
Condo Smarts

Headline: What lies beneath?

Topic: Repair & Maintenance, Depreciation Reports

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Dear Tony: I suspect many condo owners have emailed and asked this question since the tragic collapse of the condo building in Florida. Are there buildings in BC that could potentially experience a catastrophic collapse or failure that puts occupant lives at risk? Our strata corporation in Burnaby is a 40-year-old high rise with underground parking and a pool. Our owners were encouraged to defer our depreciation report for the past 6 years to essentially avoid the rising obligations and costs of major renewals. While our community has planned well for major repairs such as roofing, elevators and safety systems, nothing has been dedicated to our building exterior of doors and windows, the structure of our building and parking garage, upgrade to our electrical systems or our pool and club house. We have exceptionally large trees growing over our parking garage and several areas of the garage waterproofing that have failed and now leaking.

Tanya M.

Dear Tanya: The structural integrity of buildings is just as critical as all as of the components within the building systems. As building systems age, the requirement for detailed review increases and should be considered at least every 5-10 years, especially if there are indications of settling, separation, elevation changes, local geologic/ground changes, water table changes, or events such as a seismic occurrence that could have impacted or altered the structure or surrounding area. If adverse conditions align, there is always the chance of building failures; however, until the report on cause of the collapse is published, there is no indication of imminent failures elsewhere. The construction, climate, soil conditions, geologic conditions and materials used in Florida may have few comparisons to our construction methods in BC, but we are exposed to saltwater intrusion in many coastal locations.

A depreciation report that is updated every 3 years and that encompasses all common property and assets, including a recommendation for structural review, is still one of your best investments. The report itself will not provide a structural evaluation; however, the consultant may identify conditions that recommend a structural review of the building, the parking garage or any other structures.

For many of our buildings in BC, the properties have been designed with the building rising over the parking garages to maximize the use of the space and provide for ground level landscaping. The parking garages are covered with membranes before the landscaping is installed. These are the most vulnerable areas as the membranes age and fail. When the membranes begin to leak the re-enforcement (rebar) within the concrete structures will become vulnerable to corrosion if the failures are not addressed. Our buildings do not sit on top of the parking garages. The buildings have their own structural integrity and are integrated with the parking garage designs and structures. The membrane over the parking garage is a building asset that must be scheduled as part of the depreciation report and renewals.

There are many examples of deferred maintenance and repairs that snowball into massive costs that could have been avoided if the strata corporation had planned for a controlled and funded renewal. As the single greatest investment for all of us, no one wants special levies or bad news relating to our property. Take control of your property. Be fully informed about the condition of the assets, the best practice for renewals and increase your annual funding contributions to reduce and avoid special levies. If there are any doubts about the structure of the building, retain a certified consultant for a complete review. For more information on "parking podium renewals" BC Housing has an excellent guide at: <https://www.bchousing.org/research-centre/library/consumer-maintenance-renewals>