

INTRODUCTION

A community development district (CDD) is created under the Uniform Community Development Act of 1980, Chapter 190 of the Florida Statutes, as amended. It provides a mechanism to finance, construct and maintain community or subdivision infrastructure improvements. A CDD is organized as a special-purpose unit of local government and operates as an independent taxing district.

Because a CDD is an independent special district, its governing body establishes its own budget and operates independently of the local governmental entity within the scope of its specific and very limited powers. A CDD does not have police powers and cannot regulate land use or issue development orders; those powers reside with the local general-purpose government (city or county).

The primary function of a CDD is to issue tax-exempt bonds to construct subdivision infrastructure, e.g., road, water and sewer lines, recreational facilities, etc. Thus, new growth within a CDD pays for itself and the cost of the growth is allocated proportionately by levying special assessments on the landowners who receive the benefits.

A CDD gives the developer an efficient mechanism to finance front-end capital expenditures at a lower interest rate and usually on a non-recourse basis, while maintaining control of the district for a period of years that extends beyond the build-out of the development. A CDD also provides a more efficient method of paying the operation and maintenance expense of subdivision infrastructure and related services.

For the local general-purpose government, the creation of a CDD results in an expansion of the tax base and additional fund revenues. Because of the structure and limited powers of a CDD, as defined in the enabling legislation, the comprehensive planning effort is also enhanced. Furthermore, Florida law has provisions which guard against the proliferation, duplication and fragmentation of municipal or county services by providing mechanisms for termination, annexation, or transfer of all or part of the CDD services to the affected county of municipality.

Overview of Community Development Districts

What is a Community Development District? (CDD)

A CDD is a governmental unit created to serve the long-term specific needs of its community. Created pursuant to Chapter 190, Florida Statutes, A CDD's main powers are to plan, finance, construct, operate and maintain community-wide infrastructure and services specifically for the benefit of the District.

What will the CDD do?

Through a CDD, the District can offer its residents a broad range of community-related services and infrastructure to help ensure the highest quality of life possible. Responsibilities of a CDD may include storm water management, potable and non-portable water supply, sewer and wastewater management, landscaping, street lighting, and recreational amenities.

How does a CDD operate?

A CDD is governed by its Board of Supervisors. A District Board is elected initially by the landowners, eventually transitioning to residents of the CDD after six to eight years of operation, depending on the district. Similar to all municipal, county, state, and national elections, the Office of the Supervisor of Elections oversees the vote, and CDD Supervisors are subject to state ethics and financial disclosure laws.

What is the CDD's relationship with the Home Owner's Association?

Community Development Districts compliment the responsibilities of a community home owner's association (HOA's). A CDD typically provides and maintains public facilities and infrastructure for a community whereas a HOA is effective in the coordination and management of privately held properties within the district or community. Therefore, many of the maintenance functions handled by CDD's in other communities may be handled by these associations provided these facilities are either owned by the HOA or agreements exists between the HOA and CDD regarding the maintenance of said facilities. However, the associations have other key responsibilities including the enforcement of the deed restrictions and other quality standards regarding privately held properties. For example, a CDD may contract with the Master Home Owners Association of a community to perform maintenance functions.

What are the benefits to residents?

Residents within a CDD may expect to receive three major classes of benefits:

- 1. The CDD may provide landowners with higher levels of public facilities and services managed and financed through self-imposed fees and assessments.**
- 2. The CDD ensures that these community development facilities and services will be completed concurrently with other parts of the development.**
- 3. The CDD landowners and electors choose the Board of Supervisors, which is able to determine the levels of service of CDD facilities.**

Other similarities are realized because a CDD is subject to the same laws and regulations that apply to other government entities. The CDD is able to borrow money to finance its facilities at lower, tax-exempt interest rates, similar to cities and counties. Additionally, many contracts for goods and services, including annually negotiated maintenance contracts, are subject to publicly advertised competitive bidding.

Landowners and subsequently the 5 member elected CDD Board sets the standards of quality within a District. For example, a CD can provide perpetual maintenance of environmental conservation areas within a community. This consistent, quality-controlled method of management ultimately helps protect the long term property values in a community.

What is the cost to operate a CDD?

The cost to operate a CDD is borne by those who benefit from its services. Property owners in the CDD are subject to a non-ad valorem assessment, which appears on their annual property tax bill from the county tax collector as a CDD assessment. This bulk assessment consists of two parts – an annual assessment for operations and maintenance, which can fluctuate from year to year – and an annual capital assessment to repay bonds sold by the CDD to finance community infrastructure and facilities. Annual capital assessments are generally fixed and do not vary for the term of the bonds. Because cost and levels of services vary depending upon the needs of an individual CDD, the operations and maintenance assessment will vary within each District year to year.

How are CDD's financed?

The CDD issues Bonds to finance community infrastructure. Generally, CDD's assess each property owner a yearly capital debt service assessment to pay back those bonds.

In addition, to maintain the facilities of the community and administer the CDD, the CDD conducts a public hearing each year where it adopts an Operating and Maintenance budget. The funding of this budget is levied as an Operating and Maintenance assessment on individual properties by the Board of Supervisors. All residents pay for a share of the maintenance of the CDD improvements through this annual assessment.

What are the responsibilities of a Community Development District?

A CDD may provide the following publicly owned elements:

- Off-site roadway improvements, street signage and/or street lighting
- Water management, (including but not limited to) main line irrigation, lake and pond construction, and water control structures
- Conservation areas
- Water and sewer facilities, which may be transferred to the appropriate franchised utility or municipality with jurisdiction responsibility
- Landscaping and entry features

Questions Regarding the Role of the Board of Supervisors

What is a Board of Supervisors?

A Community Development District has a Board-Manager form of government with the Board formulating public policy and the Manager carrying it out. The Board consists of five members called Supervisors. The Board serves as the governing body of the District and sets public policies implemented by the staff. Based upon board consideration these Supervisors may receive compensation or reimbursement for their participation in Board activities.

How is the Board established?

Initially Supervisors are appointed by the landowner in the formative petition filed with the local government entity. Later they are elected by the landowners and appointed to various terms of office based on the number of votes cast, either two or four year terms. Eventually, within six to eight years of establishment, Board members are elected by State registered voters that reside in the district in a general election conducted by the Office of the Supervisor of Elections in that county.

What are the responsibilities of the Board?

The Board receives its power from Chapter 190, Florida Statutes, which governs community development districts. The Board is responsible for the everyday operation and the future of the district and its residents. A summary of these duties includes, but is not limited to the following;

- Complete all forms required by the State of Florida as a Public Officer
- Comply to and understand the Sunshine Amendment and Code of Ethics for Public Officers
- Governing of the District, its staff, residents and facilities
- The annual budget and financing of the district, including operations and maintenance fees and general oversight of the District
- Holding and attending board meetings for the District
- Maintaining the current standing of the district up to code and compliance with the state of Florida and other local governmental entities
- Planning for the future growth and maintenance of the District.

What are the terms of office for the Supervisors?

Initial Supervisors appointed by the landowner are in office for 90 days until a landowner election can be noticed and held. After the initial landowner election is held, the two supervisors with the highest votes serve a four year term; the remaining supervisors serve two year terms. All supervisors elected at the six year period receive four year terms. This eventually will result in every member on the board serving a staggering four year term.

What if a Supervisor resigns his/her office during term?

If a supervisor resigns his/her office mid-term, the board will accept their letter of resignation and then appoint a new supervisor to serve the remaining term. However, should it be a board consisting of terms elected after the sixth year of the district, the board will only be able to appoint a qualified voter registered in the State of Florida that resides in the district to serve the balance of the term. The resigning supervisor must complete the required forms as per the State of Florida within 60 days of departure of office and return it to the Supervisor of Elections office in the county in which they reside.

Community Development District Staff Positions

District Manager

The district manager acts as the 'City Manager/County Administrator' of the district and works with the elected board of supervisors to serve the district and its residents. The direct responsibilities of the district manager include the following but are not limited to: Preserving and maintaining district improvements and facilities, overseeing and coordinating the planning, financing, purchasing, staffing, and compliance of the district, and any other such duties, as prescribed by the board.

District Counsel

The district counsel acts as the chief legal counsel to the district and is responsible for ensuring that the district conducts its business according to the legal standards placed upon it, both by the actions of the district/board and Statute.

In this capacity, the district counsel reviews all district documents, including resolutions, contracts, and agreements, assists district manager in drafting of same and negotiations on behalf of the district. Counsel ensures compliance with all necessary laws including the Sunshine Amendment, and assists with securing public financing.

District Engineer

The district engineer provides professional and technical services to the district in support of the planning, design, permitting, construction, financing, operation and maintenance of the district infrastructure.

The district engineer also provides the Engineer's Report for bond financing and can provide direct consultation for such items as: Bidding, contractor selection standards, master planning of infrastructure and construction phase operation.