

sun-sentinel.com/news/nationworld/sfl-flbcondocol0311pnmar11,0,5097187.column

South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Cities can require condo associations to hire security guards

Daniel Vasquez

Consumer columnist

March 11, 2009

Is your condominium association ready to fight crime?

More importantly, can it afford to hire at least one professional security guard? It soon could have no choice.

Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum ruled last month that cities in this state have the authority to force condo associations and apartment complexes to hire security guards.

His opinion came in response to questions from Sunny Isles Beach in Miami-Dade County, where police several months ago began calling for more help patrolling condo communities. A workshop showed a rash of petty crimes and car burglaries were taking place.

"We were happy to see the opinion come down saying we can require condo associations to supply security guards to police the area," Mayor Norman S. Edelcup said. "We are now trying to determine what security apparatus exists within our condo communities and how best to approach it."

City Attorney Hans Ottinot stressed the law would not be not aimed at a particular association or community.

But attorney Donna Berger, executive director of the Community Advocacy Network, which lobbies for community associations, thinks the ruling may be a bad idea.

"Unless there is a history of crime or a foreseeability of crime in the future in a particular community, it could be a wasteful budget item in a time when associations are looking to trim their budgets," she said.

Associations are already reeling financially because growing numbers of unit owners are in delinquency or foreclosure and not paying their association fees, Berger said.

"The real question here is do condo associations have the responsibility to act in the stead of the local police department," said Randall Borchardt, president of the Northampton I Condominium Association, one of 309 associations in the Century Village West Palm Beach community.

The associations there share the expense of about \$1 million a year to provide around-the-clock security



Shazia Zafar, M.D.
Hematology/
Oncology

Click to hear from
our cancer specialist

BROWARD HEALTH
POWERFUL CANCER CARE

for the 7,854 unit owners. The cost per month for each owner depends on the square footage of the unit, but is about \$9 to \$11 per unit per month.

Of course, the costs for condo security for a particular community will depend on a number of factors, including the size and needs of that community. A full-time vs. part-time guard? One guard or two?

"If we didn't have security here, we would be in need of it," Borchardt said. "Condo associations do have the responsibility to protect the safety and welfare of its residents, but there are questions."

For instance, would police be less likely to patrol a condo community if it has a security presence? he asked.

Whether other cities follow Sunny Isles Beach's lead remains to be seen.

The issue has not come up in Fort Lauderdale, public information officer Chaz Adams said.

"This is basically a policy issue and as with all policy issues, the City Commission will have to discuss and take careful consideration before enacting any similar ordinance," he said.

"Our Police Department currently works closely with numerous condo communities" to prevent crime, he said. "If an association wants an officer to attend their meeting, we encourage them to call the Police Department and set something up." In Sunny Isles Beach, Edelcup said he expects to create an ordinance that would set a minimum number of security guards based on the size of the condo community.

It would also require associations to hire licensed professionals. "A resident may want to volunteer to be a security guard, but we want this done in a professional manner and not on the cheap," he said.

Daniel Vazquez can be reached at condocolumn@sunsentinel.com or 954-356-4219 or 561-243-6686 ([Palm Beach County](#)). His condo column runs every Wednesday in the Local section and online at sunsentinel.com/condos. You can also read his consumer column every Monday in Your Money and at sunsentinel.com/vasquez

Copyright © 2009, [South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#)