

**Condo Smarts**

Headline: Smart Meter Upgrades  
Topic: Utilities, Alterations to Common Property  
Publication date: Aug 28, 2014  
Publication: The Province  
Written by: Tony Gioventu

---

**Dear Tony:** As a strata manager, we are often faced with many requests by service providers to obtain access to a strata corporation to either service a building or conduct maintenance or modifications to a building. We recently had several clients who have received letters from BC Hydro about the installation of range extenders to enable smart meters to communicate with their system, as meters are often in underground or blocked locations of the buildings. The alterations however are more significant than we were led to understand. In some cases it will require drilling through concrete structures and surface mounting of components on the building exterior. If you could provide the public with some guidelines on the installation I know our clients would greatly appreciate the assistance. We are encouraging the council to seek legal advice as one of our buildings is still under warranty and the alterations could affect the conditions of the warranty.

*Jason Kurtz, Strata West Management*

**Dear Jason:** A strata corporation should view any request for an alteration under the same conditions they would approach an alteration to common property or a common asset. There are a number of easements for existing utility services that are filed on most properties and buildings in the province which enable the utility providers to access and maintain their equipment that provides, water, gas, electricity, cable and telephone services, the conditions of the easements have limitations, and it is the property of the strata corporation, so the strata owner has to approve changes. As technologies change, building owners are experience a growing number of requests for modifications of service equipment, design and use. Strata owners are also frequently asked to consider the installation of communications systems and towers on their building roofing systems, if the elevation and location are beneficial to communications providers. Strata corporations requiring an alteration for smart meters should have received a letter from BC Hydro that indicates the need for the installation of a range extender, and the proposed changes to permit the

installation. These changes may require access to a variety of secure locations in the building, alterations to the common property, and possibly coring for the provision of additional service lines. This may also require scanning of concrete structure to ensure safe coring without damage to existing building systems. Surface mounting of cables and lines may be visible through utility areas, such as stairwells, and there may also be a requirement to mount the cables and the range extender on exterior components of the building envelope. If the alteration affects the building envelope or conditions of an existing warranty, the proposed construction should also be reviewed by the affected parties. Before a strata corporation grants permission for the alteration, they need to review their bylaws and determine whether there are specific conditions related to the alteration of the common property. Because the decision to agree to the alterations to the common property is generally a bylaw matter, the strata council will be required to review and vote on the proposed amendments. If the changes are significant in any way that could alter the use or appearance of common property or a common asset, it may require a special general meeting of the owners. There may also be a requirement for a written agreement for the alteration, including the need for independent engineering services and legal review of the terms and conditions of the contract.

BC Hydro have a helpful process that requires the approval of the strata corporation, prior to the alterations. A site contractor is designated for the installation and is required to review the installation process and any proposed changes. To ensure the project is successful, confirm every detail in writing prior to construction. If your strata corporation has any questions regarding the changes please contact BC hydro's Smart Metering Program at 1-800-409-8199 or by email at [smartmeters@bchydro.com](mailto:smartmeters@bchydro.com).

---

**For more information on CHOA resources and benefits visit [www.choa.bc.ca](http://www.choa.bc.ca)  
or contact the office at 1-877-353-2462 or email [office@choa.bc.ca](mailto:office@choa.bc.ca).**

**No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior written permission of CHOA**

This publication contains general information only and is not intended as legal advice. Use of this publication is at your own risk. CHOA will not be liable to you or any other person for any loss or damage arising from, connected with or relating to the use of this publication or any information contained herein by you or any other person.