

Headline: Strata Management Services: Renovating my condo: What can I do?

Topic: Alterations

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We often see home renovations as necessity and not as a luxury to improve our environments and protect our investments. Because many strata corporations have not provided sufficient funding for long term repairs, owners often tap into their resources for special levies and leave their units unattended. Every strata home at some point will need some renovations and upgrades and while it may be the next owner who takes up the paint brush and starts improving their space, doing the renovations in a way that keeps you in line with your strata bylaws and neighbours is just as important as the renovations you are considering.

The *Strata Property Act* imposes a *Schedule of Standard Bylaws* that determines the type of renovations permitted and when an owner requires permission from their strata. There are also significant differences between renovations to a strata lot, and renovations or alterations to the use and appearance of common property and common assets of the strata. Apply the same rule of renovations to a strata lot as you would to digging on a construction site. Before you dig...or rather before you renovate, contact your strata council and find out what the limits are. The Standard Bylaws require that any structural change to a strata lot, or a change to a fixture the strata has to insure, must first be approved by the strata council. It seems silly, but technically speaking, under the Standard Bylaws, replacing the original carpets would require permission from the strata. The strata cannot unreasonably refuse an application for an alteration to a strata lot; however, never assume that what appears to be part of your strata lot may not have an impact or change to common property.

Kitchen renovations and upgrades are a perfect example of condo alterations. They often involve new appliances, ventilation, kitchen cabinets, plumbing

fixtures, flooring, lighting, and even removal of a wall section if an island or other features are being installed. These types of renovations are a great improvement to many condos, but there are a number of alterations that affect both the strata lot and common property and require the permission of the strata corporation. You may also be required to obtain building permits for changes to plumbing, electrical, fire safety systems the structure. As a condition of granting permission for the alterations the strata may require an alteration agreement and request proof and copies of, any plans or drawings that clearly identify the scope of the work, copies of the permits required, any additional insurance requirements, engineering or environmental reports. Asbestos in older drywall or popcorn ceilings is common and must be managed before the construction can proceed. Too often strata councils are left with managing the disasters of flooded buildings or electrical shut downs because an owner started renovations without permission.

The alteration agreement is essential for your protection as an owner and for the strata corporation. As the owner you do not want the problem of unauthorized alterations becoming an issue when you are trying to sell your home. As a strata council you need to know what is being changed to the building systems and common property to manage the property. The results for both an owner and the strata can be extreme. Between bylaw enforcement that could include substantial fines or court orders to restore the unauthorized alterations or pay for damages it becomes very costly. Save everyone the troubles, before you renovate, request permission in writing.