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YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 334. Do EVs and strata mix?

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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.

Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome to this week's podcast episode. I'm your host, Amanda Farmer, and my guest this week is me. I'm doing something a little different today. A few weeks ago I was interviewed by Emily Bobis for the Byte Size Podcast, a series where Emily speaks to traffic and mobility experts, discusses innovations, and highlights business leaders within transport and city planning. What does all that have to do with Strata Law? You might think? Well, Emily invited me onto her show to talk about electric vehicle charging in Strata, and I felt that this was such an important, relevant, timely conversation that I asked Emily for permission to share her episode exactly as she published it here with you on our podcast. And Emily generously agreed. A little bit about Emily Bobis before I take you over to her show, Emily is passionate about building businesses, customer-led design, thought leadership marketing, women in tech, and projects that have a tangible impact on our everyday lives.

Emily was a finalist in the 2022 New South Wales Young Woman of the Year Awards and is a co-founder of Compass IOT, creating road intelligence software using connected car data that helps transport professionals build better, safer cities. Now in this chat with Emily, I talk about how important it is for our Strata communities to start thinking about the role of electric vehicle infrastructure in their buildings, both for current occupiers with electric vehicles and the many future owners and occupiers who will be looking to live in and invest in buildings where they and their tenants are able to charge their cars. Not being a Strata Law podcast, unlike ours, I only touch briefly in this chat on the legal regime that is in place to ensure it's easier than ever before to install this type of sustainability infrastructure in our Strata buildings. If you want to get started with this process in your building, then you want to get your hands on a template by-law for the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

As always, I have you covered in that department. I have just uploaded to the website a copy of my own template EV Charging by-law, which includes the necessary motions you'll need to resolve to comply with the relevant provisions of our New South Wales legislation. The EV charging template pack is free to members of Your Strata Property online community. If you're not a member, it is just \$197. You can access your copy over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/evcharging.

If you're a member and you want your free copy, just log on in to the member portal and hit the resources library. The template pack is a fully editable Word document. It is suitable for situations where there is an individual owner wanting to install EV charging infrastructure at their parking space, and that owner is prepared to meet all the associated costs and to take on responsibility for the future repair and maintenance of the equipment. You will need a by-law and a specific set of motions to make all of that possible, and I am happy to make my template available to you. You can find out more over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/evcharging and get your hands on that template pack. For now, I'll take you on over to an episode of the Byte Size Podcast with Emily Bobis featuring yours truly. Enjoy.

Emily Bobis: Welcome to Byte Size, a series where we highlight innovation across transport, mobility, and smart cities and meet the people that are making it happen. My name is Emily Bobis. I'm a road intelligence startup founder, and my goal is to combat the stigma that transport is uncool, uninteresting, and uninspired. Amanda, thanks so much for coming on to the show to chat with me today.

Amanda Farmer: My pleasure, Emily. Thanks for having me.

Emily Bobis: I was wondering if you could tell the listeners a little bit more about your background and a few things that you are passionate about.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, sure. Well, I am a lawyer, specifically a property lawyer, and I help apartment owners to demystify the legal complexities of apartment living. And I use the word apartments because across our country we may refer to apartment living differently. Some people refer to it as strata living. Some refer to it as body corporates. We use the term owners corporations, but basically, I help people who live in these multi-unit dwellings to get through the day-to-day craziness. I often use that word.

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Anybody in apartments or had some experience of apartments might be familiar with the many layers of complexity, the different rules, the regulations, the way that we all make sure we live together as peacefully as possible. That's my bag.

Emily Bobis: Totally. And as someone who lives in an apartment building, I can definitely resonate with having to deal with a lot of those extra complexities. So I was hoping you could tell us a little bit more about Your Strata Property. So I know there's like a podcast attached to it, but I thought I would get you to probably tell me more about it in your own words.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, sure. So I have been practising as a lawyer for about 15 years now, and when I started my legal practice, I decided that I would specialise in serving those who were living in a managing apartment community. So I became a specialist strata and community title lawyer, and that has kept me very busy. Within the first few years of practice, I decided that I'd like to reach more people, be able to communicate these complexities in a way that could help owners in particular to understand how they could live more peacefully in their properties. So I decided to start a podcast, and that podcast is called Your Strata Property, and it has been running for over six years now. We've just published episode number 327.

So we have an episode that goes out once a week and with the success of the podcast and listeners coming to me saying, "Amanda, we love it. This is exactly the information we need", I built an online membership community around that also, where I work with owners and strata managers online through a Q&A forum where they can log in and ask me questions to help them solve their problems. We have lots of resources, templates, webinars, all sorts of helpful education that happens in there. So a big part of my business now as well as still doing the one-to-one legal advice and legal services, I also provide a lot of education through the online world and also doing face-to-face education as well.

Emily Bobis: Excellent. I will definitely be putting some of these things in the show notes as well, so if anyone's interested, there will be links in the sub-stack and probably in the body of the episode when it's actually published as well for this episode... So normally I do the very typical podcast thing where I fire a bunch of questions off at you, but when I was actually doing my research for this episode, I found it quite difficult because there's so much conflicting and like you said, complex information about strata plans and particularly around integrating electric vehicles because obviously, that's where our two industries collide at the transport in smart cities and then the strata side. So I wanted to do a bit of a game called Truth or Myth. The gist, it's pretty simple, is I have a bunch of statements about electric vehicles and how they relate to strata schemes and you can tell me as the name suggests, whether it's a truth or a myth. Does that sound like a good plan?

Amanda Farmer: Sounds like fun. Let's do it.

Emily Bobis: Perfect. So the first one on my list, I've got quite a few, so we'll see how we go. Truth or myth, it's not a good idea to buy an EV if you live in an apartment building.

Amanda Farmer: I am going to say that is a myth. I could take a very lawyering answer, which is, "Oh, it depends. It depends on what type of building you are living in." But I'm going to commit and I'm going to say that is a myth. Whilst you might be a little bit ahead of the curve, definitely the world of electric vehicle charging in apartment buildings is changing and it's changing really quickly. And your listeners being interested in transport and smart cities probably know that there are ambitious targets right across our country to half our emissions by 2030. And our apartment buildings play a huge role in that because we have almost 10% of the Australian population living in apartments.

So if our governments are going to reach their targets, then they have to connect with, engage, enroll apartment residents in this project. And we can talk a little bit more about how they're doing that. But I think for all of those reasons, it is a good idea to buy an electric vehicle. Even if you live in an apartment building. There's a few steps you might want to take specific to your building, like checking whether there are charging facilities in place yet, and if not, then understanding what the process is to have those installed. But I certainly don't think it should stop you from buying an electric vehicle.

Emily Bobis: So I'm going to jump ahead in my list of truth on myths, given that you did mention government support and

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government being involved in the process. So truth or myth, there is government support in New South Wales for funding electric vehicle infrastructure within apartments or strata schemes.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. So that is true. I know New South Wales in particular has committed over \$170 million to help build electric vehicle charging infrastructure over the next four years. I think that all different states will have their funding regimes. I think New South Wales has probably the most generous investment and it was just announced, I think it was with the 2023 budget, that \$10 million in particular is being put towards funding around 125 medium to large apartment buildings that have more than 100 car parking spaces to build their EV charging upgrades. So we do have specific funding for apartment buildings and I think that's only going to increase. I think that's just the start of what we're going to be seeing. So yes, there's definitely a generous and expansive funding arrangement in place.

Emily Bobis: That is interesting because I think as you mentioned, every state has their own EV and electric vehicle infrastructure or incentives and plans and New South Wales did recently update them. It used to be not too good and then they added in a bunch of things to try and make it more, I think more attractive, I think to a wider range of people. Because until then it was a bit ridiculous. It was the taxes that you got were the luxury car tax because they were so expensive, which is a bit inhibiting for a lot of people.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I think we're only going to see it become easier because we've come out with these ambitious goals and we've got to be able to reach those goals. I think there's no shying away from the goals, but as you say, when we look a little bit more closely about the policies in place to achieve those goals, some of them were a bit unrealistic. So we've seen a lot of movement just in the last couple of months in this space from what I'm reading anyway.

Emily Bobis: Yes, totally. So next truth or myth, body corporate would have to undertake expensive energy supply upgrades to facilitate charging. So I think a lot of people or strata schemes themselves think, "Well, if I'm going to have all these vehicles in my building using my electric infrastructure, it's going to cause surging and the facilities can't cope", basically.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I've been reading a lot about that as well. And I'm going to say that this is a myth. I am first and foremost a lawyer. Okay, I'm not an energy supplies specialist or in any way technical. So please do take what I'm saying here with a grain of salt and certainly make your own enquiries with the relevant experts. But my understanding is that this anxiety around surges and the grid not being able to cope and perhaps a buildings energy supply system itself not being able to cope, they're a little bit misplaced and maybe there's a little bit of scaremongering going on there. It really depends, as I understand it, how many vehicles are charging at the same time and what time of the day it is and what else is being used in the property. And studies have been done to show that really the likelihood of many vehicles all charging at the same time in the same place is very, very low.

People drive their cars at different times, they work different hours, they work in different places. They are not going to be charging their vehicles all at the same time. Now that's not to say that if you're in an older building, you're not going to require some kind of upgrade to your system to be able to facilitate EV charging. But what I'm seeing in buildings that I'm working with and people that I've spoken to on my own podcast is that as time goes on, the technology is getting much more sophisticated and there's actually a number of different options for installing this infrastructure in your building that makes it cheaper. That means there are different ways to install the infrastructure that may not be as invasive or intrusive that may not require upgrades. There's a few different options and it's not always as expensive as you think it might be.

Emily Bobis: Yes, I think you are very right, I think in picking the word anxiety. Particularly, if, and I think this goes on to the next truth or myth, if you actually own the apartment, and for those of us who maybe are not familiar in the audience, if you own the apartment you don't have just to pay your utilities, but you also have levies that you would pay towards strata and capital works costs. So the next truth or myth, it doesn't matter if you own an electric vehicle or not. Everyone in the building would incur a cost for the use and the installation of charging infrastructure.

Amanda Farmer: That is a myth. Or at least it can be a myth if that's not how your building wants to set it up. Okay. So it is

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possible legally, and this is where the lawyer hat does go on, and it's important to seek legal advice on these issues if you're going down this path. It is possible for one owner to install infrastructure for their car and to have the responsibility for that infrastructure for its ongoing repair and maintenance and to meet the costs associated with that infrastructure. There are legal mechanisms in place to make sure that that can happen in that way.

And if that's the case for one owner then if you had 20 out of 30 owners, for example, only 20 have parking spaces and 10 don't, so they're not wanting to contribute to the infrastructure. It is possible through a clearly and carefully drafted by-law, that is a rule that is registered on the title to the property. If your by-law is very carefully drafted, there is a way that you can have only those 20 owners who are getting the benefit of the infrastructure to be the ones who are paying for the infrastructure. So it's possible. It is something that you want to get legal advice on. It will be very specific to your building and to your setup. But this is a myth that I think is scaring people away from going further down the path of investigating EVs.

Emily Bobis: Yes, it's a good point that you brought up as well about whether or not your apartment even has a car spot inside your apartment building or strata scheme. Because I was just thinking the apartment that I'm currently in does not have a car space. So I can see a lot of people would probably be afraid of being hit with extra charges for infrastructure that they don't even have the capacity to use even if they wanted to.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, yes. It's a legitimate concern, but it can be dealt with through the legal framework, definitely. There is a solution to it.

Emily Bobis: Okay, so my other truth or myth, if no one in the building currently owns an electric vehicle, then we don't need to plan any infrastructure for electric vehicle charging.

Amanda Farmer: That is a big one and it's a big myth. Now this is something that I think about from my perspective as an apartment resident, but also as an investor in apartments. I really want my building to be on the front foot here. Even if we don't have residents with electric vehicles, there are absolutely electric vehicles driving around on our roads and maybe the building that is very similar to mine two doors down has charging facilities. And when one of those apartments is up for rent and my apartment might be in competition for that rental, if there is a tenant who is ready, willing, and happy to move in with their electric vehicle, they're going to choose the building that's two doors down because they have the charging facilities.

You don't know if purchasers, if potential tenants are writing off your building and just not coming to inspect because they know it doesn't have EV charging. So you could be really missing an opportunity here to add value to your investment. And even if you live in the building, then absolutely, our properties that we own as Australians are usually our single most important financial investment. This is something that you want to be on the front foot with and I think you ignore this change, which is coming. It is here. It is moving quickly. You ignore this at your peril.

Emily Bobis: That is an interesting perspective because I hadn't actually considered that as from the tenant perspective to be like, "Oh, well I actually have a vehicle and I have an electric vehicle. How do I reconcile needing to find a place to rent but also charging my car?"

Amanda Farmer: And we're going to be seeing more of that maybe in particular areas, first of all, and then more widespread I think. But you don't know if you are missing out on opportunities to rent your apartment at a higher rent or to get a better sale price because EV owners are taking you off the list. They're not even coming around to have a look because they know you don't have charging facilities. And this will be something. I predict buildings that do have this infrastructure are going to be shouting it from the rooftops. I would be, if my building had it. I would be saying to my selling agent, to my letting agent, put it on the brochure, put it in the realestate.com ad that there is EV charging facilities. Because my market then broadens significantly and it's only going to get bigger as we move forward.

Emily Bobis: Yes, cool. Interesting. Okay, so that's the end of my list of truth or myths, but I was curious as to whether you had

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come across any other misconceptions around EV-ready infrastructure in strata schemes that you think are important to highlight.

Amanda Farmer: Look, I think we've covered the main ones there. I do see our communities struggling with this. I work with owners, I work with strata committees, I work with strata managers, and it is an emotive and emotional issue. For some people, it's a political issue. For some people, it's purely a financial issue. They don't want to spend money on upgrades or installations and for others, it's just not even on the agenda. So every community's different. And for those who are managing these communities, whether as a strata committee member or as a strata manager, I'm seeing the difficulties of managing all those different points of view. So I know one strata manager said to me recently that she was talking to a strata committee and they were talking about a resident who wanted EV charging to be installed. And one of the strata committee members said, "Well, we don't put petrol pumps in our basement parking, so why would we put EV charging infrastructure?"

So I mean, I don't know where you start with responding to that kind of a comment, but it just shows you where some people's points of view are. And everybody's coming at this from a different angle. And when you live in these buildings where you may have hundreds of different people with different points of view and different angles, it can be hard to bring everybody together. So I think that community piece, that more maybe emotional piece is going to be a tough one to wrangle, set aside the funding and the tech and the legalities. Our communities are really going to have to come together on a personal level to make sure we can reach these targets.

Emily Bobis: Do you think that there's better educational resources that could be made available because from the sounds of what you've mentioned, a lot of it seems to be anxiety or fear-based, very similar to why people wouldn't want to buy an EV in the first place because of range anxiety and like, "Oh, what if I wanted to do this one thing that I don't even do in my petrol powered vehicle, but if I wanted to I couldn't do it in an EV?" Yes. Do you think it's that we need more clear places that we can get this kind of information to help demystify?

Emily Bobis: What kind of comes through in a lot of these questions is stakeholder management, I think. So from your experience and these case studies that you've kind of been a part of, what practical tips or advice would you have for either strata managers or maybe someone who is in a strata scheme that wants to put forward a motion to install EV infrastructure? Or even just start a discussion about that kind of infrastructure?

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I think definitely get informed. There's more and more information out there almost on a weekly basis. Before having this chat, I did my quick Google update to just see what had changed in the space, and there's a lot that has. There's a lot changing every week. So try and access that education as best you can. Whether it's podcasts like this, whether it's government websites, owner advocacy groups. We have the Owners Corporation network, OCN in New South Wales, which is doing great work in this space, and just inform yourself as an owner or even as a strata manager to understand what this is all about on an individual level in a building. Definitely check the current by-laws for your building, also known as the rules in Victoria. Have a look at whether there's anything in the by-laws that relates to electric vehicle charging or the installation of what we call sustainability infrastructure.

So we have this general term in strata law, sustainability infrastructure, which includes EV charging solar panels, LED lighting, anything that improves the energy efficiency in a building and in an apartment. If you've got some kind of rules already in place about the installation of that infrastructure, it's really important that you know what those rules are and what the processes are for then applying for approval to have your infrastructure installed. And that probably means having a chat to the strata committee members, to the strata manager, the body corporate manager if you have one, letting them know what your plans are. "Hey, I've got an EV or I'm about to buy an EV. I noticed we don't have any charging facilities, we don't have any by-laws. How do we get this process underway?" And starting that conversation. That's always a good first step.

Emily Bobis: So we've talked about quite a lot. There was a lot of truths and myths and things in there, but out of everything we've talked about today, what do you think you would want the key takeaway to be for listeners?

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Amanda Farmer: I think the key takeaway would be, even if you are an apartment resident, one of those lucky people I say to be an apartment resident, don't write off electric vehicles. I think absolutely you can have an electric vehicle and live happily and peacefully in an apartment building. At the moment, the law is on your side, the political zeitgeist is on your side, the funding is on your side. Now is the time to be having that conversation with your community about getting infrastructure in place. If not for your electric vehicle, then knowing that there are going to be residents purchases in the future who will want to come to your building or should want to come to your building and they will have electric vehicles. It is just beyond question that that is going to be the way of the future. So start having these conversations now and don't get sucked in by, don't get overwhelmed by the anxiety provoking content that might be out there. Inform yourself from informed sources, get educated, understand what the myths are, what the truths are, and stick to your guns. We're all going to get there.

Emily Bobis: Lovely. So how can people connect with you or find out more about your strata property and the stuff that you are doing as well?

Amanda Farmer: Yes, thanks Emily. My website is probably the best place to connect with me, that is yourstrataproperty.com.au. Lots of free resources there for apartment residents, owners, managers. That's where you can access the weekly podcast as well. I'm also over on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram @yourstrataproperty](#). Love to see you over there.

Emily Bobis: Perfect. Well, Amanda, thanks so much for your time and for chatting to me about EVs and Strata.

Amanda Farmer: My pleasure. Anytime.

Emily Bobis: If you'd like to learn more about any of the guests that we have on the podcast, more about Byte Size or more about Compass IOT, the company that produces this podcast, you can visit our website, which is www.compassiot.com.au. Until next time.