
Condo Smarts

Headline: Solar panel installations

Topic: Alterations to Common Property, Energy Upgrades

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Dear Tony: We live in a medium size townhouse complex on the sunshine coast. Two owners have given notice to strata council they are going to install solar panels to reduce their energy use. This will require securing the panels to the roof, an access for the power cables, and may have long term impact on maintenance and potential costs of replacing roofs in the future. Our council have several concerns and would appreciate some guidelines on how to approach this.

Gloria C.

Dear Gloria: In a townhouse complex, the building exteriors and roofing systems are generally common property. This is the situation in your strata corporation. The owners who are wishing to install solar panels are seeking permission to alter common property, this could also result in a significant change in use or appearance of the common property. Your bylaws, with the identical wording of the Standard Bylaws in the *Strata Property Act* require an owner to seek written permission of the strata corporation/council before they alter common property.

The strata council may apply conditions on cost, technical requirements around the installation of the panels and trays, building and electrical permits as this system will be connected to the existing electrical service, the method of installation and who is qualified and insured to install the system, and the future impact such as the renewal of the roof. The strata corporation may require as a condition of the installation, the owners take responsibility for the costs associated with the installation and maintenance requirements, and the conditions on how a future owner will be responsible for the installation.

It is beneficial for the strata corporation to have an alteration agreement drawn up by a lawyer who deals with strata issues routinely, and that cost can also be a condition of the agreement. It seems a bit excessive, but damaged roofing systems, or increased fire hazards will be costly for all owners if this is not addressed formally, and the increased risk puts pressure on your strata corporation insurance qualifications. This alteration may be a significant change in use or appearance of the property as well, requiring a special general meeting and a 3 / 4 vote of the owners.

Solar systems in bare land strata, townhouse complexes and even common area generation for apartment/highrise buildings is an excellent energy source with beneficial results if the installation and use are managed correctly. This might be a good time to hold an information meeting of your owners. There may be a greater number of owners interested, and the cost benefits for product and labour are always better when applied to larger scale. For a helpful bulletin on: "Solar Photovoltaic Systems for Multi-Unit Residential Buildings" go to www.bchousing.org and link to Licensing and Consumer Services.