
Strata Living

Headline: When do I need approval for alterations to my strata lot?

Topics: Alterations

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Dear Tony: I live in a 16 unit strata in North Vancouver. Several owners within our strata have made significant changes to their condos. One owner has gut their interior and upgraded flooring, redesigned the kitchen, laundry and bathrooms. Other owners have changed their patio doors to French doors and installed a small window above their kitchen sink. While all of these changes have definitely improved our property and modernized their units, who ends up paying the bills when something goes wrong. Case in point, one owner managed to flood their unit during construction when a water line was snapped. While the owner ended up paying the deductible, the claim impacted all of us. We spoke with our manager who advised the alterations are up to council's decision whether the strata needed to be involved or not. I find this arbitrary approach unwise and potentially unfair.

Suzi M.

Dear Suzi: The types of alterations and conditions that are permitted and whether an owner requires permission or not before proceeding are determined in the bylaws of your strata corporation. The *Schedule of Standard Bylaws* automatically applies to every strata unless they are repealed or amended. Under the standard bylaws if an owner alters the structure of the building, the exterior of the building, chimneys, stairs, balconies or other things attached to the exterior, fences, railings or similar structures, common property located within the boundaries of the strata lot, and critical and often overlooked are those parts of the strata lot which the strata corporation must insure under section 149 of the *Act*. These are those fixtures in the strata lot that include the original flooring, finishing, cabinets, plumbing and electrical fixtures installed by the owner developer. It seems a bit of overkill, but many of the projects that involve cosmetic or minor

alterations can trigger environmental issues such as asbestos abatement or building/permit issues such as electrical or plumbing upgrades or changing exterior doors and windows. The short term benefits are often a face lift to a strata lot, the long term impacts often result in building failures, mechanical problems, or structural problems leaving the other owners on the hook for the legal bills, dispute solutions, and bylaw enforcement. The strata corporation has a duty to enforce their bylaws. When someone is changing their strata lot or common property, the council needs to quickly inform them of the bylaws, and the owner's obligation for permission before they proceed.