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YSP Podcast Transcript: 126. How one building saved \$60,000 on its water bill

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Amanda Farmer: Hi everyone, Amanda here. I've got 2 quick reminders for we jump in to today's episode. Firstly, the Peaceful Communities webinar at midday on the 30th of August. I'll be teaching you how you can use by-laws to restore peace to your strata community. Sounds good isn't it?

I have been absolutely bowled over by the response to this webinar. So, so many of you are registered to attend. I'm talking in hundreds. Tapping into the power of by-laws really is the hot topic that I predicted it will be. On this webinar, I'll be talking about the notice to comply and tribunal penalty order process. I'll be talking interesting cases, examples of buildings using by-laws in really creative ways to ensure peaceful community living.

If you're not registered to attend and you want to be. Why wouldn't you want to be head over to yspwebinar.com. Thursday, the 30th of August, midday. It will run for 1 hour. We will be done by 1 PM. Grab an early lunch, spend it with me. I'd like to spend it with you.

Secondly, the membership doors are closing. I announced this in some detail at the beginning of last week's episode. So, if you want nitty gritty on membership close. Head back there Episode 125. All I'm saying today is that by the end of Sunday, the 2nd of September it will no longer be possible to simply join the YSP membership and gain all the member-only benefits.

The doors will be closed and I do not know if or when I will open them again. Many of you have very cleverly heeded this call and signed up for membership while you still can. If you are still vacillating on this you haven't got much time left. Sunday, the 2nd of September is D day on the membership. You don't want to be on the other side of those doors when they close and you have a strata problem that you want me to personally solve for you.

That's what I'm doing for members right now and that's what I want to continue to focus on hence the closing of the doors. Find out more about how you can join us on the inside over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/membership.

Today's episode Kimberly Crawford of the City of Sydney council. I have bumped up Kimberly's episode some of you may have been expecting to hear Reena and I this week. I've bumped it up because Kimberly has some important news and some pressing deadlines relating to the Smart Green Apartments program. So listen carefully if you want to get involved in that one and Reena and I will be back next week for our usual wins and challenges. Catch you then.

Intro: Welcome to Your Strata Property. The podcast for property owners looking for reliable, accurate, and bite-sized information from an experienced and authoritative source. To access previous episodes and useful strata tips, go to www.yourstrataproperty.com.au.

Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome. I'm Amanda Farmer, and this is Your Strata Property. Kimberly Crawford is the program manager of the City of Sydney's Smart Green Apartments Program. She works collaboratively with owner's corporations, strata managers, and building managers to improve the environmental and economic efficiency of strata buildings. Kimberly has a strong interest in the design, delivery, and evaluation of sustainability behaviour change programs, which she's previously utilised across the not for profit and corporate sectors. She has a commitment to lifelong learning, holding a masters of environment, and has recently commenced a Ph.D in sustainable future studies. Today, I'm delighted to welcome the very qualified Kimberly Crawford. Welcome, Kimberly.

Kimberly Crawford: Thanks, Amanda. It's great to be here.

Amanda Farmer: Lovely to have you on the show. Having just started a Ph.D, I'm amazed that you are working, studying, and making time to chat with us on the podcast. That's amazing.

Kimberly Crawford: Thank you. It's busy, but it's all really, really good things to be working on, so definitely feel inspired to be



working in sustainability, so that's the main thing.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. It's definitely a good time and a hot topic. We talk about it a fair bit on the podcast. I have always had a knowledge of this Smart Green Apartments concept, and that there was a program out there, but I've never really dug very deeply into exactly what it is. I know there's some fabulous buildings out there doing great things with city of Sydney. So I thought I'd get you on and have a chat with us about the program. So let's kick off. Tell us a bit about it. How did the initiative come about? How does it work?

Kimberly Crawford: The Smart Green Apartments program really came about because the city of Sydney recognised that so many of our residents are actually living in strata communities. In fact, in our local government area, it's around 80% of our residents live in apartment buildings. So it became really apparent that we actually need to do something to help these communities save cost but also reduce their environmental footprint.

Along with that, experience all the benefits, like improve livability and increased resale value of their properties. To that end, Smart Green Apartments was piloted about 5 years ago now by the City of Sydney and we worked with a number of buildings there to test out the different elements of the program before it was launched in its current form in 2016. So what we actually do is work with 20 strata communities, or buildings, each year. The council's committed to doing that for a 10 year period. It's actually around 8,000 residents that we're working with annually, which is quite cool. Bit of a challenge, but it's truly great. Essentially what we're looking to do is improve the environmental efficiency of these buildings, but in doing so really reduce cost for our owners and to help them work collaboratively together on a really positive and proactive initiative.

Kimberly Crawford: The program actually, it's quite comprehensive. There's several different elements involved. But essentially, we send in lots of trusted experts to the building to work with the owner's corporations, the strata manager, and the building manager. We deliver energy audits and recommendations. We help get them approved and implemented as well, which is often a big challenge. We help these communities monitor the energy and water they're using, improve waste management, increase recycling, and also up-skill and train all the different people who are in those strata communities to make really good decisions for the future. So offer a lot of upskilling and capacity building programs as well.

Amanda Farmer: Wow. That sounds like huge value that's being provided, and I had there are so many areas that we can dig in to. I want to just track back to clarify. You mentioned 20 buildings in the intake for your program. Is that something ... You open the program every year and take 20 buildings who you then commit to work with for 10 years? Is that how it works?

Kimberly Crawford: Yes. So we open the program each year and we take 20 buildings, which can often be many more strata plans of course because we are often working with the really complex sites with multiple strata plans and that sort of thing. Then we work with them intensively for a year, but then after that time, they become part of our leadership network, or alumnae if you like. We continue to have that relationship and support with them into the future. So support doesn't really end, we just continue to work with them on an ongoing basis. But yes, it's an annual intake, and we're lucky enough to be launching a new round in October.

But the important date to remember is the 14th of September when applications close. It's a fairly straightforward process, I mean, there is an application form that's all online at smartgreenapartments.com.au. You'll also find information to share with other building stakeholders there too, so a flier that can be shared amongst owners and strata managers of course. Basically, in that application, we're asking about the features of the building. We're asking for some information about the structure in terms of how many strata plans you have and whether there's a building management committee, things like that. Then what we can do is make a really sound evaluation of all those applications to decide which buildings that we're going to work with on that intensive basis.

It's not all bad news if buildings don't get into the program. We have a really comprehensive grants scheme at the city of Sydney as well, so even for the buildings who are unsuccessful, we can assist them to apply for funding in other ways. We're really just about working with as many strata communities as we can.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. You guys are doing a great job. And city of Sydney in particular, I take my hat off to for its interest and

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engagement with the strata communities. You also have your Strata Skills 101 program, which we can touch on later as well. You just mentioned there, funding and grants. That's on my list of questions to ask you. What is it in that intensive first year that city of Sydney is providing for buildings? Are they providing funding? Are they contracting with service providers? How does it work in practice?

Kimberly Crawford: Yes, that's a really good question. Basically, we invest quite a significant amount of money into each of the buildings. What that money goes towards funding, is an expert energy auditor who actually works really intensively with each community to identify, *"Okay, where are there really strong opportunities for improvement?"* Those might be upgrades, but they also might be really easy operational improvements that can be made at low to no cost. The really great thing about the program is that that expert along with city staff will engage with the strata committees, the owners corporation as a whole, and really work to assist with implementation, so will provide support in obtaining quotes, analysing the financial business cases, and all of those things which often can prevent projects actually getting off the ground.

The funding also sets each building up on an online data platform. What that does, it allows buildings to see, *"Okay, this is actually what we're using from an energy and water perspective."* And really interestingly, respond more quickly when there's a problem. So often if there a massive leak, for example, we don't know about that unless it's obvious.

Amanda Farmer: 'Till the water starts flowing through to everybody's apartments.

Kimberly Crawford: 'Till the water starts flowing through or until you get your bill, which can be a month or so later. In that time, you might have wasted lots of money and water of course. So these sort of systems help you spot something straight away and address them. We also fund a NABERS rating. So some people might be aware that that stands for the National Australian Built Environment Rating System, which is a mouthful, but essentially is a star rating that lets a community know, *"This is where we sit in terms of how much energy and water we use."* And also, *"This is sort of how we compare to others."* So it's a really good way to plan for the future.

We also work with buildings on improving recycling, setting up different waste management opportunities such as textile bins and things like that. And finally, provide training events and capacity building workshops and the like to building managers, owners, strata managers. So it's quite a comprehensive program actually with a lot that we offer to each of those buildings.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, definitely. Do you find the application process is very hotly contested? You have a lot of buildings vying to get in?

We do have a lot of buildings vying to get in, which is great. It's really good to see that appetite and interest. I think people are recognising that environmental efficiency means better operating buildings and lower cost buildings as well. So we do, and we're really looking for a range of different apartment buildings, so your single tower one strata plan, right up to your mixed use building, even buildings who are part of community associations as well. So we're committed to working with the whole range of different set ups.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. Now you have been running the program for a couple of years. No doubt you've got some success stories, some case studies. Can you share a little bit about a Smart Green Apartment? What do they look like when they come out the other side of this process?

Kimberly Crawford: A Smart Green Apartment is obviously environmentally efficient and using resources really efficiently. It's also one, I guess, that's investigated other ways to get energy. So we've got a lot of buildings who are looking at solar and other ways that they can be a little bit more energy independent I guess. The really great success stories, I guess this is where the smart comes into it, they've actually, through this process, improved their governance and operating these multimillion dollar assets really well both environmentally, but also economically. From that, we're seeing buildings that have improved liveability outcomes as well.

In terms of specific examples, I've got heaps, which is so exciting. One, I guess that I might touch on is the Summit. It's a building in the CVB here in Sydney. I just like this story because it's an example of a building manager and a community of owners who are really collaboratively working together. They've actually implemented really simple energy savings projects, most of which are just

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putting variable speed drives on their existing equipment. Through that, they've actually cut nearly \$30,000 a year on their energy spending with really quick payback periods. It's fantastic.

They've also participated in a water fix program that we run in collaboration with Sydney Water. That's saving them over \$60,000 a year in water cost, which is obviously directly attributed to each owner. And they've addressed their waste management, so they're engaging new tenants in recycling and waste management tours. They're also diverting clothing from landfills, so they've got a new charity clothing bin. The thousands and thousands of kilograms that they've avoided going into landfill, which is so great. You can really see a sense of connectedness amongst the whole community there, that they've achieved all these outcomes together, which is really fantastic.

Amanda Farmer: Imagine the impact of that when it's spread across hundreds if not thousands of strata buildings. Do you know if there are other counsels in New South Wales who have similar programs or are looking to model this program?

Kimberly Crawford: We are seeing, in the last 6 to 12 months, a lot more of an interest. I think that's because finally local governments and governments, in general, are starting to realise strata communities are obviously so many of our residents. Also in some ways, almost like the fourth level of government. It's really important that we invest in them. Having really good results and data come out of our city programs, I think has given other counsels confidence that they can actually get great environmental outcomes along with providing services to their communities. So Waverley Counsel in the eastern suburbs, they've recently launched a really great program working with 10 of their buildings. We've got interest increasingly from other counsels in Sydney as well. I think with this new rating system that I mentioned, the NABERS rating tool that's recently launched, I think we're on the cusp of nationally a lot more government investment and interest and acknowledgement of this sector, which is obviously really exciting.

Yes. Excellent and great to hear. You mentioned that Kimberly, sometimes there is difficulty when you guys go into a building to do that intensive 12 months, difficulty getting things approved maybe. Maybe getting everybody on board. How do you overcome that? What is that objection? Are there any others that we can address and work on solving?

Kimberly Crawford: I think often people potentially not clear on what some of the other co-benefits of improving the environmental performance of a building are. So we've found being really clear on what those economic benefits are is key. But also actually providing an example of alternative outcomes. So often people think, *"Oh, we can either choose to do this improvement project or do nothing."* It's about showing these corporations, *"Well, if you choose to do nothing, you're actually choosing these outcomes. Your choosing higher energy prices. You're not operating as efficiently."* So being really, really clear and articulating what those benefits are.

But also, on a really practical level, having a platform where people can ask questions, clarify issues, and write down what they might see as risks have been really important. We're trying to assist wherever we can in getting that implementation happening more seamlessly. We provide sample motions. We attend strata committee meetings or annual general meetings. It's about establishing that dialogue between us and the owners corporations to break down some of those misconceptions. That's been really useful. I think also in some of our larger buildings, getting building managers on board as a bit of a champion for some of these issues is also really important and providing them with the knowledge and the training that they need to assist owners corporations and be really, really helpful to them in improving the efficiency of their buildings. That's why we're running an 8 part building manager training series at the moment, which has been very well received.

Amanda Farmer: Is that something that is only in connection with Smart Green Apartments or that's a standalone program for building managers?

Kimberly Crawford: That's a standalone program. We're seeing building managers from both within the city, but also from other council areas coming along to that program. Our hope is that they'll take that knowledge back to their communities and start to improve the operations and efficiency there.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Excellent. I think that is so clever that you've really honed into building managers and recognised how important they are on the ground there. Of course, we have our strata managers, but they're not the people who are at the building

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potentially every day as building managers are, connecting with the residents, providing that one to one service, and able to have a real influence on the direction of the building particularly when it comes to these sustainability measures.

Kimberly Crawford: That's it. I think, on strata managers, we've really seen this growth and this inclination to really embrace environmental and economic efficiency amongst strata managers as well. Over the last couple of years, some of our strata managers in the program have just really worked collaboratively with us to help explain some of the recommendations to owners corporations and to be really a part of that process. I also think that as we're recruiting for new buildings currently, we're often relying on strata managers to disseminate the information and promote this program. So we really acknowledge the active role that they take in engaging with owners to do this work.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. Now you've mentioned that Kimberly, the 2018 program is open. Where do our listeners need to go to get involved with the Smart Green Apartments program?

Kimberly Crawford: Sure. It's a really easy website. It's smartgreenapartments.com.au. When you go there, you'll see a link to an online application portal. There's also a downloadable flier so you can share information about the program with others in your building. There's also email addresses and phone numbers of myself and colleagues here at the city. You can call us if there's anything that's unclear or you'd like more information. That page is a really good resource. It links to other case studies and examples of what others have achieved in the program, which I think will help people to understand the benefits of participating. So I'd really encourage owners, strata managers to apply because the city will invest all the money that otherwise would be spent by the owners themselves on actually identifying where those opportunities for improvement are.

One other thing that I think is in the feedback we've been getting from the buildings who have participated, they really value the fact that this is a city-backed program and the experts and the consultants we're sending in, we've vetted them and we know that they know strata. That's really critical. So you can be really confident in the service that you receive.

Amanda Farmer: Sounds like a fabulous opportunity to basically get a done for your service. I would love for my own building to get involved in a program like that in the near future. Once again, fabulous that it exists and that it just seems to be growing and getting even better. Wonderful to hear all of that. Kimberly, you're on the podcast, you're a guest, you get the book question. What books have had the greatest impact on you, and why?

Kimberly Crawford: Yes. I loved this question. It's a hard one, isn't it, to narrow it down? I'm a massive reader. I have always been really passionate about the environment, which is cool that I've ended up working in that field. One of my biggest heroes is Dr. Jane Goodall. There's a book called *In the Shadow of Man*. It's about her experience working with chimpanzees in Africa. I read it when I was quite young. It really resonated with me in terms of that desire to act in a way that protects the environment and also to be a part of that conservation of the earth really. So it's one that stuck with me and as a big of a cementing that desire to work in that field and to try and make a bit of a difference.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. She is a wonderful woman. Were you able to catch her when she was in Sydney? I think it might've been last year now, or earlier this year, she spoke for Business Chicks at one of their lunches, a very large women's networking organization for women in business. I was at that lunch, or maybe it was a breakfast. She was so inspiring.

Kimberly Crawford: Actually, I wasn't at that one, but I did see her, I think it was the Hordern Pavilion. That same year, or a couple months earlier, I'd also seen David Attenborough speak. It was a good few months.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Excellent. Well, thank you so much for your time, Kimberly, with so much on your plate. All the best at continuing your PhD studies. I'll look forward to catching up with you about that next time we see each other at one of our events. Please let us know if there's anything you want to add before we wrap up. I will make sure that the link to the application form, that website, is in our show notes so our listeners can go and check it out via the Your Strata Property website. Anything you want to add?

Kimberly Crawford: No. I just wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to speak about our program and also just encourage

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buildings to apply either for Smart Green Apartments or to check out any of the other offerings that the city has for strata communities as well. The Smart Green Apartments is for buildings within our local government area, but **there's** increasingly more resources for buildings anywhere. So I'd encourage buildings outside of the city of Sydney to go to their own council websites and look at what might be on offer. Also, the Green Strata website, greenstrata.com.au is an invaluable resource for not only becoming more sustainable but becoming more efficient and saving money. So I'd recommend checking out Green Strata as well, and the NABERS website if you're interested in getting a star rating, a simple star rating for your building.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. I will make sure all of those fabulous resources are in our show notes for our listeners. I'll look forward to catching up with you again soon, Kimberly.

Kimberly Crawford: Thanks, Amanda.

Amanda Farmer: Thanks so much.

Outro: Thank you for listening to Your Strata Property, the podcast which consistently delivers to property owners reliable and accurate information about their strata property. You can access all the information below this episode via the show notes at www.yourstrataproperty.com.au. You can also ask questions in the comment section, which Amanda will answer in her upcoming episodes. How can Amanda help you today?

