

Before tomorrow

Each year, around January 1, many people undertake an inventory that, for some of them, really only happens at this time of year: an inventory of personal qualities and accomplishments, habits and circumstances, all with the intention of deciding what they can do, or become, that is better in the coming year.

The whole exercise can involve a little bit of self-trickery, or personally directed passive-aggressive behaviour, but the intention isn't necessarily a bad one – seeking to manipulate and motivate oneself toward some measure of improvement. But, as we all know, we often fail. Some weeks or months into each New Year, a common theme of conversation is shame-faced and lightly laughable acknowledgement that many, if not all, of those “resolutions” for change have been forgotten.

In this sense, “New Year’s Resolution” making is a little like going on a fad diet, a bit of wishful thinking that is joined into with a rush of energy as fleeting and fragile as the trendiness that attends the fad we are following. But it needn't be like this.

Using the occasion of New Year’s Day as a marker and motivation to set new goals is a perfectly fine practice; we are cyclical and seasonal creatures, and target dates for particular activities actually can help us to progress. But when it comes to developing new habits, ending old ones, and converting ourselves to better ideas, patterns and practices to improve our lives, the best approach is not a once-a-year all-in feeling, but a more regular – daily, weekly or monthly – routine of conscious self-assessment and readjustment till the changes we have only imagined are made real and more permanent parts of our experience and identity.

Bringing the conversation back to the topic usually reserved for these memos, the same is true for condominiums.

We have heard of boards of directors who meet no more than annually. We know of some cases where the responsibilities for the property and condition of the corporation are all but entirely abdicated to the hired condominium manager or other professional services. We are also aware of several condominiums where owners barely attend to meetings, other than maybe the AGM; where by-laws are presented over and over again simply because an insufficient number of people show up to vote; and, in fact, in one case, where the condominium has failed to hold its “turnover meeting” for about three years now, simply because not enough of the owners are motivated enough to care.

Condominiums need more concern and attention than this. If a condominium is to be a successful community, its board and owners must be more actively involved. They cannot depend solely on the “hired help” to run the show. The board must meet more often than annually. The owners should be more interested and involved.

If your condominium has any of the patterns of neglect that we describe above, you probably also have other problems. You should be concerned about whether maintenance and repairs are properly kept up. Rules are likely not all being followed. Many might be out of date, in terms of the interests and desires of your owners, and need revision. Potentially your budgeting or, worse, your reserve fund, is not properly maintained, and you might be looking at future costly borrowing or special assessments. Your governing documents likely haven't kept pace with legislative changes.

If you've never done it before, then, please, go ahead and use this New Year's as an opportunity to make that special, overdue inventory of your condominium's overall health and performance. Then, make commitments – even plans – for how you can improve things during the coming year. And, we recommend that you include in those plans a regularly scheduled – maybe even monthly – review, just to see how you are doing. (Board meetings are, ideally, exactly the time to do that.)

Make 2021 the year your condo becomes its best – or at least, its better – self. You might not accomplish every goal, but, if you do this not like following a popular trend but as a dedicated and diligent good faith engagement, at least something or another will invariably improve.

Best wishes to all for a better New Year!