ManageStrata

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE · BRITISH COLUMBIA

Your first term on the strata council.

What the job actually is, which decisions are yours, and what the law expects of you — in plain language, for volunteers.

Strata management, made intelligent.

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What's in here

Ten short chapters. Read them in order the week you're elected, or jump to the one you need the night before a meeting.

BEFORE YOU START

This guide describes British Columbia, where strata corporations run under the *Strata Property Act* and its regulations. The principles travel well to the rest of Canada, but the deadlines and thresholds do not — check your own province's statute before you rely on a number here.

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CHAPTER ONE

What you've joined

A strata corporation is not a company someone owns. It is every owner in the building, together — and now you help run it.

When your building was registered, the law created a corporation, and every owner became a member automatically. The owners together own the common property — roof, hallways, parkade, boiler, land. The corporation maintains it, insures it and pays the bills.

The **council** is the small group of owners the rest of them elect to make decisions on their behalf between annual meetings. That's the seat you now hold. You are not the landlord and not the property manager — you are one of a handful of neighbours the others trusted to look after something expensive they all own.

> THE LINE THAT MATTERS MOST
>
> Between general meetings the **council** generally exercises the corporation's powers and duties. **Owners** approve what the Act, the regulations or your bylaws reserve for a general meeting — and can direct or restrict the council in many circumstances. When you're unsure which side of the line a decision falls on, ask first.

Where a property manager fits

Many corporations hire a management company. A manager collects the fees, pays the invoices, keeps the records and gets contractors to the door, under the management contract and the council's direction. The council stays responsible for exercising the corporation's powers, subject to what it lawfully delegates. If your building self-manages, the council does both.

Who else has a say

Owners	Elect the council, approve the budget, vote on bylaws and levies, and can ask to see most of the corporation's records.
Tenants	Live under the bylaws too. A landlord can assign some rights to a tenant, in writing, and then the tenant may act in their place.
The council	Maintains common property, spends within limits, enforces the bylaws, keeps the records, and reports back to the owners.
The tribunal	Many strata disputes in BC are dealt with by the Civil Resolution Tribunal rather than a court — unpaid fees, bylaw fines, many repair arguments.

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CHAPTER TWO

How you got here

You were elected at an annual general meeting, and you hold the seat until the next one. That is the whole of your term.

Council is elected each year at the AGM. Anyone eligible can stand, nominations are usually taken from the floor, and in most buildings there are fewer candidates than seats. Your term runs to the following AGM, when you may stand again.

Who can stand

The Act sets the basic eligibility rules; your bylaws may add requirements or allow further classes of people to serve, so read both. Owners are eligible, as is the individual representing a corporate owner and a tenant who has been assigned the landlord's right to stand. Under the Standard Bylaws a council has three to seven members; in a very small building, every owner may be on it.

Officers, and what they actually do

Once elected, the council picks its officers from among itself. These are working roles, not honours, and the rest of the council still shares the decisions.

President

Chairs the meetings, keeps the agenda honest, and is usually the council's point of contact for the manager.

Treasurer

Watches the two funds against the budget, and can explain any line on the statement to an owner who asks.

Secretary

Makes sure the minutes get written and sent, and that notices go out on time and to everyone.

Vice-president

Steps in when the president can't. In practice, often the person who picks up a file nobody else has time for.

THE HABIT TO BREAK EARLY

You represent the corporation — not the owners who voted for you, not your own floor, and not your own lot. If a decision helps your unit and costs the building, you are on the wrong side of it.

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CHAPTER THREE

The four jobs

Every agenda item you will ever see belongs to one of these four. It is worth naming which one, out loud, before the discussion starts.

1. Keep the building standing

The corporation must maintain and repair the common property — the roof, the envelope, the plumbing in the walls, the elevator, the parkade. Owners generally maintain the inside of their own lots, except the parts the corporation is responsible for under the Act, the regulations or your bylaws. Most of the money and most of the arguments live on this line, so find out where it runs in your building before you need to.

2. Keep the money straight

You prepare a budget, the owners approve it, and strata fees follow from it. Two funds are kept separate: the operating fund for this year's costs, and the contingency reserve fund for the big items that arrive every twenty or thirty years. Chapter five covers what you may spend without asking.

3. Keep the record

Minutes of every meeting, the bylaws as they currently stand, financial statements, contracts, insurance policies, correspondence about the building. The Act says which records the corporation must keep and for how long, and owners can ask to see most of them. A council that writes things down as it goes is a council that can answer a question two years later.

4. Keep the rules fair

Bylaws bind everyone, including you. When someone breaks one, the corporation can act — but only after telling the person in writing what the complaint is and giving them a chance to reply or ask for a hearing. Enforce consistently or don't enforce at all; inconsistent enforcement causes councils real trouble at the tribunal.

> **A TEST FOR ANY DECISION**
>
> Which of the four is this? Who has the authority — council or owners? What does the bylaw or the Act actually say? What will the minutes record as the reason? If you can answer those four, you can defend the decision a year from now.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The standard you're held to

Section 31 sets the core standard of care for everything you do as a council member. It is two lines long, and worth knowing by heart.

A council member must **act honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the strata corporation**, and must **exercise the care, diligence and skill of a reasonably prudent person in comparable circumstances**.

Read that second half slowly, because it is more generous than new council members expect. You are not required to be an engineer, an accountant or a lawyer. You are required to behave the way a sensible person would when handling something that isn't theirs: ask questions, get advice when the decision is large, compare more than one quote, and write down why you chose what you chose.

> **WHAT "REASONABLY PRUDENT" LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE**
>
> Three quotes on a $40,000 roof, not one. An engineer's opinion before you approve a building-envelope repair. A note in the minutes saying the council chose the second-cheapest bid because the cheapest wouldn't warranty the work. None of that is heroic — it's just visible.

You are allowed to not know

The standard asks for care, not expertise. Getting an engineer's opinion on whether the balconies are failing is the kind of step that shows reasonable care. Guessing, where advice was plainly needed, is the kind that is hard to defend afterwards — and the guess is what an owner will point at later.

The same goes for the boring version: if you don't understand a line on the financial statement, say so in the meeting. Someone else at the table almost certainly doesn't either, and the answer belongs in the minutes.

> **THE SHORTEST VERSION**
>
> Act honestly. Ask when you don't know. Write down what you decided and why. Those three cover most of what section 31 asks of a volunteer.

Conflicts, cover, and the common slips

Conflicts of interest

Section 32 covers the situation everyone eventually meets. If you have a direct or indirect interest in a contract or transaction the council is considering, you must disclose it fully, then leave the discussion and the vote — unless the council asks you to stay and provide information.

The common cases are ordinary, not scandalous: your brother-in-law's company is bidding on the landscaping, or you'd like to rent the guest suite the council is about to price. Not every overlap is a conflict — the question is whether your interest could put you in material conflict with the matter in front of you — but declaring it early costs you nothing, and being found out later costs the corporation the decision.

Are you personally on the hook?

Generally no — not when you act honestly, in good faith, and within the authority the Act and your bylaws give you. Whether insurance also covers you depends on your corporation's actual policy and its exclusions — don't assume it does.

> **ASK THIS AT YOUR FIRST MEETING**
>
> "Does our policy cover council members, and what's the deductible?" Your manager or insurance broker can answer in a sentence. Have the answer minuted so the next council doesn't have to ask again.

Where good councils get into trouble

- **Deciding by text message.** A decision nobody minuted is a decision you cannot prove and cannot explain.
- **Deferring maintenance to hold fees down.** Popular for two years, then it is a special levy and an angry meeting.
- **Enforcing a bylaw against one owner and not another.** The tribunal notices, and so do the neighbours.
- **Acting on something the owners were supposed to approve.** Being right about the repair doesn't give the council the authority.
- **Letting one person carry the whole file.** When they move, the building's memory moves with them.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The money

Two funds, kept properly separate. Almost every financial rule you need follows from understanding which one you're standing in.

	OPERATING FUND	CONTINGENCY RESERVE FUND
Pays for	This year's running costs — insurance, utilities, landscaping, management fees, small repairs.	Big, occasional work — the roof, the elevator, the boiler, a re-pipe.
Filled by	Monthly strata fees, set by the approved budget.	A yearly contribution the owners approve as part of the same budget.
Spending it	Council spends within the approved budget.	Owners normally approve it — a majority vote for certain depreciation-report and EV-related work, a ¾ vote for most of the rest. A qualifying emergency needs no vote.
Year end	A surplus or deficit is dealt with as the Act and your bylaws direct.	Stays in the fund. It is being saved for a reason.

The budget, and where your fee comes from

The council prepares a budget each year and the owners approve it at the AGM. Once approved, the total is divided among the lots by unit entitlement — a number fixed in the strata plan, usually tracking the size of the lot. That is your monthly fee. Nobody sets fees directly; you set a budget, and the fees fall out of it.

How much has to go into the reserve

Every year the corporation must contribute at least **10% of the amount budgeted for the operating fund** to the contingency reserve, and must set that contribution after considering the most recent depreciation report. Ten per cent is a minimum, not a target — the report is what tells the owners the number the building actually needs.

> THE TRADE-OFF, STATED PLAINLY
>
> Money not collected through regular contributions has to be found later — through higher fees, a special levy, or work deferred again. Low fees are not by themselves a sign of a well-run building.

Spending, levies and arrears

What council may spend without asking

Inside the approved budget, the council spends as the budget allows. Outside it, and unless your bylaws set a different figure, the total of unapproved operating-fund spending in a fiscal year must stay **below the lesser of $2,000 and 5% of the year's operating contributions** — for most buildings $2,000 binds, and it is a total for the year, not a limit per invoice.

Emergencies are the exception. If the safety of people or property is at risk, or the building is about to take more damage, act first and report it after. A burst pipe at midnight is not a matter for a special general meeting.

> **BIGGER THAN THAT?**
>
> A special levy — a one-time charge to the owners for a specific purpose — needs a **¾ vote** where each lot's share is worked out by the statutory method, and a **unanimous vote** where it uses another method that establishes a fair division. Say what the money is for, what each lot pays, and when it's due. Anything left over goes back to the owners — unless no owner would receive more than $100, in which case it can go to the reserve.

When an owner falls behind

BC has no statutory late fee. Interest on late strata fees needs a bylaw setting the rate; interest on a late special levy can come from a bylaw *or* from the resolution that approved the levy. Either way the maximum is **10% a year, compounded annually**. Beyond that the corporation can register a lien and, in time, take the claim to the Civil Resolution Tribunal.

Start with a phone call. Some arrears have an ordinary explanation — a changed bank account, a death in the family — and a corporation that goes straight to a lien on a two-month arrear looks worse at the tribunal than the owner does.

Reading the statement without an accounting degree

- **Actual against budget, by line.** One line badly over is a story; every line slightly over is a budget that was too optimistic.
- **The reserve balance, and the direction it's moving.** Compare it to what the depreciation report says you'll need.
- **Receivables.** How much is owed to the corporation, by how many lots, and for how long.

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CHAPTER SIX

Meetings and votes

Councils meet to decide things. Owners meet to decide the things councils can't. Both are governed by notice, quorum and a threshold.

Council meetings

You'll meet monthly or quarterly, in a lobby or on a video call. Decisions are made by a majority of the council, and every meeting gets minutes — including the decisions taken and, where it matters, the reason. Owners may attend as observers, apart from the parts dealing with a bylaw-contravention hearing, a rental-restriction exemption hearing, or anything where an observer would unreasonably intrude on someone's privacy.

General meetings: the AGM and SGMs

The annual general meeting must be held within two months of the fiscal year end. It is where owners receive the financial statements, approve the budget, elect next year's council, and vote on anything requiring their approval. A special general meeting is the same machinery called at any other time, for one specific reason.

THE NOTICE TRAP THAT CATCHES NEW SECRETARIES

Notice must reach owners at least **two weeks** before most general meetings — **four weeks** where a winding-up resolution is on the agenda. Notice sent by email or mail counts as received **four days after you send it**, so an emailed AGM notice has to go out **18 days** ahead. Send it short and the meeting can be challenged, however well it went.

Quorum and proxies

A general meeting needs a quorum before it can do anything — under the Standard Bylaws, eligible voters holding a third of the votes, in person or by proxy, and two thirds in a corporation of fewer than four lots. An owner who can't attend may appoint someone in writing to vote for them.

If quorum isn't there within half an hour, the meeting is generally adjourned to the same day the following week. If it still isn't there half an hour into that second meeting, the eligible voters who did turn up are the quorum — unless your bylaws say otherwise.

So chase proxies in the week beforehand. A failed AGM costs everyone a second evening, and the second attempt rarely draws a better crowd.

The four thresholds

Almost every question an owner asks about a vote is really the question "how many of us have to agree?" There are four answers.

VOTE	NEEDS	USED FOR
Majority	More than half	Ordinary resolutions, such as approving the budget. Council elections follow the procedure in the Act and your bylaws.
¾ vote	75%	Whatever the Act, the regulations or your bylaws require a ¾ vote for — including most bylaw amendments and many special levies.
80% vote	80%	The rarest and largest decisions, including winding the corporation up.
Unanimous	Every vote	A short list in the Act, such as changing what unit entitlement each lot carries.

A majority and a ¾ vote are counted from eligible voters present in person or by proxy who have not abstained. An 80% vote and a unanimous vote are counted differently — from **all** eligible voters, whether they turned up or not. Your bylaws may add requirements.

Running a meeting people don't dread

- **Send the agenda with the notice.** Owners who know what's coming arrive ready to vote rather than ready to argue.
- **Take the resolutions in order and read them out.** People vote on what they heard, not on what was in the package.

What the council cannot decide alone

These go to the owners, whatever the council thinks of them:

- **Changing a bylaw** — a ¾ vote, and it has no effect until the required Form I is filed at the Land Title Office.
- **Raising a special levy** — a ¾ vote, or unanimous where the shares use a method other than the statutory one.
- **A significant change in the use or appearance of common property** — generally a ¾ vote, but a majority where the change relates to EV charging infrastructure or the electricity it uses. Painting the lobby is maintenance; enclosing the balconies is not.
- **Spending the reserve** — a majority vote for certain depreciation-report and EV-related work, a ¾ vote for most of the rest, and no vote at all for a qualifying emergency.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Records and rules

The paperwork is not the boring part of the job. It is the part that proves the rest of the job was done properly.

Minutes

Minutes of a council meeting go to the owners within two weeks. They don't need to capture the debate — they need to record who was there, what was decided, and enough of the reason that someone reading in three years understands it. Write them as the meeting happens, and they can't be argued about afterwards.

Bylaws and rules — not the same thing

Bylaws apply to owners, tenants and occupants, and are changed by a ¾ vote. An amendment has **no effect until the required Form I is filed** at the Land Title Office — so file it, and don't enforce a bylaw that isn't on title yet. **Rules** are narrower: the council can make them for the common property, and they last only until the next AGM unless the owners approve them.

Enforcing a bylaw

Someone complains. Before the corporation fines anyone or charges the cost of remedying a contravention, it must give the owner or tenant written particulars of the complaint and a reasonable chance to respond — including a hearing if they ask for one. Only then does the council decide, and the decision goes to them in writing.

> **CONSISTENCY IS THE WHOLE DEFENCE**
>
> A bylaw enforced against one owner and quietly ignored for another is the trouble waiting to happen at the tribunal. If a bylaw no longer has the building's support, take it to the owners and change it — don't stop enforcing it.

A minute somebody can use

Three things make the difference between a record and a note:

- **Who was there**, and who sent regrets.
- **What was decided**, in the words of the motion rather than a summary of the mood.
- **Why**, whenever the reason isn't obvious — the quote you accepted, the advice you took, the option you turned down.

What owners ask for, and what you owe them

The records an owner can ask to see

The Act lists what the corporation must keep and for how long, and an owner may request most of it: the bylaws and rules, minutes of council and general meetings, the budget and financial statements, insurance policies, contracts the corporation has entered into, and correspondence about the building.

A request is not an accusation. Answer it the same way every time, charge only what the regulation allows for copies, and keep a note of what you sent and when. Councils that treat records requests as a fight generate the disputes they were trying to avoid.

The two certificates people will ask you for

When a lot sells or is refinanced, the buyer's side asks the corporation for these. The fees are capped and the clock is short.

CERTIFICATE	MAXIMUM FEE	WHAT IT TELLS THE BUYER
Form B Information Certificate	$35, plus 25¢ a page for attachments	The monthly fee, what's owed, the reserve balance, agreements, and any levy or lawsuit ahead.
Form F Certificate of Payment	$15	The lot's payment status. It can be issued where qualifying arrangements have been made for what's owed. A current one is required to register a conveyance of title to a strata lot.

Both must be provided within **seven days** of the request. Missing that window can hold up someone's sale — this is the one deadline a council is most often thanked for hitting.

What to hand the next council

A term is a year. The most useful thing you can leave behind is a building that doesn't have to be rediscovered from scratch every October.

- **The bylaws as they currently stand**, with every amendment filed and dated.
- **A list of the contracts** and when each one comes up for renewal.
- **The depreciation report**, and a note on what the council has done about it so far.
- **The open items** — the two or three things still unresolved, named plainly rather than left to be discovered.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Your year at a glance

Most of a council's year is the same year again. Knowing its shape is most of the difference between a calm council and a busy one.

FISCAL YEAR END

Close the books

The treasurer and the manager prepare the financial statement for the year just finished. It goes to the owners with the AGM notice.

WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF YEAR END

Hold the AGM

Notice out at least two weeks ahead — 18 days if you're emailing it. Owners receive the statement, approve next year's budget, and elect the council.

RIGHT AFTER THE AGM

Set fees and appoint officers

The approved budget sets the fees for the coming year. The new council meets and chooses its president, treasurer and secretary.

EVERY QUARTER, OR EVERY MEETING

Check the money against the budget

Actual spending against each budget line, the reserve balance, and what is owed to the corporation. Finding a line running over in month four is a conversation; finding it at year end is a deficit.

ON THEIR OWN SCHEDULES

Safety systems and insurance

Fire and life-safety systems, elevating devices and other regulated equipment are each inspected, tested and maintained at the interval set for that system — not in one annual sweep. Review the insurance every year: the coverage, the deductible, and whether the replacement value still reflects the building.

EVERY MEETING, ALL YEAR

Minutes out, bylaws filed

Council minutes to the owners within two weeks. Any bylaw amendment filed at the Land Title Office — it has no effect until it is.

The two reports the Act asks for

Neither of these arrives on the annual calendar, and both take months to commission. They are the two dates a new council should find out about first.

The depreciation report

A BC strata corporation with **5 or more lots** must obtain a depreciation report — a thirty-year forecast of what the common property will need and what it will cost — and refresh it every **5 years**. Since July 1, 2025 it must come from one of the designated professional groups, a list widened that October.

> **CURRENT DEPRECIATION-REPORT DEADLINES**
>
> For an existing corporation with no report obtained since December 31, 2020 — July 1, 2026 for Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and the Capital Regional District; July 1, 2027 for the rest of BC. The one still ahead: **July 1, 2027**. Newer corporations, and some island areas, run to their own deadlines.

The electrical planning report

The newer of the two, and the one that catches councils out. A corporation with **5 or more lots** must obtain an electrical planning report — an assessment of what the building's electrical capacity can carry, and what adding EV charging would take. A corporation with fewer than 5 lots is generally exempt from the report, but still has to deal with owner requests for EV-charging alterations under the Act.

> **ELECTRICAL PLANNING REPORT DEADLINES**
>
> **December 31, 2026** for Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and the Capital Regional District; December 31, 2028 for the rest of BC. Getting one costs money the budget may not have allowed for, which is the reason to look now rather than in the autumn it's due.

> **WORTH ASKING AT YOUR FIRST MEETING**
>
> "Do we have both reports, and when is each due?" If the answer is no, or nobody knows, that is the first thing for the council's list — not because the deadline is close, but because the money for the work it recommends usually isn't there yet.

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CHAPTER NINE

Your first 90 days

You don't need to know everything by the second meeting. Work through this and you'll be ahead of most councils.

Week one — read four things

- [ ] **The bylaws, as they currently stand.** Including every amendment filed since. Ask for the consolidated version, not the Standard Bylaws.
- [ ] **Last year's AGM minutes.** They tell you what the owners approved and what they were angry about.
- [ ] **Twelve months of council minutes.** The building's open problems are all in here.
- [ ] **The current budget and the reserve balance.** Two numbers you should be able to say out loud.

Month one — find four documents

- [ ] **The insurance policy.** What's covered, what the deductible is, and whether council members are included.
- [ ] **The depreciation report.** Read the summary table and the funding scenarios. If there isn't one, ask when there will be.
- [ ] **The management contract.** Know what you're paying for and what remains the council's job.
- [ ] **The strata plan.** Usually the first place to look when deciding whether something is a strata lot or common property.

By month three — do four things

- [ ] **Walk the property** with the caretaker, the manager, or the longest-serving council member.
- [ ] **Learn your three biggest expenses,** and when each contract comes up for renewal.
- [ ] **Write down the next statutory date** the corporation has to meet, and who is responsible for it.
- [ ] **Agree how decisions get recorded** — so that a decision made over email still reaches the minutes.

> ONE QUESTION WORTH ASKING OUT LOUD
>
> "What did the last council leave unfinished?" Every building has two or three of these. Naming them at your first meeting is more useful than any report.

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CHAPTER TEN

Words you'll hear

The vocabulary is the first barrier and the easiest one to clear.

Common property	The shared property the owners own together and the corporation maintains — roof, hallways, envelope, the pipes inside the walls, the land.
Limited common property	Common property designated for the exclusive use of the owners of one or more lots — a balcony, a parking stall.
Unit entitlement	The number in the strata plan that divides the budget into fees, usually tracking lot size.
Strata plan	The registered drawing of the building. It settles what is a lot and what is common property.
Bylaws	The corporation's own law. Applies to owners, tenants and occupants, and can make them answerable for visitors. No effect until filed.
Rules	Narrower than bylaws, made by the council for the common property, and expiring at the next AGM unless owners approve them.
Operating fund	Pays this year's costs, from monthly strata fees.
Contingency reserve fund	Savings for the big, occasional work. Often shortened to CRF.
Special levy	A one-time charge to the owners for a specific purpose. A ¾ vote, or unanimous where the shares use a non-statutory method.
Depreciation report	A thirty-year forecast of what the building will need, and what it will cost.
Form B	The Information Certificate a buyer's side requests before a sale.
Form F	The Certificate of Payment, confirming a lot's payment status with the corporation.
SGM	A special general meeting — the owners, called together outside the AGM for one specific reason.
Proxy	Written authority for someone to attend and vote in an owner's place.
Section	A formally established group of lots for a distinct category of owners — residential and commercial, say — managing certain expenses separately.
CRT	The Civil Resolution Tribunal, where many BC strata disputes are resolved instead of in court.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Nobody expects you to know all of this

You were elected because you were willing, not because you were an expert. These are the places to look when a question is bigger than the room.

The Act itself	The *Strata Property Act* and its regulations are published free at BC Laws. Searchable, and more readable than you'd expect.
Your strata manager	First call for anything procedural — notice periods, forms, what the contract says, how something was handled last time.
Owner associations	CHOA and VISOA both run education, publish plain-language guidance, and answer member questions.
A strata lawyer	Worth it before a large levy, a contested bylaw, or a dispute heading for the tribunal. Cheaper than the alternative.
The Civil Resolution Tribunal	Publishes its decisions. Reading two or three about buildings like yours is an education in what councils get wrong.

This guide explains the basics in plain language for new council members in British Columbia. It is general information, not legal advice, and it is not a substitute for the *Strata Property Act*, its regulations, or your corporation's own bylaws — which may differ from the Standard Bylaws described here. Statutory dates and thresholds change; confirm anything you intend to rely on. Prepared September 4, 2026 by ManageStrata, a product of Embed AI Solutions, Ltd.