Guide #1: New Council Member Basics

Disclaimer: This guide is for the readers’ convenience and is completely voluntary information. This guide should not be considered as any sort of legal advice, or direction to resolving matters. It is intended to give an elected council member a general understanding of roles and duties pertaining to how strata council operates. These are merely the opinions and suggestions of the author, and are not the only method of organization a strata council can adopt. If for any reason there was an error in referencing, the act or other documents, or the act is amended where such references are no longer accurate, in this guide. Then we apologize, as this guide is only updated periodically and updates may be missed.
This is a basic guide for new or recently elected council members who are wondering how to act as a council member. This guide intended to give you a foundational understanding and confidence of your roles and responsibilities as a newly elected council member.

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Council Introduction

Congratulations on your nomination, and election as a Strata Council Member. Your nomination and election is evidence that you have value to offer the strata corporation. The owners and other council members, value your input and suggestions that influence the governance of the Strata Corporation as a whole. Understand that no matter how you arrived on council your service is greatly appreciated, and you again wouldn’t be there, unless you had value to add to the management team (Strata Council and/or Agent) So give yourself a pat on the back!

As a newly elected council member, If you are currently thinking, “What the heck am I doing?”, please take the time to read through this guide, as it should give you some confidence in your role, and help you understand the operation a little better.

Induction into Council

As a new recently elected council member, being inducted into council means you are working with a team of people to manage the property and all the issues that need addressing. Typically everyone will have roles, such as; President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and up to three or more ‘standing’ council members, and every strata corporation has the same work requirements set by the strata act. How a strata corporation and council organizes themselves as the ‘managers’, will really set the stage for how well they act as ‘managers’ of the property or asset. There are two different management styles that influence how a council conducts business; Self-Managed, and Professionally Managed.

- Self-Managed is where a council will divide up the work needing to be done amongst current council members, and typically have enough experience to deal with issues. They have the confidence to navigate and conform to the Strata property act, the current registered bylaws, and rules enacted by the owners. Members usually possess a certain level of professional experience, and most certainly have a personal standard of good organization.

- Professionally Managed Is where council has hired a manager to perform some or all of the duties, and typically at meetings, council simply discusses issues and determines a best course of action. The agent will take direction from council and execute those decisions to the degree for which they
have been contracted. The agent will offer their comments if they recognize a conflict and supply council with information to make the appropriate decisions. When it comes to organization, agents generally guide us, and supply us with organization to keep everyone on track. The reason they are so valuable is because they have the experience and the knowledge to help inexperienced members to conduct strata business in an efficient, effective manner.

So whichever management style your strata is, it will help you understand the degree of responsibility your position will hold. If you would like an overview of what exactly a Strata Corporation must do, and what a council must take care of, then Refer to the Act or the Provincial Guide 4: Roles and Responsibilities of Strata Councils.

Your First Meeting

While you may be staring in awkward silence at all other council members trying to figure out what’s going on and who’s doing what, the roles will very soon be identified. Typically who ever speaks first will display the confidence and direction to be the president, and may be nominated to be president. This member most likely has served as a junior council member before and possesses some leadership skills. And as a president is nominated, if there are no objections or other nominees for president, they will be elected into that position. Quickly the other members will snap up the duties as to what they are most confident in doing. And you being a new council member most likely will be happy with the title; council member, or councilor.

Now, if two people have been nominated for the same position, there are options and processes to determine who gets that job, and your vote will count. This is known as an election, just like when we elect our Prime Minister. I won’t go into detail about it, because typically the senior council members, or agent, will ensure this process is done in a procedurally fair manner. In later guides we can explore this topic more and identify some of the issues that can arise.

Once nominations and elections have taken place, establishing who has signing authority for the strata corporation, will occur. It may not happen exactly in this order but it will be addressed. Then the meeting will continue with business as usual, noting completed tasks, any council correspondence, new business, and a discussion of when the next meeting is and how many meetings per year council will have.

After your first meeting, you will go home knowing some stuff was accomplished but with little understanding of exactly what you did. Generally you know you’re on council, you know you had to put up your hand a couple times, that you may be signing authority, that you are a member at large, and that you have to do work, and most likely not get paid for it. When I say it aloud, it sounds horrible, “Wow I’m a member and I have work to do, and I don’t get paid for it, that’s so awesome!” As you finish your first meeting you may have second thoughts, about being on council. You may question what you know about the job, if you have anything of value to offer, and is it a complete waste of your time?.

Well before you get discouraged, understand that being on council is an extremely important job and incredibly rewarding. So many families and people rely on you as an elected member, to make decisions on their behalf to the best of your ability, to the benefits of all the owners. Your reward is knowing that you helped so many families manage their home and maintain the value in their homes. Just as if you were simply a resident owner, then the acting council members are managing on your behalf, and to your benefit. So as you make decisions to manage the property, the better you are at managing the property, the more it will provide you and the other owners a greater return on
investment. So you may not get paid for your time initially, but your service to the other owners and your return on investment will provide greater returns long term.

And lastly, during the meeting you will experience a process of approving agenda items. You will recognize this as a member will ask for a ‘mover’ (course of action) and ‘seconder’ (someone else in favor of the course of action) then the ‘motion’ goes to a vote. All members are then asked if they are ‘all in favor, or against’, and this is where you give your vote (raise your hand) to either approve or disapprove of the ‘motion’. If the ‘motion’ passes’, it signals council acceptance of the course of action. If after reading this you may, or may not understand but as you go through the meetings you will catch on quickly. For reference to this process, read ‘Roberts Rule of Order’. For Strata Corporation this is the process of approving agenda items, and can vary in formality, depending on the president’s direction.

Managing Members Roles & Responsibilities

These roles were drafted to give a general outline of duties each elected member is responsible for. These roles are not the only way of managing a strata complex but in our opinion, is the ideal scenario to encourage that work is being balanced, council members are learning, and not any one member is doing all the work.

To be a good council member, everyone must have some responsibility, and contribute some information to the meetings. The more council members do for their properties the more they will be prepared to make effective decisions.

**President:** The role of president is important and they are like the leader of a business. They ensure everything is getting done and if someone needs help they are available to provide direction, and ensure that direction conforms to the Strata Property Act. Sometimes a president, will naturally do too much rather then teach other council members. Being a president doesn't mean they should do everything, or should have to do everything, or should be expected to do everything. A president is not a mediator between disputing owners, and generally their job is to ensure that when council members need help completing their duties they can offer support and can review their reports to ensure accuracy of information.

The President is also in charge of leading the meetings, known as the ‘Chair’ person and has a duty to understand the act, the strata bylaws and any rules adopted by the strata. A president will ensure proper council conduct and procedural conformity. The president should be able to hear council discussions and provide direction and effective courses of actions that reflect council’s discussions. You will recognize this skill when a president or other member puts forth a ‘Motion’. A motion signals a course of action, or direction, a council will take on a particular issue.

To be a good president they should have a good understanding of the act and procedures, duties and responsibility of each role, and be able to provide support and teach the roles to new members. They should possess good computer skills, communication skills, English language skills, organizational skills, and general accounting skills.

**Vice President:** The role of the Vice-President is similar and parallels that of the Presidents role. Anything the President needs help with the vice president should be available to help, and should possess the general knowledge, to be able to support other members. As Vice President you will need to assist the President in the interpretation of the act, procedures, strata bylaws, and rules. Assist in
ensuring procedures are being followed as per the act, and be able to support other members in the fulfillment of their duties.

To be a good Vice-President they should have a good understanding of the act and procedures, duties and responsibility of each role, and be able to provide support and teach the roles to new members. They should possess good computer skills, communication skills, English language skills, organizational skills, and general accounting skills.

**Secretary:** The role of secretary is to ensure effective taking of meeting minutes, document organization, production and distribution of documents. It is extremely important to ensure from one council to the next every member has the information well organized and documented in a consistent fashion. And when documents are requested they are easily found.

To be a good secretary they should know the notice requirements stated in the Strata Property Act and be diligent in the recording of minutes. Their skills should include organizational skills, computer skills, writing skills, communication skills, and good English language skills.

**Treasurer:** The role of a treasurer is to review and create budgets with an understanding of past and future considerations, question unexpected expenditures, give budget reports if a shortfall is expected, monitor bank balances, report delinquencies in strata fee collection, and ensure checks are being written and services are being paid for.

To be a good treasurer they should know the requirements for a strata corporation fund accounts (CRF and Operating, investments, and other funds applicable), as set by the Strata Property Act. Their skills should include, necessary computer skills, communication skills, a good accounting knowledge, and understand how to produce and read financial statements.

**Council Member:** The role of a Council Member is typically to produce reports about different areas of the Strata Corporation so all council members are aware of what needs to get fixed, any repairs needed, or issues resolved. So for example one person might be in charge of landscaping reports, or perhaps parking reports. These reports should be reported at each meeting unless there is nothing to report. Never the less these reports are important, and are different depending on the property, but are necessary for the effective management of the strata corporation.

To be a good member at large, they should try to learn as much about the building as possible. Like maintenance, water shut off valves, equipment rooms, etc. They should possess computer skills, communication skills, and have an eye for detail. They should also have, at minimum, a good understanding of the strata bylaws and rules.

**Strata Agent:** If your strata is professionally managed, typically the agent will be contracted to do the paper work, like meeting minutes, financials, financial planning (budgets), they are typically like a president and ensure everyone is on track and they to help when it’s needed. They also make sure council conforms to the act and regulations. They will sometimes ask to be one signing authority for ease of management and paying bills. An agent’s obligations to the strata depend on what they are contracted for, and typically they will cost more the more work they do. Typically, compared to the duties above, an agent would be contracted to act as a; President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer. And council members will all perform the duty of ‘Council Member’ and produce reports for council and agents to review. The council president and/or Vice president should always retain the duty of leading meetings.
What is a Strata Corporation?

A Strata Corporation is a community of owners all working toward a common goal. That goal is generally a well maintained home and property, as if it was one property, with everyone offering respect and understanding to one another. The goal definition may vary depending on the property type. The strata communities’ issues are divided into two categories; Social Management issues and Property Management issues.

- **Property Management Issues**: Consists of Maintenance contracts, emergency repairs, insurance claims, Fire safety, etc. anything to do with the physical aspect of the property. The act has regulations that define exactly what the strata corporation has direct authority over, and what a strata lot owner is responsible for. Other regulations like, mandatory depreciation reports, are developed to help a council understand the scope of repairs to the common assets and plan for the future repairs of the common property.

- **Social Management Issues**: Consists of dispute resolution, interpretation and understandings of bylaws, bylaw hearings, complaints, dividing the work evenly amongst council members, etc. Social management is controlled by having bylaws enacted or established. Which bylaws can be effective, except if done improperly, can cause more problems than what the bylaw is trying to fix. Social issues if not handled properly can be exhausting, time consuming and expensive. If you are unsure of how to handle a situation you should consult a professional, and always consult a professional when drafting bylaws.

The Council is elected to resolve the issues arising out of property management issues and social management issues, and conduct meetings to discuss and execute solutions to problems. If there are lots of problems you may need to have more meetings, if there are fewer problems, you may decide to have less. The management of these issues rests with council and their commitment to Strata Corporation as a whole. The first step in the management of any, and every, issue is to consult you Strata Property Act and familiarize yourself with the governing laws, if any. Once council has a good understanding of the act and their bylaws, they can then have a better discussion as to what the solution is.

Social Point of Interest: Generally when you have fewer meetings, more problems may tend to happen because it takes longer to solve problems and re-educate the offenders of their misconduct. Cont….
More meetings may tend to have fewer problems, as issues are dealt with in an expedient manner, keeping residents more aware of misconduct and rules. So the choice is yours. Work less maybe get more problems, Work more maybe get less problems. Also what’s better? Having 4-3 hour meetings talking about more issues, 6-2 hour meetings talking about current issues, or 12-1 hour meetings addressing issues before they get worse? The work load is typically the same no matter how you do it, and with either 6 or 12 meetings you stay on top of issues better, owners know you care more, and also if they have requests they aren’t waiting so long for the next council meeting.

If you are professionally managed, typically Agents will be contracted to attend 4-6 meetings, and as they get busier, they may reduce the number of meetings they attend. Just because a manager does this doesn’t mean you can’t operate, or have meetings, it just means you as a council need to be diligent in checking the act for what you are planning on doing and make sure your taking minutes. It will be up to you to decide how many meetings you want to have, and what is best for your property your management team, and the owners.

### Length of term

A council member can act on council for as many terms (1 year) as they want, unless other bylaws have been established to limit how long a member can act in a certain role for. Study your bylaws to know if this applies to you. If you have accepted a nomination to act on council but want to quit, next time don’t accept the nomination hastily. It’s like when you’re at work and your training a new employee, and then they just quit. It’s better that employee fulfill their obligation, and then put their notice in. For council members it’s every year they change, so try to stick with it.

### Social Point of Interest

**Social Point of Interest:** a long standing councilor may feel like they are the only ones doing the work and may feel disrespected if no one comes to meetings, annual general meetings, etc. So that’s why it’s important that owners take an active interest in the strata corporation to express gratitude at annual general meetings. And it’s ok for councilors to appreciate other councilors for their work because they are all in it together. If you as a council member feel like you should be paid, then you’re not receiving the gratitude from the other owners for your service. Hopefully you understand the benefit is not necessarily that you should get paid, it’s that you offered your service to the strata corporation, and when you’re old and grey someone else will do that for you in return. The truth is you rarely ever get praise, and out of all the work you do you may never get praise. But don’t ever think other owners don’t appreciate your work, they just forget to tell you sometimes. It’s that saying, that you are “paying it forward”.

In my opinion there should never be payment, because as soon as there is payment, there is a greater implied expectation of professionalism, and if you make a mistake, all the money you earn as a councilor wont amount to the anxiety you experience fending off criticism from all the owners. (*cough *cough Welcome to a Strata Managers world!*) Amongst implied professionalism, the Canada Revenue Agency jumps in and they make sure they are getting taxes deducted, if you are a salaried employee. The list goes on. My motto?; “Keep it simple, stupid!”
Council Member Code of Conduct

As you have become a council member, and part of the management team, there are some social etiquette rules we want to share with you. Naturally as a council member and an owner, you will feel, upset if things don’t go your way. Understand even though decisions made by council may not be to your liking, they more than likely were made to the benefit of all owners, you included. So understand this Council Member Code of Conduct, these are here for your benefit, and to make your time on council a better experience.

Council Conduct #1: You must act honestly and in good faith, with a view of the best interests of the strata corporation.

When you are an elected council member, you are making decisions on behalf of all owners, yourself included. So together you are all working towards the same goal, and when making decisions on behalf of the strata corporation, you must be honest and have everyone’s interests, as a whole, at the forefront of your thoughts.

Council Conduct #2: You must exercise the care, diligence, and skill of a reasonably prudent person in comparable circumstances.

When making decisions on behalf of the strata corporation, you must take the time to examine and determine the best course of action to the benefits of all owners, to the best of your ability. You’re not perfect, but you must do the best you can do, and utilize all resources available to ensure best course of action.

Council Conduct #3: You have a duty to maintain strict confidentiality of council communication and discussions, or anything deemed confidential by council and the strata corporation.

When conducting Strata business, if any discussions of a disciplinary course of action are circulated to members of the strata, it may make for an unfriendly environment, and the member subject to discipline may try to ‘bully’ members in favor of disciplining. So any council discussions, conversations, and information, are for you, and you only.

Council Conduct #4: You have a duty to dedicate enough time and effort into fulfilling the obligations of being a council member while acting as an elected council member of the Strata Corporation.

As a council member you must dedicate enough time to research, investigate, and perform the duties required of you as a council member. If you aren’t dedicating enough time to understand situations brought forth to council, it will make you duty to act in the best interests of everyone hard to accomplish.

Council Conduct #5: You have a duty to seek as much knowledge as possible from resources available to you, with respects to Strata law and governance, management, and maintenance of the strata property, while on council.

In order to make effective decisions on behalf of others, you must possess the knowledge to understand the scope of each issue. So when understanding the issues before council take the time to educate yourself as much as possible. The more you know the better decision you can make.

Council Conduct #6: You shall treat any member, agent, or employee of the Strata Corporation with courtesy, respect, and understanding, while fulfilling the duties and acting on council.

Essentially you are respected as an ‘executive’ of the strata, while on council. So your behavior must reflect that of a leader and executive. Your behavior must be respectful, courteous and of an understanding...
nature, to evaluate each issue and advise on the appropriate course of action. Just think what would your ideal boss be, and you strive to be them.

**Council Conduct #7:** You, while fulfilling the duties and acting on council, shall be unbiased, resolved of all emotions, and be fair towards all members and issues of the strata corporation.

There may be times you develop opinions about individuals, and those individuals may ask council for solutions to issues. It’s important, that no matter what your opinion is, it doesn’t affect or interfere with your fair evaluation and consideration of the issue raised before council. If you are somehow biased due to it being a certain individual, or the issue causes you to be emotionally upset, then you should abstain from discussing and voting on that issue.

**Council Conduct #8:** You shall disclose any conflict of interest, to any degree, promptly to council, and abstain from participating in council discussion and/or voting.

When you are a party, or have an interest, in an issue under council review, you must disclose your involvement, and abstain from any influence on council’s final decision. Disclosing a conflict of interest is a requirement of the act and if not done, may leave you liable if damages are caused. So disclose, disclose, disclose, and no discussing the issue or voting on the issue if you’re involved.

**Council Conduct #9:** You shall not undermine council solidarity once a motion has been passed, and will not impose undue influence or authority on other members, agents, or employees of the Strata Corporation.

While acting on council, once council has made a decision all council members must respect that decision as if it were their own. If you were voted against, you must accept it and move on, and never get mad or upset at council’s decision. Everyone is acting to the benefit of all owners and more then likely have made their decisions based on those terms. If you are acting contrary to council, or acting inconsistent with council’s direction, you shall not try to impose your authority over any individual, agent, or employee under contract by the strata corporation. Your way may not always be the best way, so relax, and work towards executing council’s decision to the best of your ability.

**Conflicts of Interest**

A conflict of interest, is when you are acting on council and, for example, you are offering a service to the same council you are acting on. You cannot be in control of making the decision to accept your offer for service, and have it be to your benefit. Otherwise you simply wouldn’t be considering all options seriously, to the benefit of the other owners. The Strata Property Act states that any council member that has a direct or indirect interest in a contract, a transaction, or a matter council must discuss. The council member must promptly disclose that interest, and if council is discussing the issue, then the conflicted member should be removed from that discussion and vote. So plain and simple, disclose, disclose, disclose, to stay out of trouble.

**Conclusion**

So that’s all we are giving you for now. We taught you:

1. What to expect at your first meeting
2. Generally, what your role is and what role an agent has
3. Generally what the goal and management style, of a strata corporation, is
4. How long you can be a council member for
5. How to act professionally while on council

As you learn to be a better council member, other guides will go more into detail about the specific jobs and also give you a general structure of your time management, standard property inspection forms, and other issues you may encounter in those roles. We hope you feel confident now and have a general understanding of your role in your management team. Now relax, absorb the information, and as you near next council meeting, be prepared!
Council Member Code of Conduct

Council Conduct #1: You must act honestly and in good faith, with a view of the best interests of the strata corporation.

Council Conduct #2: You must exercise the care, diligence, and skill of a reasonably prudent person in comparable circumstances.

Council Conduct #3: You have a duty to maintain strict confidentiality of council communication and discussions, or anything deemed confidential by council and the strata corporation.

Council Conduct #4: You have a duty to dedicate enough time and effort into fulfilling the obligations of being a council member while acting as an elected council member of the Strata Corporation.

Council Conduct #5: You have a duty to seek as much knowledge as possible from resources available to you, with respects to Strata Law, Governance and maintenance of strata property, while on council.

Council Conduct #6: You shall treat any member, agent, or employee of the Strata Corporation with courtesy, respect, and understanding, while fulfilling the duties and acting on council.

Council Conduct #7: You shall be unbiased, resolved of all emotions, and be fair towards all members of the strata corporation, while fulfilling the duties and acting on council.

Council Conduct #8: You shall disclose any conflict of interest, to any degree, promptly to council, and abstain from participating in council discussion and/or voting.

Council Conduct #9: You shall not undermine council solidarity once a motion has been passed, and will not impose undue influence or authority on other members, agents, or employees of the Strata Corporation.

As a recently elected council member, I, _________________, have read and understand the above ‘Council Member Code of Conduct’, and agree, while acting on council, to act to these general council member standards to the best of my ability.