and one for the small accent areas which the consultant defined. This was a total of 9 color choices.

Over the past 3 years, the colors chosen have remained in style, the owners are able to come into the Management office and select their colors from the "color board" and actually thank the Board for making their job of selecting paint easier. The Association still requires that the colors which are chosen by the owners be approved by the Architectural Committee as they don't want 5 houses with exact same colors in a row on one street.

There are several company's in the Las Vegas valley and state who have realized the unique problems faced by the community associations. Their representatives have been very helpful in working with other Associations to develop the pallet of colors and making a color board. They offer free consulting with the owners when it is time to paint their homes if their paint products are used. The owners of this development can call the representative (announced in the newsletter) to come and consult with them knowing that only the approved colors will be suggested.

Either method (paint company consultant or paid color consultant) that a Board may choose to help them pick their color pallet, will not only protect your development and help the owners with their choices, but keep your Association out of the Purple Twilight Zone.

Many of you work with or live in Townhomes or Condominiums. The same rules apply. When painting your development, consulting with an expert will greatly update the dated community. Most consultants will attend Board or Committee meetings and give advise on your project. If your development is in the desert, mountains or in the middle of the City, the consultant will work with you to see that your surroundings are taken into consideration with the final paint color selection maximizing the qualities of your unique development.

It is critical that the owners funds are maximized in making a decision on how best to use the painting dollars allocated.