**PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS**

**McCormack v. Wisteria COA**

Prepared By

EMS

June 8, 2023

# SHORT SUMMARY OF CASE

Clients own two units in the community. There was a special assessment. Clients want to contest the vote and validity of the assessment. Clients received a Claim of Lien on both units.

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# Parties / Significant Figures

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| --- | --- |
| **Name of Party** | **Significance to Underlying Matter/Dispute** |
| Ronan McCormack (“Client”) | Client / HOA Member |
| Anthony Murnane ("Mr. Murnane") | Client |
| Wisteria Court Condominium Association, Inc. ("COA") | COA |

This table may be amended from time to time as new information/evidence comes in regarding new “parties” and/or witnesses.

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# Statement of Facts / Evidentiary Support

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date / NA** | **Fact** | **Evidence Supporting That Fact** |
| 4/19/19 | THIS IS AN EXAMPLE. REPLACE IT WITH ACTUAL DATA.  Client closed escrow on the property. | Client Timeline |
| N/A | THIS IS AN EXAMPLE. REPLACE IT WITH ACTUAL DATA.  Client notified HOA of sprinkler leak into Client’s unit. | Email from Client to Mgmt. Co. |
| N/A | REMEMBER TO DELETE ANY EXCESS ROWS IN THE TABLE BY DRAGGING YOUR MOUSE OVER THE ROWS TO BE DELETED AND THEN PRESSING **BACKSPACE** and then pressing **DELETE ENTIRE ROW**. | \*\* |
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This table may be amended from time to time as new information/evidence comes in that require significant revisions to Client’s pre-litigation strategy.

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# Notable Provisions of the Governing Documents

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Document**  **Article / Section No.** | **Text of the Selected Article/Sections No.**  **(if none, put “N/A”; delete rows that you didn’t use; maintain formatting)** |
| CC&Rs  Section 6.01 | THIS IS AN EXAMPLE. REPLACE IT WITH ACTUAL DATA.  The HOA shall paint, maintain, repair and make necessary improvements to the common areas, as well as the exteriors of the garage, deck, and balcony elements of the Units, in good condition and repair. |
| Operating Rules  P. 20 | THIS IS AN EXAMPLE. REPLACE IT WITH ACTUAL DATA.  [I]n the event of any water damage, mold infestation, or related damage arising from an owner’s negligence, or arising from any pipe leak or similar failure for which this owner has the maintenance responsibility, the owner shall be responsible for all repairs and resulting damage. |
| N/A | REMEMBER TO DELETE ANY EXCESS ROWS IN THE TABLE BY DRAGGING YOUR MOUSE OVER THE ROWS TO BE DELETED AND THEN PRESSING **BACKSPACE** and then pressing **DELETE ENTIRE ROW**. |
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The table may or may not contain all the significant provisions of Client’s governing documents. Its sole purpose, in fact, is to help make the Firm’s analysis of Client’s pre-litigation case more convenient. The provisions contained in the table, therefore, should neither be viewed as an exhaustive list of key provisions/evidence, nor be used as a measure of what provisions of the governing documents might strengthen (or weaken) Client’s pre-litigation case.

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# Additional Information/Clarification Needed From Client

The Firm should follow up with Client regarding the following items/issues:

— TBD

This section of the Preliminary Analysis may be amended from time to time as new information becomes known.

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# Additional Documents Needed From Client

The Firm needs to ask Client for the following documents:

— TBD

This section of the Preliminary Analysis may be amended from time to time if Client locates additional documents, or if a third party produces additional documents.

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Potential Causes of Action and the Strengths/Weaknesses of Each

## Breach of CC&Rs / Breach of Equitable Servitudes / Violation of Civ. Code, § 5975

Elements—Breach of CC&Rs.

— Restrictive covenants and recorded declarations are written agreements governed by contract principles. (*Pinnacle Museum Tower Assn. v. Pinnacle Market Development (US) LLC* (2012) 55 Cal.4th 223, 240.) Restrictive covenants and recorded declarations are of a contractual nature and are enforceable by statute unless unreasonable. (*Id.* at 237; and see Civ. Code, § 5975.) Because the Declaration of CC&Rs is a recorded declaration of restrictive covenants, it is enforceable provided it is not unreasonable. “[S]ettled principles of condominium law establish that an owners association, like its constituent members, must act in conformity with the terms of a recorded declaration. (See Civ. Code, § 5975, subd. (a); *Lamden v. La Jolla Shores Clubdominium Homeowners Assn.* (1999) 21 Cal.4th 249, 268 [homeowner can sue association to compel enforcement of declaration's provisions];(Citations.)” (*Pinnacle Museum Tower Assn. v. Pinnacle Market Development (US) LLC*, supra, 55 Cal.4th at p. 239.)

— Where enforcement is an issue in a breach of CC&Rs cause of action (as it is here), it tends to arise in two ways: (i) HOA not enforcing rules at all; or (ii) HOA applying different rules to different homeowners and/or issuing fines that are not supported by existing CC&Rs (i.e., selective enforcement).

• HOA Not Enforcing Rules.

→ A homeowner can sue his or her HOA to compel enforcement of the CC&Rs. (*Lamden v. La Jolla Shores Clubdominium Homeowners Assn., supra,* 21 Cal.4th at 268; *Pinnacle Museum Tower Assn. v. Pinnacle Market Development* *(US) LLC, supra,* 55 Cal.4th 223, 239.)

• Selective Enforcement.

→ In an improper enforcement situation, there a couple avenues of attack against the HOA. First is to examine the propriety of the rule itself. Use restrictions can be enforced unless they are wholly arbitrary, violate a fundamental public policy, or impose a burden on the use of affected land that far outweighs any benefit. (*Sui v. Price* (2011) 196 Cal.App.4th 933.)

→ The second avenue is to review the enforcement process used by the HOA. This enforcement must be “in good faith, not arbitrary or capricious, and by procedures which are fair and uniformly applied.” (*Liebler v. Point Loma Tennis Club* (1995) 40 Cal.App.4th 1600, 1610; *Nahrstedt v. Lakeside Village Condominium Assn.* (1994) 8 Cal.4th 361.) In other words, the HOA must enforce the CC&Rs in a uniform and fair manner, or else its enforcement will be deemed unlawful. (*Dolan-King v. Rancho Santa Fe Ass’n.* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 965, 975, citing former Civ. Code, § 1354; *Villas De Las Palmas Homeowners Ass’n. v. Terifaj* (2004) 33 Cal.4th 73, 84.)

→ When an HOA seeks to enforce the provisions of its CC&Rs to compel an act by one of its member owners, it is incumbent upon it to show that it has followed its own standards and procedures prior to pursuing such a remedy, that those procedures were fair and reasonable and that its substantive decision was made in good faith, and is reasonable, not arbitrary or capricious. [Citations.]” (*Ironwood Owners Assn. IX v. Solomon* (1986) 178 Cal.App.3d 766, 772.) “The criteria for testing the reasonableness of an exercise of such a power by an owners’ association are (1) whether the reason for withholding approval is rationally related to the protection, preservation or proper operation of the property and the purposes of the Association as set forth in its governing instruments and (2) whether the power was exercised in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner. [Citations.]” (*Laguna Royale Owners Assn. v. Darger* (1981) 119 Cal.App.3d 670, 683–684.)

— One of the fundamental duties of an HOA is to maintain the common areas. (Civ. Code, § 4775.) In performing its duties, an association shall perform a reasonably competent and diligent visual inspection of the accessible areas of the major components that the association is obligated to repair, replace, restore or maintain. (Civ. Code, § 5500(a).)

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— The statute of limitations to enforce a restriction, which includes CC&Rs, is five years. (Code Civ. Proc., § 336(b).) Consequently, an action for a violation of a restriction must be commenced within five years after the party enforcing the restriction discovers, or through the exercise of reasonable diligence, should have discovered, the violation. [*As used here, a “restriction” means a limitation on, or a provision affecting the use of, real property in a deed, Declaration, or other instrument in the form of a covenant, equitable servitude, condition subsequent, negative easement, or other form of restriction.*] (Civ. Code, § 784.)

Remedies—

— While typically injunctive in nature, courts may fashion remedies to enjoin an ongoing breaches. (*Ritter & Ritter Inc. Pension and Profit Plan v. The Churchill Condominium Assn.* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 103.) Additionally, compensatory damages are available if plaintiff incurred monetary damages. (*Cutujian v. Benedict Hills Estates Assn.* (1996) 41 Cal.App.4th 1379, 1385; Civ. Code, §§ 3281, 3300.)

— As to whether attorneys’ fees are available to the prevailing party, see “Attorneys’ Fees and Costs” section below.

Application—Application of the Law to Client’s Facts.

— REPLACE THIS TEXT by restating applicable facts from above that support the elements of a cause of action for *breach of the CC&Rs*. If one or more provisions of the CC&Rs is/are relevant, you should cite to that/those provision(s) here (no need to quote or provide a snip). **By the same token, however, you need to determine whether the CC&Rs actually require the HOA to enforce the CC&Rs. Some do, and some don’t.**

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Conclusion—Strengths/Pros and Weaknesses/Cons of this Potential Cause of Action.

— REPLACE THIS TEXT by drawing a conclusion about the *strengths* of this particular cause of action given the evidence at our disposal.

— REPLACE THIS TEXT by drawing a conclusion about the *weaknesses*, if any, of this particular cause of action given the evidence at our disposal. If there are none, say so—e.g., “At this time, this cause of action is supported by the facts and the law.”

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Based upon the allegations made against Client thus far, and based upon the facts and evidence provided by Client and/or reflected in the documents the Firm has received and reviewed, the affirmative defenses discussed below appear to be applicable.

This section of the Preliminary Analysis may be amended from time to time if new information/evidence comes to light that supports additional affirmative defenses.

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# Strategic Considerations

## Applicability of Davis-Stirling Act

The Davis-Stirling Act does *not* apply to the facts of this dispute.

## Attorneys’ Fees and Costs

If this dispute is adjudicated, the prevailing party will be entitled to attorneys’ fees and costs under Article 13, Section 13.2 and Article 19, Section 19.4 of the CC&Rs.

## Jurisdiction and Venue

Since there is no binding arbitration provision in the CC&Rs, any litigation related to the dispute must take place in superior court of the county in which Client’s property is located.

## Standing

Based upon the information/evidence that Client has provided thus far, Client has standing to pursue every cause of action described above against each of the intended defendants (excluding DOES, of course).

## Secondary Conflicts Check

No new potential or actual conflict of interest between the parties and/or significant figures came to light during the Firm’s preparation of this Preliminary Analysis.

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# Final Thoughts / Issues / Concerns / Comments

None.

This section of the Preliminary Analysis might be amended from time to time to reflect new information, strategies, or concerns that arise during the course of the litigation.

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