

Publication Date: 06 March 2019
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 152. Practical waste management tips - plus a special opportunity

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Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome. I'm Amanda Farmer and this is Your Strata Property. Beth Kasumovic is the sustainable waste coordinator at Waverley Council. She oversees various programs in the areas of sustainable waste education, policy, planning, and compliance to achieve council's desire to become a zero waste community. That is an admirable goal. Beth works closely with council's planning and policy teams to address the challenges associated with waste management in Waverley, the second most dense community in New South Wales. Beth believes that all apartments can have a sustainable waste management plan, and she's up for any challenge to achieve this outcome. Welcome, Beth.

Beth Kasumovic: Thank you.

Amanda Farmer: Pleasure to have you with us here on the show. And yes, we are talking waste. We are talking rubbish, garbage, recycling in our strata communities. A very, very important issue. And I want to say right up the top of this episode that Beth and I have something special to tell you about. We're going to tell you about it at the end of the episode. It's an opportunity for all of our listeners. So keep on listening and you'll hear what we have to say at the end. So that's all I'll say about that right now. But I'm going to start by asking you, Beth, tell us why waste management is such a critical issue for people living in strata.

Beth Kasumovic: Well, waste management is a critical issue for apartment blocks as plenty can go wrong when waste is not managed properly, as I'm sure many of you know. It can lead to poor building amenity, potentially lowering the property value, and it can lead to extra costs for waste removal and disposal, cleaning, and even potential fines under the state government legislation, ranging from \$100 to \$22,000 for corporations.

Amanda Farmer: It's certainly something that I discuss when I'm working with buildings, with committees and managers. Of course, it's something we all deal with every day, rubbish and waste, but when I'm sitting down with buildings and trying to work out, often it's a set of by-laws that is going to work for their buildings. We come across the usual garbage or rubbish by-law and the conversation inevitably turns to, how do we do this better? Because we do have a problem with waste management in our building, whether it's tenants who come and go on a short-term basis and just seem to leave things lying around, or not complying with the policies that we might have in place for recycling and for regular collections and cleanups. What do you say, Beth, our apartment buildings should be doing when it comes to waste management? What's a good policy for our buildings to have?

Beth Kasumovic: I don't know about a policy as such, but my recommendation is to have a waste management plan for your building, and this plan would outlying where your waste is stored. So where you would place your bins and any bulky goods that you're storing before collection, even the transportation route to the collection point, and any rules about presentation. So for example, you could have a rule that says all the bins are presented the night before collection and brought in immediately afterwards. So that prevents the bins sitting out for extended periods. And rules about the bulky waste collection. Designate an area where people know that's where they put their items for a council collection.

I think it's really important that roles and responsibilities are included in your waste management plan. So then this is for anyone who is involved in the building. So it's your residents, tenants, cleaners, and property managers. And so, this ensures that everyone knows what their role is and their responsibility. It just allows a little more accountability for ensuring that your waste management plan's implemented.

Amanda Farmer: And in terms of distributing this waste management plan, is that something that you think should be accessible to residents, or something that the committee looks after, it's available through the strata manager? In your experience, working with apartment buildings, what's the best way to make sure people know about this plan and what the rules are?



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Beth Kasumovic: Yes, that's a really interesting one. So from a planning perspective in the conditions of consent for new developments, we would require that there's a waste management plan for the building post-construction.

Amanda Farmer: So for our newer buildings-

Beth Kasumovic: Yes.. Council actually stipulates that as a condition, but I'm actually not sure from the point of councils provided your conditions, what happens at that point from building management perspective. I assume that any property owner would get that information and have to abide by the conditions and it would be up to them to implement that.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, it's a really good question to think about, I suppose, and perhaps to educate our buildings and our committee members and our strata managers. Question one, do you have a waste management plan? And if, as you say, Beth, if you're a brand new building it's quite likely that you do because it may have been one of council's conditions of consent for post-construction. If you don't because you're an older building or you've just never had one, then think about putting one together, and really put some thought into how that's then published, how it comes to the knowledge of your tenants and your residents.

And I would think from a lawyer's perspective, it's something that should be mentioned in your by-laws. That would be the place that I would think waste management plans should be referred to. Where you're dealing in your by-laws with waste and you have one of these plans, make mention of it and make clear that anybody who wants a copy is able to get a copy through the strata manager or through the committee. And I suppose these plans don't have to be complex. They might be if the developer has put it together, but if it's something that you're putting together yourself, perhaps something quite simple, not so many words. This is, as you say, Beth, where the bins go. This is what goes in the bins. This is the particular area, or if there's a bulky goods collection. And this is how we make sure that we keep our communities tidy and healthy as possible.

Beth Kasumovic: Yes, exactly. And if you're struggling to find out what would be suitable for your waste management plan, we do have some examples on our website. More for new developments, but it still gives you an idea of what would be included in such a plan.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. I might get the link for that page from you Beth, and we'll put that in our show notes so that our listeners can head over and check that out. Beth, in your experience working with buildings when it comes to waste, have you got any case studies? Any stories to share? Buildings who are doing this really well. Our pristine, clean heroes of the community? How do they do it?

Beth Kasumovic: Yes, look there are some really great examples, I'm happy to say. There's a few buildings that have really taken on that waste management plan idea, and they even put it on display in their bin room area. So it's in your face, those roles and responsibilities are right there, along with contact numbers. So I think it's important to know who to contact if there's an issue, that information would be included.

Other examples of where buildings get it right are where they have people that are really invested in waste management. So for example, a caretaker that just takes it upon himself to make sure the bin room's really clean, that the bins are tidy and in order, they have signage, and that the bin room is accessible and has a good lighting. All those things that make people feel safe and secure, that they can go into that dark corner with their waste and recycling and dispose of it properly. So we do have some real ambassadors in the area, and it'd be great to showcase their good work at some stage.

Some of the things that council can support in that area is, we have bin-based signage and bin stickers available to anyone. You just call customer service and we can provide those to you. And they're a variety of sizes so we can accommodate any building's needs, basically. And I think getting the signage and the infrastructure right just provides that platform for people to start disposing of waste and recycling properly.

Amanda Farmer: Now, I can say from personal experience, we do have those stickers and that signage in the building that I live in. And we have an interesting system where we have a chute, we have a compressor, we have recycling, we have our normal

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bins, and regular collections. And those signs work wonders, especially when you might have tenants or owners who English is a second language and may not be able to read the waste management plan or understand the waste management plan or that kind of detail. The stickers that just have pictures to say, this goes here and that goes there. When I'm in a hurry, I'm looking at those pictures. I'm making sure I'm putting the paper and the plastic and the cardboard all in the right spots. So definitely reach out to your council even if you're not in the Waverley local government area, find out if your council does those kinds of stickers, because they're a really easy way to get organised when it comes to your waste management, I think. And making sure that your caretaker and that your building manager is onboard and of course understands what the plan is and where everything's to go.

Amanda Farmer: Something that popped into my head there, Beth, when you were talking about the bin rooms and disposing of things in the right places, CCTV cameras. I know that buildings that I work with who are having trouble with not just waste management but other maybe behavioural issues on common property. The question of, should we have cameras? How do we best use cameras? Does come up. And it occurs to me that when we're talking about waste control and proper disposal, that if there were cameras in common areas, what do you think? Do you think that changes people's behaviour? Improves people's behavior if they know they're being watched?

Beth Kasumovic: Oh, that's an interesting one. I think that would be a good test to trial a few of those cases. I don't have a lot of data on that, but I'm very curious about it.

Amanda Farmer: Me too.

Beth Kasumovic: From the state government and their illegal dumping program, they are an advocate of CCTV and they do get results. Especially if they see simple indicators of who is doing what, like a rego plate, they can pin those people. And similarly for property managers, if you have any evidence of someone doing the wrong thing, for example, it can be a simple letter or a mailing address. Something that links to the person who might have dumped some rubbish outside your property or in the common ground, that gives you more weight to enforce your policies and by-laws.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, very good point. If you do have a by-law that you've carefully put together dealing with waste management, of course the question arises, what if somebody breaches that by-law? And, what are our options from there? And from a lawyer's perspective, evidence of that breach is going to be important. So if you do have CCTV in your building, you're lucky enough to have made that investment, use it to your best advantage. Make sure that you've got some cameras there on the garbage room. Not so much for, I think, when it comes to fines and penalty proceedings and things like that. But just I find if people know they're being watched, their behavior improves and they want to make sure that they're seen to be upholding the community standard.

Beth Kasumovic: And that is another behaviour change theory is that, if people think they're being watched, you can actually demonstrate that by just having a very well lit area. Because then it just shows that, wow, everyone can see me. I'm in the spotlight. A very clean area. It looks like it's really well maintained, so people are coming through regularly. So that gives the same impression without the camera. So there's mechanisms you can do to give the same feeling.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Awesome. I love that. That's a really excellent tip. Thank you, Beth. Waste can be a difficult issue for buildings to manage, probably for some buildings more so than others. The building might be in an area where there's lots of short-term tenants, so people coming and going, tourists and visitors. So waste's left on the street in the common areas, the bins not being used properly. How do buildings overcome these problems? What do you see as the common problems buildings are facing? And, how do we solve those?

Beth Kasumovic: Yes, where to begin? I think there's a few key problems. One that you touched on is our transient community in Waverley. We have a lot of short-term stayers, and this is a real challenge for council and building managers. So I think having some measures in place where you can have some controls. So whether it's a by-law, a policy about how you rent out your space, those kinds of things can really assist. The challenge with having so many visitors, especially over summer, people coming from all over, they're not invested in doing the right thing for their 2 to 3 weeks. So whatever way you can get that message to them about, "While you're here, this is how you can recycle and carry your items down to our common area and dispose of them correctly."

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Whether it's a letter or something you can attach to their lease agreement. I'm not sure if that's possible in the strata world, but some way of getting the owner responsible for their tenants and the correct processes while they're staying at your building.

Beth Kasumovic: Few other ones that I can touch on. We've got bins that are left out. That's one of our key issues in Waverley. So this is in the public space. This is an area that council advocately tries to get people to do the right thing. We like people to bring their bins in immediately after collection, and only present them the night before collection. So this deters the bins being left out on the street where people passing by can just add to the bins, creating an excess waste issue and litter issue. So one measure to assist with that is with your cleaner contract agreement. If you can get the cleaner to present the bins the night before and bring them in immediately afterwards, that's ideal. We understand that sometimes cleaners are only working on a Thursday, for example, but your bin day might be Monday. So if they're only there on that one day, of course they're going to present the bins. But what happens if they set out for 4 days, it's just not a great solution. So maybe get a different cleaner. I don't know. There has to be other ways to keep your area clean. It works for everyone. if we can address that issue.

Amanda Farmer: Or even a roster of residents who are willing and able to commit to taking the bins in or putting the bins out on a particular day. And if there's 4 or 5 of you, then it's a once a month job. If you don't have a cleaner or a caretaker who's there on that day to be able to do it for you, maybe that's an idea.

Beth Kasumovic: Oh, that's a great idea. Often there's an ambassador in a building that really wants to do the right thing, and we've come across that with a program where we're engaging with 20 problem properties, and there's often 1 or 2 people that really want to get it right. And maybe if you contact those people, they'll take on that role.

A few other issues that we come across are that there's challenges for tenants to bring the recycling ... Store the recycling in their apartment and then bring it down the stairs or wherever to the bin room. So what we've seen historically, and it's just been a problem for a very long time, is that people store their recyclables in a plastic bag in their apartment unit. And so, it makes sense in a small space, they need somewhere to store their items, but then they carry their recyclables in the plastic bag down to the bin room and they put the whole bag, including recyclables into the recycling. So this is a real challenge for council because plastic bags is our biggest contaminant. So we now provide reusable plastic bags for apartments and you can store your recyclables in those bags. There's one that's yellow for containers and another one that's blue for paper. They're flexible so you can sneak them into any tiny spot in your apartment and then carry them down to the bin room, empty them out, and wash them out. They're very, very durable. So that's something you can order through council. If you want to call customer service, we can accommodate that.

Amanda Farmer: Awesome. That is a great idea. I hope there are other councils in New South Wales doing that as well and not just Waverley. I'm going to get my hands on some of those bags. That sounds great.

Now you mentioned there, Beth, the need to involve owners in this conversation, particularly when there are tenants and short-term tenants and it's very difficult for our buildings. It's a common complaint that I see. "Amanda, how do we get these tenants to comply with the by-laws? Because they're coming and going. Enforcement is not really possible. They don't understand the rules." And my answer to that is always, be a bit creative with your by-law drafting. If we're talking about a by-law being the way to get this message across about waste management, then in my view, you should be very clear in the by-law that the owner has responsibility for the actions of the tenant, and that if the tenant does not comply with our rules about waste management and if we incur costs, if we incur fees, if we get a fine from council, then that's going to land in the owner's responsibility. So you do need to make that clear in your by-law if that's what you're going to do, but I really think that if you can tack that responsibility legally onto the owner, then you're going to start seeing owners taking a more hands on role, I guess, when it comes to educating their tenants and picking the right tenants for their property.

Beth Kasumovic: Yes, excellent point. That's exactly what we want to see from a council perspective.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. I often think that we're lucky in New South Wales that we can use our strata by-laws to deal with a range of different problems. Other people might take a different view and say that our powers are a little bit too broad, but I definitely advocate for some creative thinking, creative drafting when it comes to by-laws and not forget always to involve owners as well.

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Amanda Farmer: All right, Beth. Now let's talk about some quick action steps that our listeners can take to start solving a waste problem. What can they do today to get on top of waste in their apartment buildings?

Beth Kasumovic: An easy win is just to call council's customer service center at 9083-8000 and order your bin and stickers, the signage that's appropriate for your bin room, and any other educational material you think that your residents and tenants could use. You can even do your own bin room audit. It doesn't take much to walk into the bin room, have a look at the lighting, see where the light switch is if there is one. Will the door stay open while people walk in with their items? You want to make sure that it's easy for your residents to be able to access the bins. Do you have enough bins? Are they in good nick? All those things. You can just do a quick assessment, any concerns, give council a call and we can help you.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. So that is for residents in the Waverley local government area. I would recommend anyone in any area, contact your local council because I'm sure that they have similar initiatives to Waverley. And just on that point about the bin room, I know these rooms can be a bit gross and a bit stinky and no one really wants to spend too much time in there. If you're on the committee or you're a manager, maybe just check with the cleaner that they have that room on their list and that they are in there regularly giving it a bit of a hose out or a clean out or whatever setup you've got. I know our bin room where I am, that can get a little bit stinky, but I know that it gets properly thoroughly cleaned out regularly, and so we all get a bit of relief when that's done. And as you say, Beth, it's really those little steps to be encouraging residents to use that area properly that I think can get a lot of traction.

All right. Now, I am going to ask you to wrap up soon and leave us with your closing comments. But before I do that, we have promised our listeners some special news and the news is this. On the 20th of March I will be presenting an evening at Waverley Library. Hand in hand with Waverley Council, I'm going to be talking about ... And I've mentioned it a few times in this episode. By-laws. How we can use by-laws to deal with bad behaviour in our strata communities, and you can guarantee there'll be a bit of a discussion there about waste and about how we might use by-laws in some of the creative ways that we've been talking about here today.

Now, if you want to get involved in that event, it is an absolutely free event and big thanks to Waverley Council for taking the initiative and putting this event on. It is at 7:00 on Wednesday the 20th of March at Waverley Library. And if you'd like to register for free, you can head over to YourStrataProperty.com.au/event, and I'm giving you that short URL because you can click through there to the Eventbrite booking page, which is set up through Waverley Council. But the Eventbrite URL is a little bit complicated, so I'm just giving you a short URL there. YourStrataProperty.com.au/event, and you'll click through there to the Eventbrite booking page.

Beth Kasumovic: You can also just search on Eventbrite for March 20th and the keyword strata and it will come up.

Amanda Farmer: Beautiful. Thank you. It's very good advice. Search Eventbrite, 20th of March with keyword strata. Love it.

Beth Kasumovic: And just to add to that, we can bring some examples of the bin bay signage and some bin stickers that I've been talking about, if anyone wants to have a look.

Amanda Farmer: Awesome. Now the evening is ... I think it's 7:00 til about 8:30, isn't it, Beth? So we've got quite a bit of time to go through various strata issues. I know whenever I attend events and speak, which I try to do less and less live these days, so this is an unusual opportunity for everybody. Lots of time for questions is what I'm getting at. Lots of Q and A. Come with your strata questions and learning specifically about how we can use our by-laws more effectively. So I'm looking forward to that.

Now, Beth, let us know how our listeners can find out more about you and about Waverley council's initiatives and anything you'd like to add before we wrap up.

Beth Kasumovic: Look, I think that you can call customer service with any of your inquiries. We have a waste and recycling webpage on the Waverley Council site if you want to look up more information about our work and projects, etc. You can also call

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council and ask for me directly if you want to chat with me. That's fine. Just to leave you with a bit of inspiration, I've got a quote from Helen Keller. Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.

Amanda Farmer: Love it. What a wonderful quote for community living. Perfect. Thank you so much for your time today, Beth, and I will look forward to seeing you and so many of our listeners on the 20th of March.

Beth Kasumovic: Sounds good. Thanks, Amanda.

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 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?

