

STRATA & COMMUNITY LIVING

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AUTUMN 2018



New strata owners survival guide

If you're new to strata living then welcome. It's a way of living that has some rules but following them is easy and makes community living work. So read over these tips, aim to practice them and everyone will get along just fine.

1. Get to know the neighbours

Recognise that when you're apartment living that your neighbour is not across the street but can be on the other side of your living room or bedroom wall or ceiling or floor. They can hear your conversation on your balcony and the bass from your speaker on the floor. Be considerate and keep the conversations levels down and at least play good music (or keep the volume down and the speakers off the floor).

2. Check if pets are allowed

Find out if your owners corporation allows you family cat or dog to live in your new strata apartment. Don't necessarily take the word of the selling agent when he tells you the block is pet friendly. Don't also think that you can change the by-laws if they prohibit pets or that you can sneak Fluffy or Fido in. There are fines for breaches of the by-laws and you are likely to have to give up your pet.

3. Know What You're Buying Into

Have an "Identification" survey undertaken to make sure that the car space, garage and unit you were shown, is in fact the one you are actually going to buy. This should help you to understand where the boundaries exist between your property and the common property belonging to the building, such as the lobby, stairwell, car park and so on.

4. Know Your Rights

Acquire a full copy of the by-laws that are specific to your owners' corporation, so that you understand the "rules" that you will be required to live by. Know if you are permitted to hang your washing on the balcony (probably not), if you can have a BBQ (you might be surprised) and whether you can move furniture through the lobby (there's a chance you'll have to use other building access). Fines can apply so be aware and stick to the rules – they are there for a reason.

5. Do Some Sleuthing

Have a professional search the books and records of your owners' corporation so you know the finances and any other issues the owners' corporation is facing. You may be facing a one off levy for the building to be painted so best to know this sooner rather than later.

6. Make Sure Your Capital Works Fund Isn't Sinking

Have a good look at the condition of the building and make sure that the funds in the "Capital Works fund" match the long term maintenance planned for the next few years or you may find you end up having to pay for more than you planned.

7. Budget for Levies

Each quarter it is likely that you will have to pay levies to fund the annual running expenses of the owners corporation and its long term maintenance. Ultimately this will protect the value of your financial investment.

8. Be Informed

Educate yourself, as to your rights and responsibilities of living in a strata title property by joining Strata Community Australia (NSW) and coming along to our free owners seminars. Some local councils such as City of Sydney also run useful and helpful workshops about living in strata and most are often free. Check them out.

9. Know Who To Call

Find out who on your strata committee you can contact when something goes wrong with the building and its services. There will be a noticeboard in the car park or lobby that will give you details of contacts as well as minutes of previous committee meetings and the annual general meeting details.

10. Be Active

Take an active interest in what goes on in your building, attend the annual general meeting so that your voice is heard and consider becoming a member of your buildings strata committee.

Be mindful of these few things and living in strata will be the best place you've called home.



Both winners receiving the award which was sponsored by City of Sydney and presented by Councillor Philip Thalys.

Showing how community is achieved

Owners who are SCA (NSW) members are also entitled, and very much encouraged, to enter the annual CHU Strata Community Awards. Nominations will open soon for the 2018 awards (check the website soon). Owners can make a submission for the Strata Community Environmental and Engagement Award.

Before you do, read all about the 2017 winners both of which we are showcasing here. While there was one award, both winners were so outstanding the judges couldn't decide between them and so both received the award.

Water efficiency has its rewards

Andrew Whittaker is chair of the strata committee of a mixed residential and commercial property located in the Haymarket area of Sydney's CBD.

The building has 154 residential lots and five commercial lots on the ground floor as well as parking for each lot and visitors/contractors. There are 18 floors (14 residential), including two levels of basement parking.

Andrew says the strata committee was encouraged to enter the awards by the City of Sydney (CoS).

"I had been working closely with CoS and Sydney Water on water and energy efficiency initiatives for the building, which were starting to show real improvements, particularly in driving down water use. We decided entering the awards would be a good way to see how we were going against other properties," Andrew explained.

A key driver for the strata committee and owners adopting the measures was cost savings and the financial incentives being offered. Council sponsored an energy and water audit of the building and Sydney Water offered a \$0 up-front project.

"The audit showed some serious problems with the building's energy and water use, most startling being that 28% of our water consumption was coming from minor internal leaks, namely leaking toilet cisterns and dripping/running taps.

"Owners were encouraged to support the water and energy efficiencies based on a number of factors including reducing environmental impacts, zero cost upfront for the water project, attractive payback periods and future savings (estimated at \$44,000 per year on water bills)."

Andrew says the water efficiencies put in place also created efficiencies with the hot water systems meaning savings on energy costs.

Winning the award was exciting for those involved and added to the positive feedback the strata committee received for the water system improvements.

The award also reflected the very strong engagement with owners and tenants that the strata committee has worked hard on over the last couple of years.

"We run a quarterly newsletter, bulletin boards and auto-notification through our building management system.

A KEY DRIVER FOR ADOPTING THE WATER AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY WAS COST SAVINGS AND THE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES BEING OFFERED.

"For major projects we engage project managers who are required to conduct early and comprehensive consultation with residents. This is particularly important in a building which has many residents whose primary language is not English. Making a submission and driving change requires someone to "champion" the cause," Andrew explained.

Next for the building is implementing the agreed program of energy efficiencies.

"Our building, like many others, was built in the era of cheap power and plentiful water. Times have changed and we need to ensure that our properties don't become environmental dinosaurs which are expensive to operate and maintain.

"Our strata committee is firmly focussed on investing in the future, Andrew concluded.

Strategic planning pays dividends

Located in Darlinghurst is a 260 lot strata plan that has made significant reductions in its greenhouse gas emissions.

Mark Broadley chairs the strata committee and explains the process that was undertaken to achieve this result.

"Over the past 10 years, our strata plan has been guided by a strategic plan," Mark explained.

"This is a vision documenting our objectives and practices and its purpose is to guide the management of the building. A core aspect of this is environmental sustainability. We established an environmental sustainability framework, which is reviewed and reported on annually, and used to prioritise investment and measure outcomes."

In recent years the committee had noted rapidly increasing utility bills and did not wish to increase the strata levies. Having received feedback from the residents wishing to improve environmental sustainability, a decision was made to take positive action.

THE AWARDS ARE A GREAT WAY OF INCREASING AWARENESS OF PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES BEING UNDERTAKEN BY STRATA BUILDINGS.

The sustainability measures implemented were wide ranging. The first initiatives focused on water savings, encouraged by the drought conditions at the time, and programs promoted by Sydney Water. On a larger scale level, tanks were installed to collect water for car-washing and irrigation, while on the smaller level the strata committee also established a shower head replacement program. This provided owners with options available to install water efficient shower heads in their apartments.

"We were also encouraged through involvement in the CoS Smart Green Apartments program, which demonstrated the potential benefits we could achieve. We sought specialist advice, which indicated that we could reduce our environmental impact by 20 percent," Mark said.

"Recently the focus has been on improving energy efficiency and reducing power consumption and costs. We installed LED lighting throughout our common areas and car park resulting in a savings of more than \$10K per month."



"Other initiatives include developing a residents' herb garden (we are currently trialing pod style beds), encouraging birds in the gardens, and encouraging recycling. We have also installed a charity collection bin."

It was in seeing the outcome of these initiatives and the impressive results that prompted the committee to enter the awards.

Mark wants others to know that the awards are a great way of increasing awareness of programs and initiatives being undertaken by strata buildings.

"There are limited ways of sharing information and experiences between buildings, and hopefully the awards are one way of improving this," he said.

"It is always great when hard work and dedication are recognised. Our programs have been team efforts between our consultants, our facility and building managers, and the committee representatives."

"Sharing the journey with them has been a terrific experience and the award caps it off nicely," Mark concluded. ■



SCA (NSW) Strata Owners Day 2018

We'd love to see you at Strata Owners Day 2018

Celebrating Strata

Where you'll hear from and meet industry experts on a variety of topics which means we're ready to answer your strata questions.

When: Saturday 24 March, 9am-4pm

Venue: Swissotel, 68 Market Street, Sydney

Cost: \$40 Strata Owner Chapter Members
\$60 Non Members



Back story

Your chance to enter the 2018 Strata Community Awards

If you or your strata committee were inspired by the stories on pages 2 and 3 then here is your chance to enter the 2018 Strata Community Awards.

SCA (NSW) wants to hear how your strata plan has succeeded with environmentally sustainable programs and initiatives that brings your strata community together.

Award submissions open 12th March and close 1 June. The judging period will be 5 June to 12 June with the award presentation on 3 July during a glamorous gala dinner at the Four Seasons Hotel, Sydney.

Look out for submission details on the SCA (NSW) website nsw.strata.community



Reminder: child safety window locks deadline imminent

Strata owners are reminded that childproof and robust safety devices must be fitted to all common property windows above the ground floor by 13 March 2018. Windows can still be opened but only to a maximum of 12.5cm.

Hopefully by now your strata plan will have attended to this important requirement. The deadline is looming and you don't want to be caught out. Plus it's an important safety measure to protect our youngest residents and visitors from harm.

In the meantime, SCA (NSW) has expressed concern to NSW Fair Trading about the deadline for compliance. The concerns are that there are strata schemes that will not be able to fully comply, for the following reasons:

- inability to gain access to all lots in each scheme
- window lock installers have a backlog of work
- difficulty complying due to heritage issues

SCA (NSW) has also sought advice regarding requirement for ongoing audits and when to retest - annually or every three years. NSW Fair Trading's response was that there is no ongoing compliance legislation and no guidelines around certification. However, owners corporations have an ongoing duty of care meaning that it may be wise to undertake ongoing testing.

NSW Fair Trading has committed to provide further information to the public about what to do if you are unable to comply by 13 March 2018 and SCA (NSW) will provide an update to members and post information on its website.

If you still need information please go to the NSW Fair Trading website www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au



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Strata & Community Living is a joint initiative brought to you by SCA (NSW); the peak industry body representing strata managing agents and others committed to the continual improvement in standards of strata management practice in NSW and your strata managing agent.



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