



Green is the Colour of Saving Money

By Warren Kleiner

People are concerned about the environment and there are many “green” government initiatives that are



intended to help “save our environment”. People also want to save money. Going green and lowering utility costs is a way to do it and lowering costs also improves affordability and market value. As should be expected, many condominiums are therefore carrying out energy retrofit and other projects to lower costs.

Although energy retrofit projects can be expensive initially, the payback for many of them is relatively short so that the condominium recovers its investment, often in just a few years. There are also various grants, subsidies

and/or rebates available for certain types of projects.

The Building Code

Changes to the Ontario Building Code have been announced. Anticipated to be effective January 1, 2019, the changes were introduced with the goal of reducing green house gas emissions and implementing energy-efficient measures in new homes and large buildings in support of the government’s 2016 Climate Change Action Plan.

The proposed changes include adding a loading requirement to roof designs for all new large buildings to allow for the future installation of solar technology and a requirement that all new houses and large buildings include a conduit to facilitate

the installation of a photovoltaic system (a solar power system) or a solar domestic hot water system. This change though will not benefit existing condominiums.

Another proposed change would require that, effective 2022, all apartment buildings and condominiums have a heat or energy recovery unit as part of their ventilation system. A heat recovery system removes moisture and provides fresh air to maintain good indoor air quality. This is important not just for the health of residents but also for energy efficiency. By no longer having to heat excess moisture in the air, heating costs are reduced.

There is a comment period until September 29, 2017 on the proposed changes so details of the proposals may change. Everyday politics and a provin-



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cial election scheduled for next year may impact whether any of the changes are implemented.

In-suite retrofits

One of the largest utility costs for condominiums is water. Upgrading toilets and shower heads to water saving fixtures can result in huge reductions in water use and cost savings. Unit owners are usually responsible for the maintenance and repair of their plumbing fixtures and many boards of directors struggle with how to require owners to install water saving fixtures. Although the *Condominium Act*, 1998 and the declarations of most condominiums were not drafted to provide condominiums with a specific mechanism to accomplish this, it does not mean that nothing can be done. There are options. A condominium can amend its declaration but the required 80 per cent or 90 per cent owner consent (depending on the particular amendment) is not achievable for many condominiums. Much of what a board may want to accomplish however can be done through changes to the rules and/or bylaws or by making use of other provisions in the Act. Boards should consult with their corporation's solicitor to discuss the different options.

Electric Cars and Ebikes

Residents are increasingly concerned about the environment and reducing their own costs. Currently, only a limited number of condominium residents have bought or are considering buying an electric vehicle (EV). As governments push car manufacturers to increase EV production and plan for electric charging networks and some countries are planning to ban the sale of gas powered vehicles by 2040, in a very short time, every condominium will have to figure out a way to accommodate EVs.

If a unit owner wants to install a car charger, it can be done with the approval of the board and compliance with section 98 of the *Condominium Act*, 1998 which requires that the Corporation and the unit owner enter into an agreement, to be registered on title, governing the installation, maintenance and repair of the car charger. They should make the owner respon-

sible for all costs associated with the car charger, including the cost of the electricity used.

The electrical infrastructure of most condominiums will accommodate adding a number of electric car chargers. But many condominiums will have to incur substantial costs to upgrade the infrastructure to accommodate a large number of electric vehicles. Technology, however, changes fast and we hope to see improvements that will allow for less expensive ways

for condominiums to accommodate EVs. We may also see service providers offering to incur the costs to install the necessary infrastructure, whether for a small markup on the cost of electricity used or a user fee. In other words, we expect to see more options in the future.

Another issue that condominiums are facing are electric bikes (ebikes) which need to be charged. The rules of many condominiums prohibit taking bikes into elevators and to the units, requiring that

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they be left in a bicycle locker or rack, usually in the garage. There are likely no plugs where the bicycles are stored. If there are, there may not be enough and other residents may not want to subsidize the electricity consumption for a few residents to charge their ebikes. Some creativity may be required to address this issue. In some cases it may make sense to allow residents to bring ebikes to their units where they can be charged. In other cases it may be necessary to find common areas where outlets can be installed. As for the cost of the electricity, if it is not possible or feasible for people to pay for the electricity they use, charging a monthly fee or surcharge to those people who have ebikes to cover the cost of utility use may be a reasonable option.

Figuring out how to accommodate EVs and ebikes will be important. Ignoring the issue will leave a condominium behind. ■

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