



Viewpoint

Let's go forward, not back.

The initial shock and disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic may be passing, but we now face a very different future than we ever imagined. Though it's natural to wish a speedy return to normalcy and slide back to the way things were, we have a unique opportunity to permanently improve the quality of our work, our lives and the service we provide our clients. Let's briefly explore four obvious ways to improve condominium operations and achieve these three positive outcomes.



Chris
Jaglowitz

1. Virtual Board Meetings

The way we meet condo boards must change. While boards often prefer in-person meetings with their managers and supporting professionals, that's no longer feasible because physical distancing will remain important to varying extents for many months. When you add increasingly lousy traffic and the need to reduce costs, moving condo boards towards video conferencing as the new normal is a necessity that brings benefits with only modest cost and a short learning curve. While we're at it, why not go purely phone/video for "office hours" devoted to serving residents' needs?

2. Hybrid AGM Meetings

Similarly, the time has come for AGMs to go hybrid and permit owners and presenters alike to attend remotely. Even after the ban on 5-person gatherings ends, there are many good reasons to go hybrid and move towards the all-virtual model, including more streamlined meetings and shorter evenings. This was unthinkable earlier this year but is now both desirable and achievable. This is a natural evolution that builds on the increasingly-popular electronic proxy and voting tools everyone should already be using.

3. Electronic Payments

The days of circulating folders of invoices and paper cheques for approval and issuing payments are drawing to a close. Beyond pandemic issues, the new "prompt payment" regime

under the *Construction Act* is a major impetus to shorten the invoice approval process and switch to electronic payment. The technology exists, so let's use it.

4. Cloud-Based Operations

Working more effectively while being remote is paramount. Many businesses and workers were caught unprepared by emergency closure orders and less able to do their normal work, but lessons have been learned. Operations must become sufficiently nimble to withstand disruption and continue effectively off-site and away from head office. This requires more than email access, but comprehensive cloud-based systems for managers to oversee and advance their projects and access the records they need to serve clients and improve collaboration with their boards, professionals and trades. Gains in productivity, personal satisfaction and work-life balance are all there for the taking.

Make Change Happen

In all these cases and many more, condo managers will be a significant force in making permanent changes happen. They faced the pandemic challenges head-on, found creative solutions for adapting and learned painful lessons of what works, what doesn't, and what must change forever. Their creativity and determination are boundless and driven by the desire to serve their clients, including boards, owners and residents. And managers know they cannot take care of anyone else if they don't take care of themselves sustainably.

The disruption in recent months has opened our eyes to the possibilities and the clear necessity to do things smarter and better. It is a major mistake to ignore this historic chance to improve the way we work, live and serve our clients. ■

Chris Jaglowitz, J.D., ACCL, practiced condo law for 17 years in Toronto before launching Common Ground Condo Law in January 2020. He's having great fun doing legal work for condo corporations in a 21st century client-centred way. commongroundcondolaw.ca