



INTO THE STRATA-SPHERE

Serving as a council member can be rewarding and fun – while helping you personally protect what is probably your biggest investment.

AT FIRST GLANCE, joining a strata council seems like a good thing to do – kind of like running the Grouse Grind, or donating bone marrow. It's not easy, but it makes you a better person, right?

In fact, serving on a strata council can be fun and very positive – educational, social and satis-

fying in a way that allows you to stay in touch with your community while making sure things get done properly.

For community-minded, well-intentioned condo owners, council membership is a great way to get to know your neighbours, plan fun events, and

feel a sense of accomplishment. It's also a way to help personally protect what is probably your biggest investment. And it can give you valuable experience in disciplines you may be able to use elsewhere, including public speaking, problem solving, running meetings and managing properties.

Depending on the size and budget of the corporation and the urgency of needs, councils can meet as often as every two weeks or as seldom as once a year at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The usual venue is one of the members' homes or (if your building has one) a common meeting room.

The best meetings are congenial, focused and productive. Councils depend heavily on their property managers for advice and assistance with everything from fines to landscaping, parking issues, repairs, legal matters and organizing and running the AGM.

Serving time (forgive the word choice) on a strata council can be very enjoyable if you're fortunate enough to find yourself in the company of like-minded folks: fellow councillors who want to help build a happier, healthier environment. Basically, the kinds of people you want representing your interests.

Who should **not** join a strata council? For starters, owners with a personal agenda. Those pushing for the community to jointly raise pot-bellied pigs or paint all balcony rails pink to match their flower bed should be gently discouraged.

A good councillor is empathetic and a good listener. The councillor's job, after all, is to hear and act upon the wishes of all the owners. That's a mandate that requires a certain amount of patience, a little humility, and a not-infrequent dose of tact. Assembling a good group of council members, ideally representing as wide a variety as possible of professions (lawyers, accountants and trades, for example) can move mountains. On the negative side, having poor representatives in place can wreak havoc and take years to undo. Keep this in mind when voting in council members at your next AGM.

Choosing a good property manager is probably the council's most important task. The better the manager, the easier your job will be – which means

more free time for you to attend your weekly book club gatherings or hot yoga classes.

Anyone interested in knowing all the rules and regulations concerning strata corporations should read the BC Strata Property Act (http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/98043_01). It's actually a good resource for resolving uncertainties or clarifying what the law says – and not that hard to wade through if and when the need arises.

The act does not specify an exact composition of council, but many have at least the traditional core of President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, with other members filling assigned roles or simply being members-at-large to vote on issues and take on tasks as they arise.

That said, and at the risk of scaring you away, the following is an abbreviated list of some of the responsibilities of council membership.

Transparency and disclosure

As a council member, you must act honestly, in good faith and in the best interests of the strata corporation. You must exercise the care, diligence and skill of a reasonably prudent person in comparable circumstances.

Occasionally, strata councils must deal with potential conflicts of interest – for example, a contractor or stakeholder who could benefit from the award of a contract. In this case the duty of the council member is to:

- (a) *Disclose fully and promptly to the council the nature and extent of the interest.*
- (b) *Abstain from voting on the contract or transaction, and;*
- (c) *Leave the council meeting both while the contract or transaction is discussed (unless asked by council to be present to provide information) and while the council votes on the contract or transaction.*

If you are a licensed realtor, you must provide a written disclosure to the Strata Corporation prior to sitting on a Strata Council, and your letter must meet the requirements

continued next page