

Condo Smarts September 21, 2022

What Type of Alterations Need Strata Permission?

Dear Tony: Our strata council is trying to be reasonable about renovations in our older building. Several new buyers would like to renovate their units and council is trying to support their requests, but what is the test that is applied to “reasonable” for changes to a unit? Renovations to one unit that are limited to new carpets and painting are a quick approval, but renovations that change flooring to hardwood, remove plumbing fixtures, changes appliance locations, are much more complicated. Is it reasonable for the strata council to ask for more information or verification of the alteration before we grant approval. Karen R

Dear Karen: As volunteers, strata councils are asked to perform many complicated tasks from the enforcement of bylaws to evaluation of insurance on liability claims to acting as building evaluators for alterations. The source of resources for any alteration begins with a review of your bylaws and your registered strata plan showing property boundaries. Owners must obtain consent to alter any common/limited property, or part of any strata lot that is part of the structure of the building, or those parts of a strata lot a strata corporation must insure. Strata corporations must insure the common property, common assets, structure of the building and any fixtures installed by the owner developer. Strictly speaking, this will include even simple items like plumbing fixtures, built in appliances, cabinets and flooring and lighting fixtures. For the most part, fixtures such as replacing carpets, painting, upgrading cabinets and doors, and changing light fixtures rarely requires much scrutiny. These are reasonable upgrades along with decorating. Where we get into trouble is the casual assumption that an alteration will be “routine” with little impact against neighbours or the building structure. Alterations that remove or change locations of roofing, walls, windows, changes to electrical, ventilation, sound proofing, plumbing location or upgrades and alterations to fire safety or heating systems, all place a higher level of scrutiny on what is being changed. Look closely at your bylaws. A strata corporation must be reasonable when an owner requests permission to alter their strata lot, but it doesn’t imply the strata corporation cannot ask for written verification of what is being altered, who is performing the work, how the project will be managed, how demolition/waste will be managed, whether permits are required, and who will pay the costs and assume liability for these alterations. For example, in wood frame buildings, carpets form a part of the sound suppression and management. Hardwood floors, regardless of the sound proofing installed will increase the sound transmission that could become a major issue for your community. If you are a buyer looking at a renovated condo, make sure the alterations were approved by the strata corporation before you remove subjects. You may be adopting a problem you had not anticipated.

Tony Gioventu, Executive Director CHOA

Registration is now open for CHOA’s Fall 2022 Education Program. Course highlights this season focus on Council Meetings, BC Human Rights Tribunal, The CRT, The Accessibility Act and Alterations. Go to: <https://choa.bc.ca/seminars/>

Kindly note CHOA is a member-based, non-profit association. If your strata is not currently a CHOA member please consider joining – membership details are posted on our website at: <https://www.choa.bc.ca/about-choa/join-choa/>

COVID-19: To prevent the spread of COVID-19 CHOA staff may be working remotely. During this time we are online and available by phone and email to assist with your strata questions. Please stay safe and healthy.