

Condo Smarts

Headline: The dark side of family accommodations

Topic: Seniors Issues

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Written by: Tony Gioventu

Dear Tony: We have an owner in our building who should never have been moved into a condo. There have been a number of fires in her suite, she is constantly giving strangers keys to our buildings, and her personal safety is always a problem. We have two residents that reach out to her every day to make sure she is safe, has a good meal for dinner, and is taking her medication. How does a strata council deal with families who buy a condo to simply house an elderly parent to avoid the costs of care facilities?

Lindsay F. Kelowna

Dear Lindsay: The growing trend of family warehousing is a significant security and safety risk for the occupant and the residents of any multi-family building. This is a daily complaint to our offices about abandoned parents who are a danger to strata communities and themselves. Family members often look at the cost of independent care facilities and quickly realize if the family member survives 10-20 years, the estate can easily be depleted leaving the family with no inheritance or remaining resources to maintain the continued care requirements for longer periods. So they purchase a condo, usually older and at a lower price, from the proceeds of a down sized home. This ensures the family member has housing and the estate is left intact with a likely increase in property appreciation. It all seems like a simple solution, but it is a tragic symptom of divided and broken family systems, families who do not have space or resources to maintain home care services, or heirs that have abandoned their family members to protect inheritances. The implications are far reaching for strata corporations when faced with a problem resident. Kitchen fires often caused by forgotten cooking, floods from abandoned tubs and over loaded washing machines, and erratic activities are all frequent complaints, and they affect everyone in the community.

A strata has a number of options which hopefully yield some success. A family meeting with the strata council and resident is always the best start. There may be valid reasons for the owner living independently. Maintaining a close family contact will be essential when emergencies or medical problems arise. The family member may also be a good go-between, saving the council from conflict. Failing the family contact, working through the health authorities is a good starting place. A strata may contact Home Health Services, generally by city or region, which can be found by googling Home and Community Support through your local health authority. The service line will take the information from a concerned neighbour, landlord or strata council, and set up an appointment directly with the resident to evaluate their needs. Strata councils also need to remember the strata bylaws still have to be enforced. We often avoid applying bylaws where there are sensitive issues, but the application of fines or collection of insurance deductibles when claims arise may be the catalyst to force family members to act. Let's not forget the residents and council members who care for people in need. Their kindness and compassion is what makes our strata communities a great place to live across our province.