

HOA Elections: a Primer

Every fall, Bell Canyon homeowners find themselves awash in election mail—not the national kind—that brings a whole host of questions. Why vote? What's a quorum? Why are there so many envelopes? For anyone who might need a quick refresher, here's how the BCA Board of Director elections work.

What's at stake?

Three seats on the Bell Canyon Board of Directors are up for election every year. A Director of the Board serves a three-year term and votes on the rules, policies, and procedures that shape Canyon life. The position is a volunteer position and can only be held by a Bell Canyon owner in good standing.

How do I make sure my vote counts?

1. **Keep ownership information up-to-date.** If you've moved your property into a trust or LLC, make sure that paperwork is on file with the office. Only folks named on a deed, in the trust as trustees, or as managers or members of the LLC are considered owners, so double-check that your file reflects exactly who owns the lot.
2. **Make sure you can receive mail.** Returned election mailings are a serious issue for Canyon owners; if you've had a recent change in address, make sure it's been submitted in writing to the BCA office. If you are planning to be out of town during September or October, make sure you have mail forwarding correctly set up through the Post Office or that you have a trusted person picking up your mail regularly.
3. **Fill out the ballot correctly and return it in the correct envelopes.** After returned mailings, this is the single biggest cause of an invalid ballot. When you vote, make sure the following are correct:
 - A. **Use numbers correctly:** per lot, you have three votes to cast. You can put all three votes toward one candidate, or you can split them between candidates, but make sure you are writing clearly. If your total written votes add up to more than 3, your ballot will be disqualified. Do not use a ranking system on the candidates, as that will result in a total of 6 votes and a disqualified ballot.
 - B. **Don't sign your ballot:** you only need a signature on the external envelope. Signing the ballot itself removes the confidentiality—remember, any community member can ask to inspect that ballots once the election is over—and undermines the secret ballot system.
 - C. **Keep the envelopes straight:** if you only return the secret ballot envelope, the vote cannot be counted. If you do not return the secret ballot envelopes inside the signed envelope, your ballot will not be anonymous. If you do not sign the front of the envelope, the ballot will not be counted until that has been corrected. Here's a quick visual guide to a complete vote:



4. **Don't seal your envelopes until you're 100% sure about your vote.** There are no do-overs in HOA elections, as that is a potential avenue for mix-up or fraud—be aware that once your ballot is cast, it's cast.

What exactly is quorum, and why do we need it?

Quorum means that enough owners have voted for the election results to be legitimate. For Bell Canyon, that magic number is 50% of the lots casting a vote by the beginning of the Annual Meeting. If quorum is not reached, the meeting will be adjourned for half an hour; quorum then drops to 25% of the lots. In the interest of thorough and timely results, we encourage every owner to participate in the election and make their voice heard.

How do I get involved with Canyon governance?

Get involved this month and submit a question for "Meet the Candidates"—it's a great way to see how each candidate would address your specific concerns for the Canyon and to get a sense of each candidate's personality and values. To run for the Board next year, your first step is nomination: keep a sharp eye out for the Candidate Nomination Form mailing in the summer months, fill out the form, and send it in on time. You can also start small by volunteering for a committee, CERT, the Election Inspectors, or a subsidiary Board and getting a taste of what kind of demands a volunteer position will make on your time.

We hope that these tips and topics inspire you to join your fellow Bell Canyon owners in this crucial task. The Board election is not only an annual chance to participate in that most fundamental democratic process; it is an opportunity to express your support for the Canyon you call home. ■

By Bri Walker