

Winter Is Coming: Have You Thought About Next Year's Projects?

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The leaves have changed colour and will soon be falling into those seemingly endless blankets on your front lawns. That means one thing: autumn is upon us and, as House Stark has been proclaiming for the last seven seasons, winter is coming! As tempting as it would be to snuggle up by the fire and concentrate on keeping warm during the cold months, now is the perfect time to start planning what projects your condominium corporation might need to address in the upcoming year.



Why start planning now? Time and Money!

The main reason to start planning your spring/summer capital projects in the fall is potential cost savings. Contractors are typically inclined to pursue and price projects more aggressively earlier in the year to ensure that they have a full project schedule to keep their crews busy. The potential for savings is increased by holding a formal job showing and pursuing a competitive tender.

When work is scheduled to take place early in the season, it is very likely that the project will not carry over into fall or even winter months. This is helpful when concealed conditions that can cause time delays are brought to light, such as wood rot in balcony joists discovered during a wood balcony waterproofing membrane replacement project.

An ideal timeline for projects that aim to begin as soon as weather permits, usually around March/April, is as follows:

- October to December: Work with your engineer to develop the project scope of work and overall design
- January to early February: Hold the job showing, receive bids, and select the contractor to complete the work
- February to early March: Contractor has time to order materials and prepare project schedule, subject for Board review
- Late March to early April: Work commences

Remember, large projects take time to plan and implement. Going into a project with the “Do this as fast as possible” mindset can end up costing you more money!





Where do we start?

The first step to any condominium capital improvement project is to review your last reserve fund study (RFS) or capital plan. Ask yourself:

- What is recommended to be repaired/replaced in the near future?
 - Reflect on what work has been completed during the current fiscal year and identify outstanding work.
- When is the last time the condition of this item was reviewed?
 - Review the items in question and familiarize yourself with their current condition. It might be valuable to conduct a condition assessment of the replacement item in question.
- Are multiple large-scale projects scheduled for the same year?
 - Some projects can be completed in conjunction with one-another, others will require separate contractors. Keep in mind that if separate projects are in close proximity to one another, proper sequencing of work may be required to prevent safety hazards, unnecessary delays, and/or damage to recently completed finishes.
- What needs to be prioritized and what can be postponed?
 - A condition assessment or technical audit may determine that certain work can be deferred and provide with a future timeframe for the projected replacement.
- Do we have the funds to complete everything that needs to be done?
 - If certain work needs to be completed earlier than anticipated, contact your RFS planner and request them to run the spreadsheet again to check whether annual contributions will need an adjustment prior to the next RFS cycle.

Keep in mind that the RFS sets repair schedules based on a snapshot of what was seen during the site inspection, which could have been years ago. Reviewing the condition of your building's components will allow you to make better informed decisions on what needs to be done now, and what can potentially wait.

Does it really need to be done now?

Before altering the scheduling of work from the recommendations made in your last RFS, it is important to review the condition of the item(s) in question. A good example of the importance of reviewing condition is a flat roof on a high-rise building with gravel ballast covering the actual membrane. Has the gravel ever been moved to inspect the condition of the roofing membrane? Has a cut test ever been completed to review the adherence of the membrane to the structural deck? Even if the RFS recommends the roof be replaced next year, can it be postponed if the cut test proves the roofing membrane is in serviceable condition?

Especially at larger or older corporations, it is likely that multiple projects are scheduled for the same calendar year. In order to minimize disruption to the owners, recommended work should be evaluated with the more critical work, such as a roof replacement, being prioritized over less critical work, such as corridor carpet replacement.

In summary, scheduling major repair/replacement projects can have a significant impact on the overall budget and length of the project. Corporations should take the necessary steps in planning these projects now to ensure that the best decisions are being made for both the building and your wallet.