**PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS**

**Arnold v. HOA**

Prepared By

November 21, 2024

# SHORT SUMMARY OF CASE

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# Parties / Significant Figures

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

At this time, the Firm does not need Client to provide any additional information or clarification. This section of the Preliminary Analysis may, however, be amended from time to time as new information/questions arise.

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# Additional Documents Needed From Client

None at the moment.

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# Must NOT Use HOA’s Privileged Documents

If Client provides the Firm with documents that appear to be privileged (HOA’s attorney-client privilege)—e.g., communications/opinions between the HOA’s prior attorneys and the Board, etc.—such documents:

— May not be cited, or even *referenced*, at all during the pre-litigation or litigation phases of the cases.

— Must be stored in a separate folder in “Client Docs” called “HOA Privileged Docs.”

Because Client was a member of the HOA’s board, or otherwise obtained access to documents supplied by a board member, it’s very likely that Client possesses documents that are protected from disclosure by the attorney-client privilege (the HOA’s). This raises three important issues: (i) can Client waive the attorney-client privilege on behalf of the HOA; (ii) does the CRPC mandate the Firm to return the privileged docs; and (iii) does Client violate his or her fiduciary duty to the HOA by providing the privileged docs to the Firm?

## Can Client Waive the Privilege?

— Where the client is a corporation, it alone (through its officers and directors) is the holder of the privilege and it alone may waive the privilege. (*Titmas v. Sup.Ct. (Iavarone)* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 738, fn. 1.)

— The authority to waive the attorney-client privilege rests with the corporation’s officers and directors. When control of the corporation passes to new people, so too does the authority to assert or waive the privilege. (*Commodity Futures Trading Com’n v. Weintraub* (1985) 471 U.S. 343.) When control passes to new management, the authority to assert and waive the corporation’s attorney-client privilege passes, and new management may waive the attorney-client privilege with respect to communications made by former officers and directors. (*Id. at* 349.) A former director has no power to assert or waive the corporation’s privilege, and a former officer cannot assert the protection if the corporation as waived it. (*Ibid*.)

— The HOA may waive the privilege, but in cases where two or more people are joint holders of a privilege, the waiver of that privilege by one does NOT affect the rights of the other(s) to claim the privilege. (*American Mut. Liab. Ins. Co v. Superior Court* (1974) 38 Cal.App.3d 579; Ev. Code, §912b.)

### Does the CRPC Require the Firm to Return the Privileged Documents?

— CRPC 4.4 requires attorneys to return privileged documents that were “inadvertently sent or produced.” CRPC 4.4, however, does *not* seem to apply. Not only did Client intentionally produce the documents to the Firm, but Client had a valid right to receive the documents in the first place. Notwithstanding that fact, for now the Firm doesn’t believe it’s wise to rest on technicalities when dealing with the ethical rules.

— The official Comment to the Rule states that CRPC 4.4 does not address the “legal duties of a lawyer who receives a writing that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know may have been inappropriately disclosed by the sending person.” The Comment then cites to *Clark v. Superior Court* (2011) 196 Cal.App.4th 37, in which the Court of Appeal broadly held that a lawyer who receives materials that obviously appear to be subject to an attorney-client privilege or otherwise clearly appear to be confidential and privileged must (1) refrain from examining the materials any more than is essential to ascertain if the materials are privileged, and (2) immediately notify the sender that he or she possesses material that appears to be privileged.

— *Keep in mind that in Clark, the court disqualified the attorney in question* (who represented an employee of a company) for excessively reviewing the employer’s (i.e., the opposing side’s) privileged materials, *despite the fact that (a) the employee intentionally transmitted the documents to the attorney, and (b) the employee had a right to receive the privileged materials during the course of his employment*. This is precisely the scenario that we’re facing.

— While there are some distinguishing facts in *Clark*—e.g., the employee was contractually obligated to return all privileged materials upon termination of his employment—the point of the case is clear: attorneys are prohibited from “excessively” reviewing certain documents covered by another party’s attorney-client privilege. This rule makes sense given the privilege’s sacred status under California law.

— The Firm has, therefore, decided to proceed with caution at the current time, at least until and unless further research calls for a different take on the issue.

## Does Providing Privileged Documents to the Firm Constitute a Fiduciary Breach by Client?

— The Firm is in the process of completing research on this issue, but it *appears* that the answer is yes—former board members cannot make unauthorized disclosures of privileged materials.

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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

## Attorneys’ Fees and Costs

## Jurisdiction and Venue

## Standing

## Secondary Conflicts Check

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# Final Thoughts / Issues / Concerns / Comments

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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