

# Balancing Freedom

Issues in Condo Land have me contemplating the concept of “freedom from” vs “freedom to.” Positive freedoms vs negative freedoms. “Freedom from” is the freedom to choose. “Freedom to” is freedom from obstacles.



How are these freedoms balanced within a framework of consumer protection and the myriad of regulations in which condominium corporations function?

Do condominium corporations have the freedom to fail financially or structurally? Are homeowners protected from shortsighted decision-making? Should long-range planning consider the termination of a condominium corporation as part of its useful life?

The recent tragedy at Surfside in Florida and the shift of iconic brutalist condominium buildings in Chicago from condominiums to rental housing lead me to consider the long-term life of condominiums, in particular as the repair bill for the construction frenzy of the 1980s comes due. Right

here in Ontario, we had a condominium converted to a hotel not long ago. The potential for redevelopment vs a corporation's net holdings and required repairs equates to contentious conversations for the future of Condo Land.

In the shared environment of a condominium corporation, a balance must be achieved. Clearly, not every homeowner can have the ultimate freedom. For this reason, corporations have governing documents to set out the parameters of individual freedom. Should condominium corporations have the freedom to fail financially, structurally? I don't believe they should.

Finding that balance is more complex than it might at first appear. How can homeowners have the freedom to self-determine their community while protecting from the peril of financial or structural failure? Plan long term. Live within your means. Spend money conservatively.

The most significant source of resentment is money woes. Given our low interest rates and the burgeoning infla-

tion rate, this will only intensify in the coming years. How can board members protect themselves against angry owners knocking at the door when the budget is cast? Increase financial literacy with every member of your community. Understanding and prioritizing costs, both operating and reserve, will go a long way to gaining acceptance from each condominium corporation.

Authentic communication and ensuring that the message is not only delivered but that it also is understood is a daunting task but a necessary one. Articulating the standards of your community to gain a shared understanding of the values your corporation hold will go a long way to reducing conflict and ease the collecting of fees. It will also facilitate the implementation of major projects which are typically funded or executed over more than one fiscal year. ■

Katherine Gow, RCM  
ACMO President

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