

Publication Date: 16 August 2022
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 325. The solution to your painful parking problems

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Amanda Farmer: Hi there, Amanda Farmer here. You're hearing from me straight up this week because I've got a really important announcement to make before I take you over to this week's episode.

The doors to the Your Strata Property online membership community are currently open and we're welcoming in new members. But here's the thing. At midnight, this Sunday, the 21st of August 2022, the price of membership is increasing. So I wanted to jump in here quickly to make sure you know that this week is your last chance to join us at the current low price of just \$49 a month. Membership will never be this price again.

Now, I've been leading our online membership community for almost six years now, and in that time I've helped hundreds and hundreds of strata owners, strata managers, building managers, and other property professionals to improve the way they live and invest in strata and how they serve their strata clients. We have members like Cait, who, with the support that's inside the membership, has been able to successfully represent herself before NCAT, saving tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. Members like David, who has just been elected to his strata committee as the sole office bearer, the captain guiding his community through a tough period of defects rectification. David gains confidence and peace of mind from having one-to-one access to me to check that he's on the right track. Strata managers like Heather are standing out from the crowd in an increasingly competitive space, enjoying my exclusive online trainings for strata professionals on topics like marketing and business skills while also gaining valuable CPD points from my podcasts and webinars.

If you are a member, and I know so many of you listening are, I want to reassure you that the price of your membership is not changing. Some of you have been with us on the inside for years now, and the low price you joined on is locked in. That's my commitment to you in return for your trust and faith in me, especially our founding members who were the first to jump on board six years ago. For as long as you remain a member, the current price you're paying for your monthly or annual subscription will never go up.

So if you've been thinking about joining us on the inside, this week is the time to do it so you can secure the low price of \$49 a month before it increases. That increase is happening at midnight this Sunday the 21st of August, so, that is your deadline.

And the price is increasing significantly. Once midnight this Sunday the 21st ticks over, the price of a monthly subscription goes from \$49 a month up to \$67 a month. That's an increase of more than 35%.

Now, you can save yourself that 35% now and for the life of your membership when you join us before midnight this Sunday. I'll tell you now where you can go to do just that. Head over to stratamembership.com. That's where you'll find out more about what our online community has to offer, and that's where you'll secure the current membership pricing which will never again be so low. We do have an annual option in addition to the monthly option, which helps you save even more. It's all they're waiting for you over at stratamembership.com. Head on over there before midnight this Sunday the 21st of August. And that's midnight, Australian Eastern Standard Time. I can't wait to have you with us on the inside

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.

Amanda Farmer: Hello, and welcome to this week's podcast episode. I am your host, strata lawyer Amanda Farmer. And my guest this week is Angelique Mentis. Angelique is the CEO of thatsMYspot, a business she founded specifically to solve a pain point she was personally experiencing in both residential and commercial strata buildings with unauthorised people parking in her designated parking spot. Angelique's passion for all things parking has led her to speak at industry conferences on the topic, and she is a director on the board of the national parking industry association, Parking Australia.

Prior to entering the world of parking, Angelique was an international corporate finance attorney for nearly two decades as a member of the New York and New South Wales Bar Associations, practising law across Sydney, New York, and Asia. She has

also designed, built, and developed a number of residential and commercial strata property developments. Now, in this chat, Angelique shares with us her innovation that's easing parking pains for strata residents, plus the exciting technology that's about to take this innovation to the next level. You'll hear just how excited I am in particular about that. I'll take you over right now to my chat with Angelique Mentis.

Angelique Mentis, welcome to the show.

Angelique Mentis: Thank you very much, Amanda. A pleasure to be here.

Amanda Farmer: Let's start right at the beginning. It's a very good place to start. Angelique, how did you get involved in the strata space? What's your story?

Angelique Mentis: My story is I fell into it, or as one of the parking gurus in San Francisco likes to say, I backed into parking and strata. It was a personal problem that I experienced in a strata building I lived in. It was trying to get my three young kids out of the car in a dedicated parking space. And because it was directly opposite the lifts, people would tailgate in and just visitors would park there because it was convenient. And it was a high-end building, so this was not an easy building to get into. So in trying to solve that back then, you couldn't do much about it except go to strata body corporate, go to council, get approval to put a garage door in and close your parking space. Thousands of dollars later and council approvals and you had a garage door.

So left that building, got to another office suite, tried to do the same thing to secure our own private parking. And the building said, "Oh, they don't allow you to enclose your parking area." So, as a result of that, had to find another solution in a strata building to solve a personal parking pain point. At the time, I was a corporate finance attorney travelling around the world on very big-ticket deals and, as I had the three young children, was not going to do that forever and decided to start a business to solve this because there were a lot of other people with the same problem. I was also doing quite a bit of property development in residential strata and had a lot of our residents encountering the same problems. So I decided I wanted to solve it.

Amanda Farmer: And we are absolutely going to talk about how you have solved this problem. Before we do, tell me this, why is parking such a challenge for apartment residents?

Angelique Mentis: Ah, because there's often so little of it and it's not shared effectively and it's very hard to police it. People aren't on site all the time. It's a huge pain point and stress point for a lot of people and it causes a lot of angst. It's just something that really gets under people's skin.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, it's definitely something that we have spoken about here on the podcast. It comes up all the time in my online membership community with members in the forum asking questions about parking. In my own building, it is a big pain point. The building that I'm talking about is in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. It is across the road from a very busy park. There is Saturday sport that happens in that park. There is a large shopping centre nearby. There's transport nearby. And whilst every owner has their own secure parking space, we have an open-air visitor parking space, and that is where the trouble starts and finishes in our building. We haven't got a handle on how to deal with that aside from having committee member residents standing on their own balconies, trying to police people coming and going.

Angelique Mentis: It's a horrible position to be in because it ends up quite confrontational at times. Whether it's individual parking bays, in your building, obviously, they're secure, which is great, but in a lot of buildings, they're not secure. And in visitor parking bays, are they really for visitors, or do residents park their second and third vehicles there? Do they abuse the privilege? Is it for a carer coming in to look after a disabled person? Is it for a tradesman? And policing that, it takes up a huge amount of time if there's a building manager or facilities manager on site or the executive committee members, and it's unnecessary angst and stress that's caused to the residents and the visitors as well.

Amanda Farmer: And often expense, because I do recommend as a strata lawyer when clients come to me with this problem, one of the first questions I ask is, "Do you have CCTV? Have you got cameras on that area?" And some clients say, "Yes we do, and

we're definitely using that footage to help us police the problem." Others say, "No, we don't. That's a good idea. Let's get cameras in there." Thousands of dollars, sometimes tens of thousands of dollars of expense to police this problem.

Angelique Mentis: Not only that, but we've actually surveyed hundreds of building and facilities managers, and even where they have someone on-site, strata and facilities and building managers waste about between 10 and 15% of their time addressing the pain point of just parking. So when you add the cost of their salaries and how much of that is actually trying to stop residents or visitors parking in the wrong spaces, as well as the cost of CCTV, for example, it's a huge cost. It's really an unnecessary, huge cost that can be solved. The existing means, whether you get council officers or rangers to come around and fine people, that's another expense, but they're not very effective and you've actually got to be there at the moment that it happens. Then when you do have something like an executive committee member and it ends up being a confrontation, it's terrible.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. Nobody wants to be involved in that. And you're right, the mechanisms available now for dealing with parking problems are incredibly ineffective. And that's why I'm constantly asked questions about how we can better deal with it. And I don't always have the answers. All right. Well, let's get into it. How are you helping our apartment residents to solve this parking challenge?

Angelique Mentis: When I was a resident in an apartment building, I wanted to protect my parking spot. So it came down to my individual parking space. And so what we started doing was looking at a series of bollards, which you can get manual bollards that you can hop in and out of the car, you can install them in your parking space. And, as you would be advising your clients if you own that property within your strata lot and you get approval from the building, you can install something like that.

But then having to get in and out of your vehicle may cause an issue with safety, so we looked at something on an automated basis. So we've got bollards now that operate with a remote control so you don't have to get in and out of your vehicle or even smartphone-operated bollards where you can share access to other people within your family and you don't have to hand around a physical remote control. One of the biggest challenges in underground parking stations is the lack of connectivity for Wi-Fi and mobile data, but the bollards that we have that work from a phone app don't actually require Wi-Fi or mobile data connectivity in those underground basements. So that's a really good way of, for example, allocating visitor parking bays to approved and authorised people so you don't have to hand out whether it's a key or a remote control. So, that's a really easy way to do it.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. So this is really exciting. We are talking about the old-fashioned bollard. It is a column that stands up straight at the end of a parking space, stops unauthorised people from going in and parking in that space. But you've got the added technology that allows this bollard to go up or down at the push of a button, even remotely. So somebody could be in their apartment seven levels up, you tell me if I'm wrong, and be expecting a visitor and be able to open up access to visitor parking from their home when their visitor rolls up at the visitor parking station.

Angelique Mentis: That one is the next generation that we're building at the moment. That one's under wraps, but, yes, that's what we're working towards. And not only that, but it will be integrated into building management platforms. So the whole thing will be able to be automated, and access controls will be able to be shared through an automated platform that even goes through a building management. Whether it's a BuildingLink, or a MYBOS, or whatever sort of building management platform, we anticipate we'll be integrating into all of those systems as well.

So if it's a small building and they've got a smaller budget, they can use something simpler. If it's a larger building and there's a lot of visitor parking bays, and not only residential but commercial as well, this will open up the opportunities to be able to share that on an automated basis, to report infringements, and to notify people of booking times that are rolling over and take that stress and pain out of it. And then further down the track, if buildings allow, possibly to monetise excess capacity where they've got excess visitor parking bays, and that could be used to offset some of the strata levies that they incur. And then that depends on the contract for each building, obviously. So, that's something that will need to be built into by-laws. And then the other thing we can talk about too is EV charging in a minute.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, let's definitely talk about EV charging. But, wow, what a range of possibilities there. So in terms of how the

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technology is being used now, is that with owners who are protecting their own spaces? Is that where we're at at the moment?

Angelique Mentis: No, it's actually a combination of both. So for owners who are protecting their own spaces, they can do that with either a manual bollard, a remote control bollard or a smartphone-operated one, but we have a significant number of buildings that are managing their visitor parking bays through our smartphone bollards. But what that does involve at this point of time, it does involve an administrator enabling access for a visitor. Where we're moving to is that that will all be automated. So somebody will be able to book and reserve their own parking bay and be able to access it without having human intervention by a building manager or an authorised administrator at this point in time.

Amanda Farmer: Got it. Excellent. So it is now, right now, possible to appoint someone in your building, whether it's a building manager, whether it's a secretary, a chair who lives on site, to manage the bollards in a visitor parking area so that residents can perhaps book through that person, say, "Hey, I've got a visitor coming on Tuesday night. They'd like a space. Can you please make that available? I'll send you a text when they roll up, and can you press the button?" Is that how it would work?

Angelique Mentis: It's actually, the visitor will download the app themselves and that they can use their phone to actually lower the bollard themselves. So you don't even need the resident to come down and do it.

Amanda Farmer: Ah, excellent. Okay. So exciting. Tell me, Angelique, are there buildings that you're working with now that have some success stories they want to share or case studies you can share with us to get our listeners even more excited about this technology?

Angelique Mentis: Yes, absolutely. So for example, with holiday rentals, so most people would know Surfers Paradise. The Circle on Cavill is probably the biggest building on the Gold Coast that's holiday apartments. They have our bollards throughout their basement. So when their visitors come in, or they're AirBnBing, they can share their access through either remote control or through their smartphones. We have a number of buildings all across Australia that use it for visitor parking on the smartphone basis. We have complexes like Meriton, for example, use it for all their visitor parking bays on a manual basis.

So the ability to choose across a range of different price points is also very important for different buildings. So the smaller buildings may not have such a big budget or they're not quite so high tech. So it's important to offer them something that falls within their budget but still achieves the job. It may not be automated, but it still solves the parking pain point problem. And also, you have different types of people in buildings. So if you've got an elderly population that are not used to smartphone technology, they prefer a remote control. So we're able to solve a huge number of pain points for different price points and different types of buildings and the residents as well. Hotel complexes, for example, QT in Newcastle have just put in a bunch of these bollards. We've got them in a lot of different places, RSL Clubs.

Amanda Farmer: Are you right across Australia?

Angelique Mentis: Yes, we are right across Australia. Adelaide, we've put in just 100 in a location down there. The other thing is, of course, related to EV charging. As soon as we come into EV charging, all these strata buildings will now be needing to either put in... From 2023, I think it is, next year, they'll be required to have their circuit boards hardwired to allow for EV charging. So if individual parking spaces need to have an EV charging bay, or if a building decides that they will provide EV charging infrastructure in communal parking areas, you need to have a system whereby you can book and reserve that rather than just leave it to accidental charging. And so we're working with EV charging infrastructure suppliers to put our bollards in line and integrate them into their structures as well so that people can book and reserve EV charging bays to charge their vehicles.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. You've mentioned there, Angelique, circuit boards have to be hardwired for EV charging from 2023. I haven't come across that yet. Is that national-based legislation?

Angelique Mentis: So the EV Council is working with, I think it's PICA and the National Construction Code. So draft legislation has been drafted and it's been put out. If it hasn't been put out for comment yet, I might be speaking a little bit ahead. It is due in the

next month, I believe. And that will require all new strata buildings to have their circuitry wired to allow for needed circuit boards. And so we're getting a lot of inquiries from existing strata buildings on how to retrofit and what the processes need to be around that. The New South Wales government has actually put on their website a whole lot of information on what strata buildings can and should do in terms of a process and how to assess that. But we're finding that a lot of the older, existing strata buildings are worried that if they don't do that, it will mean that people will not be attracted to their buildings. So relative to their newer counterparts, the value may drop. So they're really in a position where they need to do this at some point in the next little while.

Amanda Farmer: I agree. We have spoken about that on the podcast previously, and I'll put a link in the show notes to that very helpful, I agree, New South Wales information that is online from our New South Wales government about strata and EV charging. So, good to know that your technology is linking in with that as well, Angelique. In terms of the building's relationship with you and your company, is that a licensing of your software? Is it an annual amount that they pay you? Is it a monthly amount? I'm sure we've got listeners who are very excited and ready to jump right in. How do those practicalities work?

Angelique Mentis: So the ones at the moment, it's an outright sale. So we sell the bollards to the building. We can install them for them. There's very little maintenance to go with them. They run off rechargeable batteries, so you actually don't need to hardwire anything, which is really important to a building. And they're also BCA compliant, so they only go 50 mils into the slab. So they don't come near any embedded services, which is a very big and real concern for strata buildings that you don't want to compromise the slab integrity.

We offer maintenance and support over the phone, but at the moment it's a standalone upfront cost. For the new project we're working on, which will be fully integrated into platforms, there'll be an upfront cost and a monthly subscription that goes with them. But what it gives them is access to a whole lot of data around it, too. So they'll be able to optimise parking. If, for example, a building's by-laws then allow them to rent parking spaces out or to charge for visitor parking after a certain period of time, which is obviously something that's negotiated amongst the contract, we'll be linking into payment gateways. So a building might be able to recoup some money for their strata levies from that. So there will be an upfront cost and a small monthly subscription on that basis.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. Are you overseas as well?

Angelique Mentis: We will be overseas. We will be overseas with the big offer. The big offer is very exciting for us because parking data is very important to cities. And this project we're working on is just the beginning of a bigger play into smart cities and digital twinning for us, because so many facilities and resources are in the underground basements of city buildings, strata buildings, and they're not accessed and used properly. Optimising a strata building has so many benefits for the residents and for the city around it. So we'll be capturing a lot of that data, especially from underground parking basements where people just can't get that at the moment.

Amanda Farmer: I just heard you use the term "digital twinning." I haven't heard that before. What does that mean?

Angelique Mentis: To make our cities smarter, buildings are getting a blueprint of exactly what they look like in a digital format so that, for example, they can optimise their air conditioning or they can improve their solar. So you'll have a digital version, effectively like The Matrix. So it's like a matrix building of yourself and then you've got the actual physical building. So it's the blueprints but in 3D, and then they're being provisioned with sensors that will give data around the building. So if it gets too hot or too cold, you can adjust the shade sails, or the screening, or the film on the building, or if you're pulling solar power from the grid, whether you can put it back into the grid at the time. So to optimise the performance of that building, reduce costs, and then if there's excess capacity or something that you can use, that that can be sold off somewhere else. So it just makes our buildings a whole lot more efficient.

Amanda Farmer: Very interesting. Now, Angelique, I know that you have a legal background as well, and I think it's important that we just give a brief nod to some of the legalities around this type of installation. I know requirements right across the country will be different in our different states. As a New South Wales lawyer, I can say generally speaking that if an owner wanted to install this kind of bollard, if it was on a one-off basis, then you would need to approach your owner's corporation and seek approval for that

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addition to the common property. That would generally be by way of special resolution being passed at a general meeting. And if you're an owners corporation wanting to install this equipment on the common property, then once again, it's an improvement or an upgrade and therefore requiring a special resolution at a general meeting. Do you have anything you want to add to that, Angelique, your experience with clients maybe going through that process around the country?

Angelique Mentis: No, that's exactly right, Amanda, and it's pretty common across most states in Australia. We always advise our customers to check with their body corporate that they've got approval to install it before doing so. As I mentioned before, the biggest concerns are that it doesn't compromise the integrity of the slab. So it's BCA compliant, doesn't hit any embedded services. And the other thing we find buildings wanting to do is, so they don't get a hodgepodge of all different sorts of bollards or different sorts of solutions, they will often adopt something in their by-laws that says, "Okay, we are going to approve the following types of bollards."

You can choose one of one, two, or three models. That gives them consistency and also gives them confidence around the quality of the product, that they're not going to have things broken or ripped out that just don't work anymore, and people aren't going to get dodgy sort of things that don't work and actually compromise the value of the building in that sort of circumstance. So we find that works really well. And then they've got a by-law in there that says you can do one, two, or three, and then the residents can go off and purchase them themselves. Other buildings we have the building will actually purchase a bulk order and then they will sell it individually to the unit holders. And then that way they can access some volume discounts and stuff like that. And they, again, ensure consistency across the building.

Amanda Farmer: Great. I love all the different options here and the flexibility that you've built in. What should be the first step for our listeners who want to get started solving a parking problem in their community?

Angelique Mentis: They should, first of all, discuss it amongst themselves in the committee and decide what path that they want to go along. And then if they want to contact us, just pick up the phone or email us. Hop on our website. We have a huge amount of information. We've got demos there, product specifications, case studies, examples of where they're used at thatmyspot.com.au. And we'd be happy to chat anytime.

Amanda Farmer: thatmyspot.com.au. We'll make sure that that link as well as Angelique's contact details are in the show notes for this episode. Wonderful to be covering this off with you, Angelique. I think that you are absolutely solving a big problem that residents in our strata buildings are experiencing. No doubt you're run off your feet with these installations. Very creative, and I'm looking forward to seeing this next generation of technology unfold here and overseas. Very proud to have that technology originating here, and look forward to chatting with you again soon.

Angelique Mentis: Thank you very much, Amanda. It's been fun.

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?