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YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 240. Safe strata meetings I online meeting hacks I return and earn

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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 Amanda Farmer here coming to you straight up before we dive in to this week's podcast episode. This week I have a chat between Reena Van Aalst and myself. The format may sound a little different this week. You won't hear Reena share her challenge first up. What you'll hear is me jumping straight to my challenge. No, we are not trying to short change you this week. Just had some technical issues with the first part of our recording and we like to keep standards high here at YSP headquarters. So we're starting this week's chat with my challenge.

You'll also hear Reena and I talked a little bit about online strata meetings. Really good timing for this chat, I have just wrapped up a webinar for Women in Strata where we talked about precisely that. The Keys to Successful Online Strata Meetings. We are going to take the recording of that webinar and give you access so that you can dig a little deeper on some of the issues that Reena and I are going to chat about in this upcoming episode.

You will find the link to the replay of the Women in Strata Webinar in the show notes for this podcast episode. You can always find those at yourstrataproperty.com.au/podcasts that's you will find the library of podcasts. Head over to Episode number 240 and we will have the link to the webinar replay there for you. If you want to learn some more handy tips and tricks for your online meetings in particular, learn from our webinar special guest Anne Maree Wilshire of Vibrant Voices on how to use your voice more effectively online.

And finally, if you are not registered for the By-law Bootcamp, now is the time to do it. The Bootcamp is running this week on 3 separate occasions: Thursday, 19th of November, Friday, the 20th of November, and Sunday, the 22nd of November. If you are listening to this before, 8 PM Australian Eastern Daylight Time on Sunday, then you are not too late. You can still join us at Bootcamp. Head over to stratabootcamp.com where you can register for free and join me online to learn more about how we can use by-laws to improve our communities in 2021. I'm really looking forward to getting you all set for a brand new year in strata. So enjoy this episode, wins and challenges with Reena Van Aalst diving straight in to my challenge.

Amanda Farmer: My challenge for this week relates to meetings, and I have received a question about holding meetings in-person during a time when we're all very conscious, still of social distancing and some owners it's come to my attention are under the belief that they cannot hold meetings in person or cannot hold large meetings in-person gathered together for the purpose of an AGM for example. That would either be illegal or maybe unsafe. And it's causing some problems for buildings who are due to hold their AGM, need to strike levies and feel that they're not able to do that. And perhaps have a demographic that's not comfortable with a Zoom meeting or an electronic meeting.

So I thought I'd bring this to the podcast. Of course, it's something we've spoken about many times over the last 6, 9 months. I keep saying 6 months, but I think it's getting closer to 9 months now that we've been dealing with this new world order. At least in New South Wales I wanted to clarify that it is definitely legal to attend a venue. And at the time we were recording, gather in a group of up to 300, that is the current limit in New South Wales. Could change in the couple of weeks before this goes to air, but gather in a group of up to 300 at a venue that has COVID safe practices that electronically records everybody's attendances and is able to facilitate 4 square metres of distance between each attendee.

So large venues I have seen RSL Clubs and clubs generally doing this really well. And I've attended a couple of AGM's at large clubs, large ballrooms are helpful and theaters are helpful for this. That is possible. You can meet that way. So if it is essential that you have a meeting in person, please don't feel that you are restricted from doing that. I think even our largest buildings would struggle to have more than 300 people decide to attend a meeting in-person. But it's really important if you're going to have a meeting that large I think, to shift that responsibility if you like over to a venue that is used to having these kinds of events and understands all of the COVID safe practices that they need to apply.

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Reena Van Aalst: Yes. I know there has been some confusion Amanda, about that building, I was thinking about the 30, I think I kind of was at a public space. I think 30 was a public space, but you're right, in a probably corporate type venue that doesn't apply. And there has been some confusion, I think in terms of that, so.

Amanda Farmer: So the language that's used in the legislation at the moment is a corporate gathering. And when you're referring, those 30 people you're referring to is a restaurant booking, basically. So members of the public going to a venue for dinner, we have a maximum at the moment in New South Wales of 30 people being able to book that. But a corporate gathering, I know of course numbers are different for weddings and funerals, but up to 300 at the moment, and I put owners corporation.

Reena Van Aalst: And I think also, Amanda, what about outside in a public place? I think that's also, there's a different figure for that too as opposed to a corporate venue that's able to practice and record people and things like that.

Amanda Farmer: Where it is an outdoor gathering for a corporate event at a venue, the limit is still 300, but the distancing requirement reduces to 2 square metres. That's the difference with the outdoor event. But otherwise the public gatherings just generally, so I'm not talking about a corporate event, we're not talking about weddings, funerals, is 30. Whether you're inside or outside, yes.

Reena Van Aalst: Yes. I mean that's where the confusion has been caused I think Amanda.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. So just thought I would put that out there. We will put the link to the relevant page on the New South Wales government website where you can check for updates to that. But good to check in, these things are changing quickly I know around the country. But at the moment, New South Wales there's no reason why you can't have a meeting in person if you absolutely need to. Just make sure you've got the right venue for that meeting.

Reena Van Aalst: Right.

Amanda Farmer: All right. Now, have you got a win for me this week? Reena?

Reena Van Aalst: Yes. So back to having electronic meetings, Amanda, many of us have been doing our AGM's by Zoom and we had a very contentious meeting recently where we used Zoom quite effectively by using the poll feature. So the reason we had to use the poll feature was to do with a special resolution, and what we found that was really helpful in terms of having people register. We actually made people register and actually use the polling function for every single motion, rather than just for the motion relating to the special resolution. Because we thought if everyone started to use it, then it'll be more comfortable when we got to the special resolution in terms of using it. And we actually found it as such a great tool because it would give you the results straight away. It actually even had an Excel spreadsheet that tells you even the time that people voted and how they voted.

And I just thought in terms of owners out there and other Managers, perhaps that may not be aware that there is a poll function that you can use. And it actually works quite well in terms of recording votes in general. And it records it in real time. And then you can have an export of the Excel spreadsheet, which then you can keep on the records. Which is so much easier than using paper or even using other electronic forms where you have to sort of calculate the voting through other means. So it's really a handy tool. And I thought that I would just raise that, Amanda, for those people out there that perhaps still don't want to have a meeting in person, even though you've just said that they can. And it just means that there's another way that you can actually record special resolutions. Because sometimes what I find difficult with Zoom is when people leave the meeting, like last night I had someone that came in late and then I couldn't see that the person was waiting to be admitted.

And then I admitted him, which is fine. I knew what time he came. And then after he left, I think there is a function that you can, where it can ping when someone leaves, but you have multiple people leaving, it does make it a bit hard I think for our Strata Managers to try and manage the meeting and manage people on a screen. And so I think having the Zoom ability to actually record their votes, at least if they've gone and they haven't recorded their vote, then you know they're gone. And that sort of in a way we could tell when someone had left, because the last time they voted was at that particular motion. So we knew then that they'd left after that.

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Amanda Farmer: And it is important too for the accurate calculation of special resolutions to know how many are present definitely. I really like that idea, Reena of getting everybody comfortable using the poll feature, by just asking them to use it for all motions, even though a motion may only be required to be resolved on an ordinary basis so that when you get to the special resolution, then everybody's used to it. It is something that many listeners would have seen me do on my webinars as I encourage people to find the chat feature and say hello to me, simply for the ... I love hearing from you of course, but also for the purpose of getting you comfortable using that chat feature because at the end we have Q&A, and I want you to be able to pop your questions in there confidently and know where that chat box is.

Something else that I do on webinars is I use the poll feature and I ask a question about everybody's level of experience. For example, if I'm with Strata Managers or I ask, "*Are you a Strata Manager? Are you a committee member?*" And people fill in that poll. So it's just occurring to me that that could be an idea that to get people used to the poll feature on a casual or informal basis before the meeting starts. You could always ask, "*How's everybody feeling today. Here's the poll, choose an option here,*" just to have a bit of practice [crosstalk 00:16:00].

Reena Van Aalst: Yes. That's a great idea, Amanda. So I think that's a really good suggestion. Yes, it does give you that confidence, especially if people aren't used to using these platforms, I think it gives them more confidence. And some people actually that I've had met, they've never used them before and they go, "*Oh my God, this is my first time ever using Zoom.*" So I think it does sort of allow people that have been fearful of using the technology to be more comfortable with it.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. It's something that we talked about with Dr. Alex Morris, if you remember, Reena, in the same Space Summit this year, and she talked about that moment of welcoming people into a meeting, getting comfortable, having that ritual that you might otherwise have had in person, but is missing from the electronic scene. And being able to construct those moments and make people feel more comfortable simply using the technology and feeling like they're connecting a little bit better before the meeting even starts.

Reena Van Aalst: Yes. That's a great idea, Amanda. Definitely.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. The win that I'd like to share this week relates to recycling. I'll put it that way. I can't reveal too much at the moment, but I have been chatting to some representatives of the Return and Earn project, which we have here in New South Wales. Have you heard about this, Reena? Or seen it or participated in it? Where we return our used bottles, drink bottles and cans to a facility and you get your 10 cents back from each deposit.

Reena Van Aalst: I'm aware of a building that's actually doing, not for cans, but for other, like polystyrene actually.

Amanda Farmer: I want to hear about this, because I was approached to assess this from the Strata perspective and give some input on how we can get more strata buildings participating in this and actually use the money from the scheme to add to a capital works funds and admin funds and have a bit of a side income, passive income, therefore owners corporations. So tell me about how it works in the building that you're thinking of Reena.

Reena Van Aalst: I really just taken this building over recently, Amanda. So I'm not really up-to-date with all the information. But at the moment it's actually not cost neutral because there is a cost for the company that's actually collecting the recycling at the moment. So that cost hasn't yet been covered by the returns, but eventually with some more education and the scheme is going to have a seminar one Sunday afternoon, like a resident forum just to let everyone know that it's happening. And yes, the aim is to make it cost neutral and eventually hopefully make some money. But I think also it reduces the costs of waste collection because all that stuff was going into the waste as well. And people's rates are affected by that amount of waste that's also collected through council and you know, the private companies that councils now use. So yes, I can give you a little bit more information. I can actually put you onto the person, Amanda that has been advocating this.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I would love to hear from that building, Reena, and also from any other buildings who are interested in that kind of a project. I'm specifically been looking at, as I said, the Return and Earn scheme, which is the glass bottles and the cans and what's being suggested is not so much that we start installing machines, as you might have seen on the streets here in New

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South Wales. Machines on common property, but there are systems similar to those that are happening in schools, where there are special bins for deposit and then later collection or even bags as well. And as I understand it, for this particular scheme there wouldn't be a cost to participate. So whether that's how it ends up rolling out or not, I'm not sure.

But I think it would be a great way to get residents more engaged perhaps in waste management with a financial incentive there as well, few things to be ironed out in terms of approval processes and making sure that residents are actually making use of the facilities. But I have a feeling there will be a more targeted project happening down the track. So it'd be good to hear from any listeners who'd be interested in being involved in that first off.

Reena Van Aalst: Sounds interesting, Amanda. I think the other thing to take into consideration is whether or not the building would have enough room to accommodate another bin. But I suppose if people are putting it in that Return and Earn bin and not in the normal recycling bin, then I suppose eventually that will cancel that aspect of a room out of the equation. The other thing I think about too, especially with COVID everyone drinking more, I suppose that would be quite a good way to stop, because I'm sure that a lot of... They say old habits die hard, and I think sometimes since COVID started, people have been drinking a lot more at home because they don't have to drive. And so that might be, you might be earning it quicker than you thought you might.

Amanda Farmer: That's a very good point actually. And I wonder if councils are seeing that too, and perhaps less being deposited in their machines on the street, unless people are very diligent about collecting. Yes, where I live we have garbage rooms on each floor, very small garbage rooms served by a garbage chute and we put our rubbish down the chute, which is awesome. And then we have a box where we put our recycling. And now that I work at home, yes, I do hear the cleaner on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday come and empty the recycling box and some weeks it's a little louder than others.

Reena Van Aalst: Yes, it's right.

Amanda Farmer: And yes, there's a few apartments on this floor, it's not just me.

Reena Van Aalst: Exactly, now we can't just blame you for that.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. So lots of innovations that we're seeing happen. And I think this is just one of them that people are thinking a little bit more broader about how we can be working together for our zero waste future. Which I know is what all the local councils across the country are aiming for and working.

Reena Van Aalst: Yes no, definitely a great initiative, Amanda. And I think that long term, I think regardless of whether schemes make money out of it or not, I think it's a really important initiative to try and reduce waste and encourage recycling.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Excellent. Well, don't hesitate to reach out to me. You can pop a comment under this episode over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/podcast. And let me know if you're interested in participating in this kind of a project in the future. I think that's all we have for this week, Reena. Thank you so much.

Reena Van Aalst: Thank you, Amanda, see you next time.

Amanda Farmer: Have a good weekend strata.

Reena Van Aalst: Bye.

Amanda Farmer: Bye.

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 comments section, which Amanda will answer in her upcoming episodes. How can Amanda help you today?