Litigation Due Diligence Analysis

Cowen/Arnold v. Sweetwater Pointe HOA

By

EMS

October 24, 2022

Table of Contents

[1. SUMMARY 7](#_Toc42862003)

[2. PARTIES/SIGNIFICANT FIGURES 7](#_Toc42862004)

[3. STATEMENT OF FACTS / EVIDENTIARY SUPPORT 10](#_Toc42862005)

[4. NOTABLE PROVISIONS OF THE GOVERNING DOCUMENTS 11](#_Toc42862006)

[5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/CLARIFICATION NEEDED FROM CLIENT 12](#_Toc42862007)

[6. CIVIL CODE § 5200 DOCUMENT DEMAND 13](#_Toc42862008)

[7. ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS NEEDED FROM CLIENT 14](#_Toc42862009)

[8. THIRD-PARTY DOCUMENTS/INFORMATION KNOWN TO EXIST 15](#_Toc42862010)

[9. MUST NOT USE HOA’S PRIVILEGED DOCUMENTS 16](#_Toc42862011)

[9.1. Can Client Waive the Privilege? 17](#_Toc42862012)

[9.2. Does the CRPC Require the Firm to *Return* the Privileged Documents? 17](#_Toc42862013)

[9.3. Does Providing Privileged Documents to the Firm Constitute a Fiduciary Breach by Client? 18](#_Toc42862014)

[radio\_client\_plaintiff\_defendant == "Plaintiff/Petitioner" 10. POTENTIAL CAUSES OF ACTION AND THE STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES OF EACH###radio\_client\_plaintiff\_defendant == "Defendant/Respondent" and yn\_cross\_claims == "Yes" 11. POTENTIAL CROSS-CLAIMS AND THE STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES OF EACH###radio\_client\_plaintiff\_defendant == "Defendant/Respondent" and yn\_cross\_claims == "No" 12. POTENTIAL AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSES### 19](#_Toc42862015)

[12.1. Breach of CC&Rs / Breach of Equitable Servitudes / Violation of Civ. Code, § 5975 19](#_Toc42862016)

[12.2. Breach of Contract 22](#_Toc42862017)

[12.3. Breach of Other Governing Documents 23](#_Toc42862018)

[12.4. Negligence 25](#_Toc42862019)

[12.5. Breach of Fiduciary Duty 28](#_Toc42862020)

[12.6. Nuisance 30](#_Toc42862021)

[12.7. Trespass 34](#_Toc42862022)

[12.8. Interference with Prospective Business Advantage 37](#_Toc42862023)

[12.9. Intentional Misrepresentation (Fraud) 39](#_Toc42862024)

[12.10. Negligent Misrepresentation 43](#_Toc42862025)

[12.11. Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress (“IIED”) 45](#_Toc42862026)

[12.12. Implied Covenant of Good Faith and Fair Dealing 46](#_Toc42862027)

[12.13. Violation of Open Meeting Act 48](#_Toc42862028)

[12.14. Declaratory Relief 50](#_Toc42862029)

[12.15. Violation of Election Laws (Civ. Code, § 5100 et seq.) 54](#_Toc42862030)

[12.16. Assault 58](#_Toc42862031)

[12.17. Battery 59](#_Toc42862032)

[12.18. Defamation 61](#_Toc42862033)

[12.19. Interference with Contract 63](#_Toc42862034)

[12.20. Civil Stalking 65](#_Toc42862035)

[12.21. Violation of Statute (Dog Bite) 67](#_Toc42862036)

[12.22. False Imprisonment 68](#_Toc42862037)

[12.23. Invasion of Privacy 69](#_Toc42862038)

[12.24. Express Indemnity 72](#_Toc42862039)

[12.25. Equitable Indemnity 73](#_Toc42862040)

[12.26. Failure to Permit Inspection of Records 74](#_Toc42862041)

[12.27. 3. Violations of the Florida Homeowner’s Association Act 76](#_Toc42862042)

[12.28. 77](#_Toc42862043)

[radio\_client\_plaintiff\_defendant == "Defendant/Respondent" and yn\_cross\_claims == "Yes" 78](#_Toc42862044)

[13. POTENTIAL AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSES 78](#_Toc42862045)

[13.1. BJR (Lamden) 78](#_Toc42862046)

[13.2. Statute of Limitations 80](#_Toc42862047)

[13.3. Equitable Estoppel 86](#_Toc42862048)

[13.4. Unclean Hands 86](#_Toc42862049)

[13.5. Laches 87](#_Toc42862050)

[13.6. Negligence (Comparative Fault) 87](#_Toc42862051)

[13.7. Apportionment 88](#_Toc42862052)

[13.8. Negligence (Sudden Emergency) 88](#_Toc42862053)

[13.9. Assumption of Risk 89](#_Toc42862054)

[13.10. Contract (Force Majeure) 89](#_Toc42862055)

[13.11. Contract (Duress) 90](#_Toc42862056)

[13.12. Contract (Fraud) 91](#_Toc42862057)

[13.13. Contract (Frustration of Purpose) 91](#_Toc42862058)

[13.14. Contract (Lack of Consideration) 92](#_Toc42862059)

[13.15. Contract (Failure of Consideration) 92](#_Toc42862060)

[13.16. Contract (Illegality) 93](#_Toc42862061)

[13.17. Contract (Impossibility) 93](#_Toc42862062)

[13.18. Contract (Impracticability) 94](#_Toc42862063)

[13.19. Contract (Mistake of Law) 94](#_Toc42862064)

[13.20. Contract (Mistake of Fact) 95](#_Toc42862065)

[13.21. Contract (Novation) 96](#_Toc42862066)

[13.22. Contract (Statute of Frauds) 96](#_Toc42862067)

[13.23. Contract (Unconscionability) 97](#_Toc42862068)

[13.24. Contract (Undue Influence) 98](#_Toc42862069)

[13.25. Contract (Accord and Satisfaction) 99](#_Toc42862070)

[13.26. Waiver 99](#_Toc42862071)

[13.27. Failure to Mitigate 100](#_Toc42862072)

[13.28. Lack of Damages 100](#_Toc42862073)

[13.29. Failure to State a Claim 101](#_Toc42862074)

[13.30. No Causation 101](#_Toc42862075)

[13.31. Justification 102](#_Toc42862076)

[13.32. Ratification 103](#_Toc42862077)

[13.33. Litigation Privilege (Civ. Code, § 47) 103](#_Toc42862078)

[13.34. Consent 104](#_Toc42862079)

[13.35. Necessity 105](#_Toc42862080)

[13.36. Private Necessity 105](#_Toc42862081)

[13.37. Equitable Easement 106](#_Toc42862082)

[14. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS 107](#_Toc42862083)

[14.1. Applicability of Davis-Stirling Act 107](#_Toc42862084)

[14.2. Attorneys’ Fees and Costs 107](#_Toc42862085)

[14.3. Jurisdiction 108](#_Toc42862086)

[14.3.1. Arbitration 108](#_Toc42862087)

[14.3.2. Personal Jurisdiction 108](#_Toc42862088)

[14.3.3. Subject Matter Jurisdiction 109](#_Toc42862089)

[14.4. Pre-Filing Requirements 109](#_Toc42862090)

[14.5. Anti-SLAPP Analysis 110](#_Toc42862091)

[yn\_final\_thoughts == "Yes" 120](#_Toc42862092)

[15. FINAL THOUGHTS/ISSUES/CONCERNS/COMMENTS 120](#_Toc42862093)

# SUMMARY

TO BE COMPLETED LATER

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# PARTIES/SIGNIFICANT FIGURES

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Party / Significant Figure** | **Significance to Underlying Matter/Dispute** |
| Timothy Cowen (“Client”)  DELETE THIS NOTE: If we represent more than one individual/entity, then list all our Clients here—one on each line. Then, make sure to alter the defined “Client” to say: **“(collectively, ‘Client’”)**. The point is to keep “Client” *singular* no matter how many people/entities we represent. If there’s a need to refer to different Clients in the “Statement of Facts/Evidentiary Support” section below, you can put a shortcut (“\*\*\*”) after each individual Client, but still collectively define all of them as “Client.” | N/A |
| Bonnie Cowen | Co-Plaintiff |
| Samuel Arnold | Co-Plaintiff |
| Tammy Arnold | Co-Plaintiff |
| Sweetwater Pointe Homeowners Association, Inc. ("HOA") | Infringing Party |

The table above may be amended from time to time to reflect revisions to Client’s narrative and/or new information that may become available in the future.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# STATEMENT OF FACTS / EVIDENTIARY SUPPORT

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date / NA** | **Fact** | **Evidence Supporting That Fact** |
| \* | This section should contain a comprehensive and objective statement of the relevant facts of the case, as well as any relevant dates. When possible, cite to evidence already in our possession that support the facts referenced. | \* |
| 4/19/19 | THIS IS AN EXAMPLE. REPLACE IT WITH ACTUAL DATA.  Client closed escrow on the property. | Client Timeline |
| 6/10/19 | 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**. | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* | \*\* |

This table may be amended from time to time as new information/evidence comes in. To the extent that such new information necessitates any significant revisions to Client’s litigation strategy, where applicable, the Firm will work with Client to develop a new strategy.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# 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**. |
| \* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* |
| \* | \*\* |

The table may or may not contain all the significant provisions of Client’s governing documents. It’s sole purpose, in fact, is to make creating the LADD 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 case.

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# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/CLARIFICATION NEEDED FROM CLIENT

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# ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS NEEDED FROM CLIENT

The Firm needs to ask Client for the following documents:

— TO BE COMPLETED LATER

— \*

— \*

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

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# THIRD-PARTY DOCUMENTS/INFORMATION KNOWN TO EXIST

Client believes that one or more third parties has possession, custody, control, and/or knowledge of the following documents/information.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Document/Information** | **Significance of the Document/Information** | **Identity of Third Party**[[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Minutes from the executive session dated 3/5/20 re Client’s disciplinary hearing. | These minutes, which are not available to non-directors outside the context of litigation, will show that the Board acted arbitrarily and capriciously in disciplining Client. | PMC Management |
| \* | \*\* | \* |
| \* | \*\* | \* |
| \* | \*\* | \* |
| \* | \*\* | \* |
| \* | \*\* | \* |
| \* | \*\* | \* |
| \* | \*\* | \* |

The table above may be amended from time to time as new information comes to light.

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## Breach of Contract

Elements—Breach of Contract

— “The essential elements of a claim of breach of contract, whether express or implied, are the contract, plaintiff’s performance or excuse for non-performance, defendant’s breach, and the resulting damages to plaintiff.” (*Darbun Enterprises Inc. v. San Fernando Community Hosp.* (2015) 239 Cal.App.4th 399, 409; *San Mateo Union High School Dist. v. County of San Mateo* (2013) 213 Cal.App.4th 418, 439.)

Remedies—

— Compensatory (money) damages are available for all expected harm caused by the breach. (Civ. Code, § 3300.) In other words, damages must be reasonably foreseeable. (Civ. Code, § 3300; *Erlich v. Menezes* (1999) 21 Cal.4th 543.)

— Emotional distress damages are generally *not* available *unless* the breach caused bodily harm or a serious emotional disturbance was a particularly likely result. (*Erlich v. Menezesm, supra,* 21 Cal.4th at 558; *Plotnik v. Meihous* (2012) 208 Cal.App.4th 1950 [breach of settlement agreement by hitting dog with baseball bat].)

— Specific performance is an available remedy for breach if the non-breaching party desires to affirm the contract. (Civ. Code, § 1680; *Kassir v. Zahabi* (2008) 164 Cal.App.4th 1352.)

— Rescission (accompanied by restitution) is available in certain circumstances. (Civ. Code, § 1692.) Mutual rescission is available if all parties consent. (Civ. Code, § 1689(a).) Unilateral rescission is available by statute for mistake, fraud, duress, undue influence, failure of or void consideration, or if the contract is unlawful or against public policy. (Civ. Code, § 1689(b).)

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

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— For breach of verbal contracts, the statute of limitations is two years. (Code Civ. Proc., § 339.)

— For breach of *most* written contracts, the statute of limitations is four years. (Code Civ. Proc., § 337.)

— For breach of *negotiable instruments* (e.g., promissory notes), the statute of limitations is six years. (Comm. Code, § 3118.)

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 contract*. 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).

— \*\*\*

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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.”

## Negligence

Elements—Negligence

— To prove a claim for negligence, plaintiff must establish: (i) duty; (ii) breach of duty; (iii) proximate cause; and (iv) damages. (*Peredia v. HR Mobile Services, Inc.* (2018) 25 Cal.App.5th 680, 687.)

— In simple terms, negligence is the commission of an unintentional a wrongful act where one fails to exercise the degree of care in a given situation that an otherwise reasonable person would exercise to prevent another from harm. (*City of Santa Barbara v. Superior Court* (2007) 41 Cal.4th 747, 753–54.)

— An HOA that fails or refuses to abide by its contractual maintenance obligations is liable to the homeowner for damages caused by such negligence. (See, e.g., *White v. Cox* (1971) 17 Cal.App.3d 824, 895.)

Remedies—

— Compensatory damages are available for all harm proximately caused by a defendant’s wrongful acts. (Civ. Code, §§ 3281, 3333-3343.7.)

— Injunctive Relief is available. Courts can fashion equitable relief to remedy negligent conditions. (*Ritter & Ritter Inc. Pension and Profit Plan v. The Churchill Condominium Assn.* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 103.)

— Damages for emotional distress are only available in connection with bodily injury. (*Potter v. Firestone Tire & Rubber* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 965.) Such relief, when available, arises out of a claim for *negligent infliction of emotional distress*, which often involve “bystander situations”—e.g., witnessing injury to a family member. (*Burgess v. Superior Court* (1992) 2 Cal.4th 1064.) Emotional distress damages for negligence *without* injury (e.g., fear of illness such as cancer if exposed to toxic substances threatening cancer) available if defendant acted with malice, fraud, or oppression, and the fear is based on knowledge corroborated by reliable medical or scientific evidence. (*Potter v. Firestone Tire & Rubber, supra*, 6 Cal.4th at pp. 999-1000.)

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

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— Two years for personal injuries. (Code Civ. Proc., § 335.1.)

— Three years for claims related to injury to property. (Code Civ. Proc., § 335.1.)

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 *negligence*. 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).

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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.”

## Breach of Fiduciary Duty

Elements—Breach of Fiduciary Duty

— The elements of a claim for breach of fiduciary duty are: (i) the existence of a fiduciary relationship; (ii) its breach; and (iii) damage proximately caused by that breach. (*Tribeca Companies, LLC v. First American Title, Ins.* (2015) 239 Cal.App.4th 1088.)

— Associations owe a fiduciary duty to their members. (*Raven’s Cove Townhomes, Inc. v. Knuppe Development Co.* (1981) 114 Cal.App.3d 783; *Cohen v. Kite Hill Community Assn.* (1983) 142 Cal.App.3d 642.)

— Directors of an association are fiduciaries and are thus required to exercise due care and undivided loyalty for the interests of the association. (*Francis T. v. Village Green Owners Assn.* (1986) 42 Cal.3d 490, 513; *Mueller v. Macban* (1976) 62 Cal.App.3d 258, 274.)

— HOAs have an affirmative duty to enforce the restrictions in their governing documents. (*Ekstrom v. Marquesa at Monarch Beach Homeowners Assn.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 1111.)

— Among its acts, directors may not make decisions for the association that benefit their own interests at the expense of the association and the entire membership. (*Raven’s Cove Townhomes, Inc. v. Kruppe Development Co.* (1981) 114 Cal.App.3d 783, 799.) This is typically referred to as “self-dealing.”

Remedies—

— If the breach of fiduciary duty results in a breach of CC&Rs, then compensatory (money) damages and injunctive relief may be available.

— If the breach results in damage to property, available compensatory damages are the cost to remedy defects and for loss of use during the period of injury. (*Raven’s Cove Townhomes Inc. v. Knuppe Development Co.* (1981) 114 Cal.App.3d 783, 802.)

— Civil Code § 3333: “For the breach of an obligation not arising from contract, the measure of damages, except where otherwise expressly provided by this Code, is the amount which will compensate for all the detriment proximately caused thereby, whether it could have been anticipated or not.”

— Equitable remedies such as constructive trust, rescission, and restitution are available when the defendant has been unjustly enriched by the breach. (*Miester v. Mensinger* (2014) 230 Cal.App.4th 381.)

— Punitive damages may be available if the breach constitutes constructive fraud. (Civ. Code., § 3294; *Hobbs v. Bateman Eichler, Hill Richards Inc.* (1985) 164 Cal.App.3d 174.)

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

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— A claim for breaching a fiduciary duty must be brought within four years of the breach. (Code Civ. Proc., § 343; *William L. Lyon & Assoc, Inc. v. Sup. Ct.* (2012) 204 Cal.App.4th 1294, 1312.) If the breach of fiduciary duty stems from the defendant’s fraud (even if pleaded as breach of fiduciary duty), which has a statute of limitations of only three years, the claim must be brought within *three* years. (Code Civ. Proc., § 338; *Professional Collection Consultants v. Lujan* (2018) 23 Cal.App.5th 685, 691.)

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 fiduciary duty*. 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).

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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.”

## Defamation

Elements—Defamation

— To prove a claim for defamation, a plaintiff must prove that there was a “publication” that was false, defamatory, unprivileged, and that the publication had a natural tendency to injure or cause special damage. (*Wong v. Jing* (2010) 189 Cal.App.4th 1354, 1369.)

— There are two broad categories of defamation—slander (oral) and libel (written), both of which can themselves be divided into two categories—*per quod* and *per se*.

• For slander *per quod*, defamation is “[a] false and unprivileged oral communication attributing to a person specific misdeeds or certain unfavorable characteristics or qualities, or uttering certain other derogatory statements regarding a person. . . .” (*Shively v. Bozanich* (2003) 31 Cal.4th 1230, 1242, as modified.) A statement is slanderous *per se*—i.e., no special damages need to be proven—if the statement falls within one of the first four categories contained in Civil Code section 46 (e.g., statements: (i) that plaintiff was indicted or committed a crime; (ii) that plaintiff was infectious, contagious, or had a “loathsome” disease; (iii) directly tended to injure plaintiff regarding his trade/profession, or that impute that plaintiff is disqualified for that, or any other profession, where such imputation has a tendency to decrease plaintiff’s profits; and (iv) about plaintiff’s impotence or lack of chastity—i.e., calling someone a whore/slut.

• For libel *per quod*, where the defamatory language is *not* libelous on its face, it is not actionable unless the plaintiff alleges and proves that he or she has suffered *special damag*e as a proximate results of the “publication” of the false statement. (*Barnes-Hind, Inc. v. Superior Court* (1986) 181 Cal.App.3d 377, 382.) On the other hand, a libelous statement that is obviously defamatory without the necessity of any explanatory matter (e.g., an inducement, inuendo, or other extrinsic fact), is considered libel on its face, and is known as libel *per se*. (*Ibid.*)

— Under the “single publication rule,” even though an individual false statement may be reprinted or republished multiple times (e.g., such as in multiple copies of magazines or newspapers), for purposes of alleging a cause of action for defamation, there is only *one* claim. (*Shively v. Bozanich*, *supra*, 31 Cal.4th at 1246-1249.) Repetition of the statement by a new party, however, gives rise to a new cause of action against the original defamer if the repetition was reasonably foreseeable. (*Id.* at 1243.) The single publication rule also applies to statements published on a website. (*Traditional Cat Assn. v. Gilbreath* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 392, 404.)

Remedies—

— Just as there are different elements to prove depending upon whether the defamation was *per quod* or *per se*, the same holds true regarding the available remedies.

• For defamation (libel and slander) *per quod*, a plaintiff can recover “special damages” resulting from the defamation. (Civ. Code §§45(a), 46(5).) “Special damages” are defined by statute as damages that a plaintiff can prove in connection with property, business, trade, profession, or occupation. (Civ. Code, § 48a(d)(2).)

• For defamation (libel and slander) *per se*, plaintiffs can recover presumed damages (for loss of reputation, shame, mortification, and hurt feelings) *without proof of actual harm*. (Civ. Code, § 48a(d)(1).) Plaintiffs may additionally recover actual proven damages. (*Weller v. American Broadcasting Companies Inc.* (1991) 232 Cal.App.3d 1991.)

— Note that public officials and public figures must prove actual malice to recover any damages. (*Issa v. Applegate* (2019) 31 Cal.App.5th 689, 703.)

— Punitive damages are available when oppression, fraud, or malice is proven by clear and convincing evidence. (Civ. Code, § 3294.) Punitive damages may also be awarded in combination with presumed damages or special damages. (*Barnes-Hind Inc. v. Superior Court, supra,* 181 Cal.App.3d at 382; Civ. Code, § 3294.)

— Injunctive relief is available only to prevent repetition of statements already determined to be defamatory. (*Balboa Island Village Inn Inc. v. Lemen* (2007) 40 Cal.4th 1141.) Injunctive relief to prohibit future statements would likely be unavailable as a prior restraint on speech. (*Id.* at 1162.)

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— The statute of limitations for defamation is one year. (Civ. Code, § 340(c).) The accrual date of the claim is the date the statement was published or distributed to the public. (*Shively v. Bozanich, supra,* 31 Cal.4th at 1247.) [*Note: keep in mind that the “delayed discovery rule,” however, does not typically apply to defamation claims involving books, magazines, or newspapers.*] (*Id.* at 1246-1249.)

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 *defamation*. If one or more provisions of the CC&Rs is/are relevant (e.g., nuisance), you should cite to that/those provision(s) here (no need to quote or provide a snip).

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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.”

## Civil Stalking

Elements—Civil Stalking

— To prove a cause of action for civil stalking, a plaintiff must prove that: (i) the defendant either engaged in a pattern of conduct with the intent to follow, alarm, or harass the plaintiff, or the defendant violated a restraining order issued subject to Code of Civ. Proc., § 527.6; and (ii) as a result of defendant’s conduct, the plaintiff either reasonably feared for his or her safety (or the safety of an immediate family member and/or any person who regularly resides in the plaintiff’s household within the preceding six months), or the plaintiff reasonably suffered “substantial emotional distress.” (Civ. Code, §1708.7; *In re Brittany K.* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 1497, 1510.)

• The law makes it clear that “substantial emotional distress” does not mean the same thing as it does in, for example, an intentional infliction of emotional distress claim, because under the civil stalking statute, demonstrating “severe emotional distress” does not require a showing of physical manifestations of emotional distress. Instead, “it requires the evaluation of the totality of the circumstances to determine whether the defendant reasonably caused the plaintiff substantial fear, anxiety, or emotional torment.” (Civ. Code, § 1708.7(b)(7).)

Remedies—

— Economic damages (e.g., general and special damages) are available. (Civ. Code, § 1708.7(c).)

— Punitive damages are also available upon a clear and convincing showing of oppression, fraud, or malice. (Civ. Code, § 3294; Civ. Code, § 1708.7(c).)

— Equitable relief (including injunctive relief) may also be available. (Civ. Code, § 1708.7(d).)

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— Although there is no case law on the subject, it appears that the three-year statute of limitations for obligations created by statute applies to civil stalking cases. (Code Civ. Proc., § 338(a).)

• The date the statute begins to run may be complicated issue since, by definition, stalking includes a pattern of conduct. (See Civ. Code, § 1708.7(a)(1).) There is no case authority on point, but secondary sources suggest that the “continuing violation” doctrine applies. Under the continuing violation doctrine, a series of acts that continue over time are viewed as a single continuous act. (See *Pugliese v. Superior Court* (2007) 146 Cal.App.4th 1444.) The trigger date for the statute of limitations under the “continuing violation” doctrine is the date that the continuing acts cease or the date of the last injury to the plaintiff. (*Id.* at 1452.)

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 *civil stalking*. If one or more provisions of the CC&Rs is/are relevant (e.g., nuisance), you should cite to that/those provision(s) here (no need to quote or provide a snip).

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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.”

## 3. Violations of the Florida Homeowner’s Association Act

Elements—3. Violations of the Florida Homeowner’s Association Act

— Provide the elements AND statutory/case law of this cause of action.

— If you want, add snippets from other cases (see the examples above for ideas). Make sure to maintain the proper formatting and margins established in this document.

— If you have more than one cause of action to add, then cut and paste this one FIRST (before replacing the green highlights) as many times as there are causes of action to add. That way, you’ll be sure to keep everything consistent and standardized.

Remedies—

— What are the available remedies.

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

Applicable Statute of Limitations—

— What is the statute of limitations for this claim?

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 *3. violations of the florida homeowner’s association act*. 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).

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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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# STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

## Applicability of Davis-Stirling Act

## Jurisdiction

### Arbitration

### Personal Jurisdiction

### Subject Matter Jurisdiction

Subject matter jurisdiction is a requirement for suits filed in federal court. There are no federal court issues of subject matter jurisdiction in connection with this dispute.

## Standing

## Anti-SLAPP Analysis

Anti-SLAPP Overview—

— Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (“SLAPP”) are lawsuits designed to hinder or prevent parties (typically the defendant) from engaging in constitutionally protected activities (e.g., petitioning or free speech). For example, development companies have used SLAPP suits to harass environmental groups standing in the way of large development/construction projects. These companies would file lawsuits against the environmentalists for the express purpose of tying up the smaller (and not as well-funded) environmental groups’ financial resources, effectively preventing them from having their “day in court.” In response, the Legislature passed the anti-SLAPP statute, which was codified in Code of Civil Procedure section 425.16. This statute allows the defending party to file a special motion to strike (called an anti-SLAPP motion) to have the court determine whether the lawsuit can proceed or should instead be thrown out as a meritless attack on the defendant’s acts made in furtherance of his or her right “to petition or free speech under the United States Constitution or the California Constitution in connection with a public issue.” (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(b)(1).)

— The granting of an anti-SLAPP motion can have *severe* consequences, not the least of which is the dismissal of the at-issue claim(s)—or even the entire complaint—depending on the circumstances. In addition, a defendant who prevails on an anti-SLAPP motion *must* be awarded his or her attorneys’ fees and costs, which, given the complexity of anti-SLAPP motions, is typically quite significant. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(c)(1).)

Anti-SLAPP Statute’s Application in HOA-Related Cases—

— SLAPP suits can, and have, arisen in lawsuits by and against HOAs and HOA members. For example, a member might file a lawsuit against a director or committee member to pressure that person to change a critical vote regarding some issue or another. To prevent that type of abuse, and to discourage members from naming individual board members as defendants in litigation, courts have determined that the protections offered under the anti-SLAPP statute apply to various issues that arise in the HOA arena. (*Colyear v. Rolling Hills Community Assn. of Rancho Palos Verdes* (2017) 9 Cal.App.5th 119, 130-36 [tree trimming dispute between adjacent homeowners that involved covenants to all lots in the community satisfied the definition of “public interest”]; *Damon v. Ocean Hills Journalism Club* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 468, 476-77 [newsletter published to 3,000 residents of an HOA was a “public forum” even if access to the newsletter was selective and limited]; *Ruiz v. Harbor View Community Assn.* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 1456; *Dowling v. Zimmerman* (2001) 85 Cal.App.4th 1400, 1409-10 [letters from attorney to management company and the HOA’s board regarding nuisance caused by an HOA member].)

— Obviously, however, not all HOA-related disputes are covered by the anti-SLAPP statute. (*Talega Maintenance Corp. v. Standard Pac. Corp.* (2014) 225 Cal.App.4th 722, 732 [holding that HOA proceedings must have a strong connection to governmental proceedings to qualify as “official proceedings”]; but see *Lee v. Silveira* (2016) 6 Cal.App.5th 527, 540-46 [holding that HOAs “functioned similar to a quasi-governmental body” to constitute a “public forum”].)

Anti-SLAPP Test—

— The courts use a two-prong test to determine if a claim is protected under the anti-SLAPP statute. First, the defendant must prove that the at-issue claim arises from a constitutionally protected activity. (*Ruiz v. Harbor View Community Assn., supra,* 134 Cal.App.4th at 1466; Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(b)(1).) If the defendant satisfies his or her burden, the burden shifts to the plaintiff to show that there is a probability that he or she will prevail on the merits of the at-issue claim. (*Ibid*.; *Equilon Enterprises v. Consumer Cause Inc.* (2002) 29 Cal.4th 53, 67; Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(b)(1).)

— With regard to the first prong, there are four categories that the anti-SLAPP statute is intended to protect:

• Any statement (written or oral) or document generated in connection with (or as part of):

→ Any official proceedings authorized by law—e.g., legislative, executive, or judicial proceedings. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(e)(1).)

→ Any issue under consideration or review by a legislative, executive, or judicial body. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(e)(2).)

• Any statement (written or oral) or document made in a place open to the public (or in a public forum) and made in connection with an issue of public interest. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(e)(3).)

• Any other conduct made in furtherance of the exercise of a constitutional right of petition or free speech and made in connection with an issue of public interest. (Code Civ. Proc., § 425.16(e)(4).)

Application/Analysis/Conclusion—

— Based upon the applicable facts and claims, an anti-SLAPP motion is unlikely because none of the conduct complained of arises from constitutionally protected activities.

## Pre-Filing Requirements

## Attorneys’ Fees and Costs

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# FINAL THOUGHTS / ISSUES / CONCERNS / COMMENTS

TO BE COMPLETED LATER

This section of the LADD 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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Reviewed and Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Any third party listed here should also be listed in the “Parties/Significant Figures” section above. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)