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# A Property Managers Guide to Starting, Facilitating and Completing Capital Projects

The pandemic has brought along many challenges that condominium corporations, managers and communities had not been exposed to in the past. Some of these challenges include virtual Annual General Meetings, considering and contemplating vaccination policies, and increased health and safety expenditures.

In addition to the above challenges, as residents have been spending an increased amount of time within their condominium units, building heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) and plumbing equipment and systems have been operating overtime to meet the comfort demands of residents. With equipment running for longer durations, the rate of wear and tear on equipment has increased, making it even more critical to maintain such equipment and ensure that old equipment is replaced promptly for continued operation and comfort before its failure.

As of January 2021, there are reportedly over 11,000 condominium corporations across Ontario, with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation reporting that 55% of homes under construction in Ontario are condominiums. As the number of condominiums rises year after year, managers across the province are bound to experience managing the replacement of capital equipment projects sooner or later.

The condominium Reserve Fund Study (RFS) is a great tool to guide managers in planning and preparing for upcoming projects. The RFS and other indicators such as maintenance expenditure and energy efficiency incentives available can help property managers plan for capital equipment replacement projects before equipment failure. This could result in the corporation saving a considerable amount on future maintenance fees and

upfront capital expenditure.

Below are key steps to follow once the need for a capital project has been identified:

### Initial Phase: Retaining a Consultant

Once the need for a project has been identified, the corporation would typically look to retain a consultant. As the corporation is preparing to retain a team to assist in implementing the project, it is crucial to have a defined and comprehensive scope of work for each project phase. This will allow the corporation and management team to obtain competitive pricing from consultants for their services and compare that pricing to a benchmark scope.

**Pro Tip:** Use the services of a trusted consultant or experienced manager by discussing the required scope of work to prepare a comprehensive and complete





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scope to obtain pricing from different consultants. This will ensure all pricing received allows for similar services enabling the corporation to compare all quotations received.

## Phase 2: Construction Phase

Once the design phase is complete, the contractor is retained, and construction has commenced, clear communication between all parties defines the success of a project. In the case of larger projects, unforeseen delays due to labour shortages, equipment delivery or extreme weather conditions are expected regardless of how well planned a project is.

Keeping residents updated and making them aware of such issues ahead of time allows them to plan accordingly. Residents expect management to keep them informed of the general status of work, including but not limited to any scheduled shutdowns of building systems, as well as any disturbances to building systems. This becomes even more imperative if the work is to occur within residential suites. Examples of such projects are domestic water or heating water riser pipe replacements.

**Pro Tip:** For any project commencing within residential suites, it is recommended that the consultant and awarded contractor host a town hall meeting for residents before the project commences to explain the project's intent and how it will benefit the condominium community. This will allow residents to ask any questions and provide a comfort level to residents.

## Final Phase: Close Out

At this phase, the project is nearing completion. The corporation's brand-new equipment is fully operational, and the contractor is finalizing construction activities on site. Managers and the consultant should complete a final walk-through to review all work and provide the corporation with a sign-off letter. In addition, close-out documents such as as-built drawings, warranty documents, and start-up documents should all be packaged and provided to the corporation by the contractor.

Managers should consult with their accounting department to confirm that all payments to the contractor have been processed and completed.

**Pro Tip:** Work with your consultant to have the contractor arrange training sessions for on-site staff and maintenance teams for any new equipment installed. Newly installed equipment may have new operational and maintenance requirements that on-site and maintenance staff should be aware of.

## Key Project Timelines

Currently, supply chain issues are a major concern. Anyone who has recently tried to furnish their new home or buy a new car may have noticed that majority of the furniture is simply out of stock, and the model of the car they had desired is not available for the next few months. Capital equipment within buildings is subject to the same issues, increasing lead times on equipment every month passing. Gone are

the days where a Make-Up Air Unit could be ordered and delivered to the site within six weeks, and a Chiller could be released in production and delivered to the site within twelve weeks. With looming uncertainty, starting capital equipment replacement projects as soon as possible helps minimize and manage the risks of equipment delivery delays and labour shortages and therefore allows the equipment to be installed in time for the upcoming season.

**Pro Tip:** Corporations should retain their professional consultants by February for boiler replacement projects to commence within the summertime and be completed by the fall changeover period. Similarly, corporations should retain their professional consultants for chiller/cooling tower replacements once the cooling season for the year has been completed. This will ensure that the new cooling plant is installed and operational prior to next year's cooling season.

Capital Projects can be intimidating and daunting, especially if they are your first. Having the right team and processes in place can make a huge difference. ■

**Kaezad Wania** is a Senior Project Manager & Mechanical Designer at Trace Consulting Group Ltd. Having attained his Professional Engineering (P.Eng.) designation, Kaezad, in his four years within the industry, has managed over 25 retrofit projects from start to completion with the majority of the projects taking place within condominium buildings. [traceconsultinggroup.com](http://traceconsultinggroup.com)

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