

Condo Smarts

Headline: Service lines and strata

Topic: Repair and Maintenance; repair of common property, Utilities

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Written by: Tony Gioventu

Dear Condo Smarts: A few weeks ago, you wrote an article about who was responsible for the water-delivery lines in townhouse units. Since then, our strata council has met and certainly decided it was a much cheaper and more certain decision to have the strata corporation replace everyone's water lines in their townhouse units, as opposed to our 107 owners having to go out for a separate contractor.

We have spoken with our lawyer, who is drafting a bylaw for us at our AGM in the first week of January, with the hopes of a planned re-piping in summer of 2013. At the same time, we were also asked to look at the gas lines which service both the gas fireplaces and in some cases, kitchen stoves and outdoors barbecues. Is it safe to assume that the gas line would be each owner's responsibility as well as the water lines, unless we had a bylaw in place?
Owen Phillips

Dear Owen: The service lines for gas, electricity and water all depends n the location of the lines, how the service is metered/monitored, and whether they are capable of being used in connection with another strata lot. If the townhouse unit has a separate gas meter, and the line serves only that strata lot, and the bylaws and the strata plan indicate the service as exclusive to that strata lot and the responsibility of that strata lot, then yes, that owner will have to eventually plan for the replacement and renewal of the lines.

Gas lines, like water lines, do not last forever. We have many townhouse and apartment-style strata properties in the province that are over 40 years old and due for major upgrades.

We also have had buildings recently shut down their gas lines as a result of discovered leaks when pressure tests were done on the system as part of the routine building maintenance and inspections.

Like water lines, it comes down to economics, safety and protection of your property assets. If you leave the maintenance and renewal of the gas lines and gas fireplaces to the owners, will they act responsibly and ensure they are operating safely and efficiently? Sadly many owners make choices based on economics, not safety or protecting your property values.

If the fireplaces are not exhausting properly, if the cabs of the fireplaces have erosion, allowing discharge in to the living space or the lines are in risk of failure, the health and life safety of the building occupants is a serious concern.

At the very least, it may be a good practice for the strata corporation to contract a routine inspection of the gas-fired units. Then the owners would still be responsible for any additional maintenance and upgrades, but at least the first part of the service would be complete.

Even in a highrise building, gas fireplaces are the responsibility of each owner to maintain and repair, unless the bylaws stipulate otherwise. Like most building systems, it is cheaper for one contact to be negotiated for even just four units, than four separate contracts, and the strata owners and occupants are satisfied that the system is operating safely and efficiently.

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