

Publication Date: 4 January 2017
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 042. Highlights from 2016 - A Year In Review

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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. Welcome everybody to the first episode for the New Year – 2017. I hope that you all took some time to have a bit of a break over the festive seasons, spend time with your loved ones and had a bit of a rest. I certainly have had some time out. I actually try to use this time at the beginning of each year to plan for my business, for the upcoming year, to take this quiet time to sit down and work out where I can improve, what I want to achieve and what steps I need to be taking throughout the year to make sure I reach my goals.

And it's something that I recommend to a lot of my colleagues and friends and I certainly recommend to everybody listening, whether you run your own business or not, the New Year is a great time to have that sense of perspective for what's coming up for you professionally, personally and take that time to make sure you get the most out of the next 12 months.

I've particularly been planning what's on the agenda for our members, the members of the YSP online community this year, and there are some exciting things in the works that's for sure, and I'm really looking forward to delivering that over the next few months and well into the year.

Okay, what I want to get into in today's episode is actually to give you a bit of summary of the highlights, what I think are the highlights from previous episodes of the podcast, we are up to believe it or not episode 042 now and I've been delivering this podcast to you for the last 9 months or so – that has gone so fast – we will soon be at our 12 month anniversary which is really exciting.

But I thought the beginning of the year is a good time to go over the key takeaways that I remember from all of the guests that have joined me on the podcast and that I know from listener feedback that you have got the most out of. So this summary episode is great if you're new to the podcast and maybe you haven't listened to the earlier episodes or not all of them and you need a bit of a jump start into the right direction to head, some hints perhaps on what might interest you.

But even if you're a long time listener this is a great way to be reminded of all the knowledge that you've gained listening over the past 9 months and maybe I'll even trigger an idea or remind you of a particular pain point that you're experiencing at the moment in your strata living or strata management and you can go back and have a listen to that particular episode which might be even more relevant to you now than ever before.

So I'm going to start with Episode 02. This was my interview with Reena Van Aalst and Reena is a very well-known strata manager here in New South Wales, and Reena and I talked about working with your strata manager and getting the most out of that relationship with your strata manager, and a couple of key takeaways there for me... I think strata managers find that their role is not often well understood by their clients and this to me is partially a communication breakdown between the strata manager and the lot owner, but I think that relationship really benefits when the strata manager can make really clear to the lot owner exactly what it is they are there for and what is part of their job and what isn't, so that's something Reena and I spoke about.

In [Episode 04](#), I spoke with Karen Stiles of the Owners Corporation Network (OCN) about short-term letting and we spoke in particular about a building that she had been involved with where there had been an extra 1,000 residents and 8 illegal brothels because of the prevalence of short-term letting and this building's difficulties in controlling that and the story that Karen told us was that eventually this building was able to get the short-term lets under control and they had some really ingenious ideas and methods for dealing with that. So great conversation there with Karen and I suggest you check that out if short-term letting is something that is an issue for you in your building at the moment.



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In **Episode 05**, I spoke with Kellie Wright from Wright and Lee. Now Kellie is what we call an owner advocate, she's not a strata manager, she's not a lawyer, but she does assist lot owners 1 on 1 who might be having difficulties in their strata scheme. Now Kellie is based in Queensland and Kellie told us a story about how she helped an owner who was basically ready to sell up and ship out after only 8 months of purchasing because he was basically being victimised by the committee.

And Kellie was able to use her expertise and her industry knowledge to make sure that he and his community were in a far better place, and one of the key takeaways I think from that discussion was how important it is to look at the books and records of the strata scheme before you purchase and absolutely go in with your eyes open and know what you are getting into to the extent that you can. That's going to save a lot of heartache down the track.

In **Episode 06** I spoke with Helen Wells from Acumen Strata about why communities should consider tendering their strata management contracts and Helen had some great advice for communities that are looking at engaging a new strata manager or perhaps renewing their contract with their current strata manager and Helen's key takeaway there, at least for me, was make sure you have the right manager for the job and each building is different, each committee is different, your building might have unique circumstances, it might be a complex community title scheme with building management committees, it might be a small block, it might be 2 lots, 3 lots, that's going to benefit from different type of manager and a different type of skill set.

So it's not always about getting the cheaper price it's about getting the right fit for your building and that conversation is particularly relevant now in New South Wales where we have new legislation in place which has the effect of shortening many strata management contracts that might currently be on foot. So I know that there are a lot of communities out there now looking at putting those contracts out to tender and if that's on your agenda definitely go back to Episode 06 and have a listen to what Helen Wells has to say.

Okay, in **Episode 09** I spoke with Dr. Hazel Easthope of the University of New South Wales and Hazel and I discussed the changes under New South Wales law when it comes to the approval threshold for terminating a strata scheme, so where we had prior to the 30th of November 2016 you needed 100% approval to sell the entire scheme to a developer, the new law that commenced on the 30th of November now means that a 75% approval threshold is in place. Now this conversation that I had with Hazel is a really great beginner's guide to this process and what you can expect as a lot owner who might be approached by a developer wanting to purchase all the lots and redevelop the scheme so if that's something you want to know more about definitely start there with Episode 09.

In **Episode 010**, I had a chat with Jenny Strong from Macquarie bank and we talked about strata finance. What is it? How do you use it? Jenny gives great answers to common questions in that area. How is a strata loan secured? How is it repaid? That's in Episode 010.

Episode 011, I had a chat with Rachel Cosentino who is a lawyer in Western Australia and we spoke about how to establish a sense of community in strata and I was really fascinated by Rachel's take on this topic and what I found interesting was that she saw strata communities as a place where we can rediscover our civic involvement, so she spoke about research that sociologists have done and they found that since the 1970's in Australia, in the U.S., civic society has been declining and we are losing those opportunities for connectedness and that sense of belonging. Rachel's view was that we should see our strata schemes as a way of rekindling that, that sense of community and that sense of belonging and I really love that take on living in strata and the wonderful benefits of living in strata. We talked all about that in Episode 011.

In **Episode 012**, I spoke with Gary Bugden and Gary and I spoke about how technology is now being used to improve strata management outcomes, so we talked about all the different ways that strata managers and strata communities are using technology to their benefit and in particular Gary gave us an example of what's happening in building facilities management, so there's apparently a very sophisticated range of technology that's now available to monitor what's happening with equipment in buildings, so it's possible to have a device installed that communicates back to the building manager, whether they're on site or whether it's the strata manager, how their equipment is performing: is it down? Does it need repair or maintenance? And that's all being done without somebody having to go and check. That's just one of the examples that Gary and I talked about how

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technology is improving our strata management outcomes. That's Episode 012.

Episode 013, I spoke with Andrew Terrell, strata manager here in Sydney from Wellman Strata about effective strata budgets and Andrew's advice was all about the importance of detailed budgets. You can avoid time consuming and frustrating questions at meetings if you have a well thought out, well planned, detailed budget for the upcoming financial year.

And Andrew also explained why unrealistic budgets are so harmful and what strata managers should be doing to ensure that their buildings don't set unrealistic budgets, so both the managers, committees, owners focused on budgeting – which I think you all should be – Episode 013 is a good one to get stuck into.

In **Episode 014**, I had a chat with Michael Teys, a lawyer here in Sydney, also a strata manager: how to improve and model behaviour in strata communities and we spoke about how bad behaviour is bad for our communities and what we can do about improving that behaviour and a key takeaway there for me, we talked about it in the conversation but it was also something I picked up from Michael's book, he has this 5 step framework for how an owners corporation or committee might assess whether or not they're being reasonable when it comes to drafting by-laws and we went through that 5-step framework in the conversation and a couple of those steps just to whet your appetite: committees should be asking themselves "is this by-law really necessary?", they should be asking "does it conform to modern, social and broader community standards?"

So if you're in that process now, particularly in New South Wales where the new legislation requires you to review your by-laws within the next 12 months, go back and have a listen to Episode 014 and listen out for that 5-step framework for how to assess whether your by-laws are reasonable. I found it really insightful.

Episode 016, Savina Yang and I spoke about how to increase your lot's value by extending into areas of the common property. Now Savina is a lawyer with my practice Lawyers Chambers, this was a very popular episode amongst you listeners. Savina and I give you a step by step guide for how you might use the adjacent common property in your scheme to increase your living area, increase the value of your investment. There's a couple of ways that you can do it and Episode 016 I'm often recommending to people who contact me wanting advice on this issue as a really good introduction for how you might get started with that kind of a project.

Episode 017, I spoke with Stephen Raff, strata manager: how to deal with noise in strata buildings, and Stephen gave us some great solutions for noise problems. We talked about all things windows, window glazing, dealing with dogs, having the local council involved, good old fashioned communication with your neighbour, how to best involve your strata manager. A great episode for anyone who is having a noise problem in their building at the moment.

Okay jumping to **Episode 019**, I spoke with Dr. Emma Power from the University of Western Sydney about how to deal with pets in strata buildings and I often refer back to this episode because I really love what Emma had to say about pets and pets by-laws in particular, and she says it's not the fact of keeping an animal that is or should be a problem for strata communities, it's about the impact that that animal has on the community.

So when we're regulating these things with by-laws she doesn't think it's appropriate – neither do I – that you ban the keeping of the animal completely, what you should be doing is regulating the impact of that animal, so you are dealing with things like noise, mess, the safety of other residents. Simply having a blanket ban on the keeping of animals is not going to the heart of the problem. We also had a great discussion about how you might approach your owners corporation if you do want to keep an animal and the kinds of things that both owners and committees are concerned about in our experience.

Episode 020, this was a hot one: can you legally record a strata meeting using a recording device like your phone, and this was my chat with Hallie Warnock who was a student in my office at Lawyers Chambers, and Hallie gave us her view drawn from some research that she had done recently that yes, you can legally record a strata meeting but there's a few things that you probably should be doing before you turn on that recording device. So that's back in Episode 020.



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Episode 021, I had a chat with Natalie Fitzgerald, strata manager from Strata Sense here in Sydney. How are the new New South Wales laws going to affect your strata management contracts? Again this is something that is now really relevant with the new law having commenced in New South Wales. If you've been hearing about your strata management contracts somehow changing under the new law, being shortened, some even perhaps being lengthened, go back and have a listen to Episode 021 and that's going to fill you in on those details.

Episode 022, I spoke with Melissa Macpherson from the Small Block Strata Company. Melissa only manages small strata blocks so we're looking at 3,4,5 lot schemes, less than 10 lots, and Melissa has a view that these small schemes have unique requirements and unique concerns and do need a different style of management. So we got stuck into a great conversation there about the nature of small strata blocks.

Episode 023, I spoke with Leonie Milonas from Strata Community Insurance about what to look for in a strata insurance policy, what kind of coverage you need and know all strata insurance policies are not the same, and Leonie explains to us what the different options are there.

In **Episode 024** I spoke to Robert Savage from Victoria, strata manager, about short-term letting after the Watergate decision. Now this was a decision of the Supreme Court in Victoria, it was pretty hot when it came out last year, and it has to an extent changed the face of short-term letting in Victoria and put a different light, let's say, on how by-laws are interpreted and enforced in Victoria. So Robert and I had a bit of discussion about that decision, if you're not familiar with it or you've heard a bit about it and want to find out more, check out Episode 024.

Episode 025: how to manage complex strata and community schemes, my chat with Chris Duggan from Bright and Duggan Strata Management again, a very popular episode. We talked about why the setup stage for a complex scheme is so important. We talked about what a complex scheme is, how in our modern world and in our busy building cities, we are faced with setups that we haven't necessarily seen before.

Why it's important to have a strata manager who understands how your scheme works and why strata managers probably need to upskill a bit in this area, that's Chris' view, taking the time to get a basic understanding of how your scheme works is going to pay dividends for you as an owner, and Chris even gave us a bit of an insight into the Barangaroo development here in Sydney which he's had some involvement in so great episode, Episode 025 with Chris Duggan.

Episode 027: why the ABMA Building Management Code is the key to managing your strata property. I spoke to Lynda Kypriadakis of the ABMA, The Australian Building Management Association and we talked about the code that had just been released recently for Queensland and New South Wales, I think there might have been a copy for Victoria as well, and I've had a bit more involvement with ABMA since that episode and I know that the code is definitely gaining some standing in the strata sector. It's something that you will be hearing more and more about and remember that you heard about it here first.

Episode 028: how electronic voting will drive strata owner engagement. I spoke to Dee Pannell from Strata Vote, this is a great beginners' guide to electronic voting. We talk about both New South Wales and Queensland laws and Dee is doing something quite innovative there with Strata Vote. It's a good platform to check out if you're looking at introducing electronic voting to your community this year.

Episode 029 I spoke with Dr. Cathy Sherry from the University of New South Wales about the immense power that strata owners have and this power is their power to make by-laws. Now this was absolutely one of my favourite interviews of the last 9 months, Cathy is just a power house, she is a font of knowledge when it comes to all things strata. One of the things that I really remember about this conversation is that Cathy said to me "Amanda, I don't know why we treat apartment living differently to any other inner-city living? Some of us live in houses, we might live in semi-detached and we live in noisy neighbourhoods, we can hear what's going on in our neighbour's backyard, sometimes we can even hear things through the walls, but because we are not in an apartment we don't feel the need to do anything about it, we say 'oh, well that's their house this is ours' and we just deal with it, we deal with the noisy kids playing basketball next door's backyard, why is it any different in strata?" and it's different because the law empowers strata owners to regulate the way other people live and Cathy says that this is essentially a form of private legislation

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that is very intrusive into people's lives and this power is often not used very wisely.

And even now under the new New South Wales law we have this provision that says by-laws must not be harsh, unconscionable or unreasonable but Cathy feels that this law doesn't go far enough and she explains to us why she has that view. It's a fabulous episode, even if you've already listened to it, go back and have another listen because there are so many gems in there and we are so privileged to have somebody like Dr. Cathy Sherry come and chat with us about this topic.

Okay **Episode 030**, this was a really popular one. This is my examination of privacy when it comes to strata books and records and I recorded that episode because I just had so many questions at least once a week from owners, strata managers, questioning how much personal information they could or should give to lot owners coming and lot owners' representatives coming to inspect an owner corporation's books and records and I have felt for a long time that there's a real lack of understanding of this area: what's private, what's not, do privacy laws apply, can email addresses be given out, can phone numbers be given out, what can be withheld or should be withheld from a strata inspection? Check out Episode 030 where I really delve into answers to those questions. I know a lot of you have found that one really useful.

Episode 031 I had a chat with interior design expert Jen Bishop on renovating your strata home. This was a really enjoyable conversation, Jen talked about keeping it simple in your renovation. My big takeaway from this, as you'll hear, is the question "have I got my rug properly positioned in my lounge room?" and I think my conclusion was "no I don't". So thanks for those tips Jen, definitely if you're about to do a renovation in your apartment check out Episode 031.

Episode 033, Sean McNamara, committee member, on things that can go horribly wrong when buying into a new strata plan and how you might avoid those. Sean was a font of advice, he had bought into a newly strata'd building, it was an older building and had been refurbished and he no end of trouble with the developer but he was able through his own personal efforts and research and connecting himself with good people in the industry to resolve those issues for his community, and he has some great tips for what he learned through that process and he did it all without legal representation which I think was just awesome and a great result for him and his neighbours.

Episode 034, tips on how to run a good strata meeting with Karina Heinz, strata manager in Sydney, and Karina's key takeaway was to explain to us why agendas and minutes are so important, and they're often things that are overlooked by strata managers, by committees, just put out a simple agenda, just quickly get the minutes out, and those documents are unfortunately not accurately recording what's planned to happen in the meeting and what actually happens in the meeting and that can cause problems down the track. So detailed agendas and minutes is something that I spoke about there with Karina and some other great tips on how to run a good strata meeting.

Now **episodes 035, 036, and 037**, that was my audio from the presentation that I delivered to members of the Owners' Corporation Network (OCN) and many other committee members and lot owners from around Sydney and surrounds on the new New South Wales law. Go back and check those out, they're good summaries of the things that I think owners in particular are going to be affected by with this new law which is now in place, and of course a great way to get all the detail from that presentation without even listening to the audio is to head over to www.yourstrataproperty.com.au/newlaw and you will be able to download a copy of my detailed paper.

Okay, **Episode 038**, I had a chat to another committee member Gordon Streight and Gordon explained how we might add value to our strata buildings and why it's so important to add value to our strata buildings. Gordon explained to us why we should be thinking about so much more than just repair and maintenance. We need to be thinking about investing in our buildings for the future and Gordon had some really great ideas for increasing the value of your investment.

Episode 039, I had a chat with Scott Walsberger from the Cancer Council New South Wales and we talked about why the Cancer Council advocates for completely smoke-free strata buildings, including the banning of smoking within lots not just on common property. Scott spoke a lot about the research that Cancer Council does, he produced some really great statistics that I didn't even know existed about smoking in strata and he even has statistic related to why smokers want smoke-free apartment living, which I found really fascinating. So a great episode to get stuck into if you are concerned about smoking in your building and want to do

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something about it.

Okay skipping to [Episode 041](#), my interview with Steven King, committee member: what makes a great strata committee? Steven is a very experienced committee member and together with his fellow members runs a really tight ship for his building and has done for many years and he has some great tips on how you might be able to do that as well in your building. What kind of personalities it takes, what the commitment level is like and how you might ensure the right culture for your strata committee.

So that is the nutshell summary of the last 9 months' worth of episodes, I haven't covered every single one you'll see, but those are certainly all of the guests that have been on the show and I have very much enjoyed chatting to. I have some fabulous guests lined up for the show this year, including some you will recognise from the media which I'm really excited about and I'm looking forward to delivering to you once again all that I think you need to know to improve your experience of community living as always thanks for listening. Catch you next time.

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 by 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?

