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# Developing a Community Security Budget

WHERE TO START & WHAT TO ASK

BY BRIE SHOUPPE

**S**ecurity systems are generally not “one size fits all.” Creating a security budget requires time, discussion, and working with security providers on what is best and realistic for the association. There are items to think through based on current experiences you may be facing. You must determine what the

community's goals are and what they want to receive from a system. The association needs to prepare and think long-term to create an accurate budget that is specific for the property. It may seem complex to begin with but can be broken down to help with the process.

• **Prioritize—Needs & Wants**

Before looking at numbers, the board should discuss which areas of the community need security or a system upgrade. Start by working through some questions. Are you having issues at the gate? Are there so many codes for the call box that you cannot keep track of which code belongs to a household or if they have been passed around? Have incidents of vandalism spiked at the pool? Think about each asset, and focus on the areas with the most critical incidents.

While you are developing this list, you should keep in mind if any of the areas discussed have a current security system. Is it antiquated?



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Security by verifying visitors, monitoring video, managing community databases, and more. Contact info: (855) 380-1274 or [www.EnveraSystems.com](http://www.EnveraSystems.com).

Is there anything you don't like about the current equipment or wish worked differently? By answering these questions and more, you can start to prioritize which area(s) needs the most attention. This is especially useful for communities needing an entire security upgrade, covering various amenities and assets. Most associations must accomplish such an investment in phases, and starting with high-priority items will help the association work through each area efficiently and affordably.

• **Security Value—System vs. Service**

How do you and your community currently value security? If security is already a key component, then you understand that efficient security is also a service. However, other communities may need to have an in-depth discussion about their values, if they need to be re-evaluated, and what the ultimate goals are once a system is installed. How your association values security will determine the type of investments you can and will make.

Security is an investment. The types of investments you make will determine what type of service you receive, if any service at all. Any security system will start with an installation investment. Before you begin asking for a general price, though, it's important to know that a credible



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provider will want to know more information about your needs first (hence number one). Then, the company may be able to give you basic starting numbers or, even better, design the system based on your needs to give you a more realistic quote for budgeting purposes.

If you stop with the installation investment, it is absolutely crucial to understand that the system is not a service. Your community will be responsible for checking on cameras, retrieving video footage, managing access control databases, and so much more. If equipment stops working, it will require servicing at additional costs (number three). If your association is simply looking to have security installed, then a range of prices can be found by speaking with various companies and comparing their rates.

Security services include a monthly investment. For communities that utilize or want visitor verification, video retrieval services, monitoring of the system's condition, database management, etc., a service provider is required. Companies specialize in this type of security for associations that value the information, data, and partnership that come with the monthly investment. Furthermore, a business relationship of this kind allows property managers and board members to focus on other responsibilities rather than addressing all security needs.

• **Future Expenses & Savings—Be Prepared**

Now you have prioritized your security needs, maybe the list is even narrowed down to exactly which provider you'll choose and what systems you are going to move forward with. You have also decided on the investments you will or want to make. The association can begin final budgeting for future maintenance, repairs, and long-term upgrades.

Even with a service and maintenance plan in place, it is best to be prepared for potential costs that may not be covered, like vandalism. If your community is under development, you will need to allot for the purchase of additional access control credentials as the community builds out and new residents move in. Plus, a security system is composed of technology and equipment; so in the coming years, certain pieces may need to be replaced or upgraded, although an entire system replacement is likely years in the future.

Do not forget about future savings. Does the system offer flexibility to eliminate certain costs in the future that will not compromise the security? This is frequently a discussion point and item for guarded communities transitioning to a virtual service. Does the service offer the ability to recoup some damage costs? Security services are not simply a deterrent; they are also in place for evidence.

With a completed budget, the association is able to manage expectations as well as have a better understanding of the systems currently installed or under consideration. Budgeting is an ongoing process. It may alter as priorities shift, based on a change of values, or as additional phases or upgrades are implemented. Work with providers that understand community budgeting and can work with the association on a solution designed for its needs and budget. ■



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