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YSP Podcast Transcript: 412. Would you choose strata over a terrace house?

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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 the podcast. I'm your host, strata lawyer Amanda Farmer. It is great to be here with you this week. An article in the Sydney Morning Herald just a few days ago at the time that I'm recording this, announced that the New South Wales premier Chris Minns is launching an international housing design competition for a Sydney terrace and mid-rise apartment design for the next century to help solve the housing crisis.

Apparently, winners of this design competition will be included in a pattern book that will contain about six architect design plans suitable for less complicated sites to fast-track approvals. Now a little bit of chat about this article over on LinkedIn in the strata professional circles. Cathy Sherry, always ready with an insightful comment on planning and housing policy, said that she supports the idea of terrace houses being part of the solution to our housing crisis and noted in particular that there are almost no legal disputes in relation to non-strata terraces.

The tricky thing, said Cathy, will be determining the need for shared land and space. As soon as you decide to have a shared car park, driveway, roof, solar panels, or garden, you are deciding to have strata title posted. Cathy we desperately need planners, architects and councils to start thinking about alternatives to strata. Is that shared space worth all of the legal complexity? Cathy says the answer to that question might be yes, but it has to be thought through.

Now, in reading this Sydney Morning Herald article and the reader comments on it, I was reminded of one of our guests over on Friday Live. That is our fortnightly chat over on the Your Strata Property Facebook page. The guest I was reminded of was Kareem Tawansi. I chatted to Kareem at the end of last year, December 2023, and in sharing his background in strata, Kareem mentioned that he had once lived in a terrace house in inner-city Sydney and that the best thing about terrace houses, said Kareem, is the outside.

They are not the best to live in, at least not our old Sydney stock. So while he loved living in the inner city, Kareem eventually decided to opt for an apartment as a more modern, more comfortable option and enjoy the best of both worlds inner city living with light, space and ease. Now I listened back to the recording of that chat with Kareem and I enjoyed it so much that I have decided to bring it to you today on the podcast.

Not only is Kareem a strata owner, he sits on a couple of strata committees, and what he was sharing with us last December were the steps that he took in one of his buildings to get a \$2.7 million improvement project across the line. He describes that journey, he calls it, in the type of detail that I know will be helpful to many of you, not just for improvement projects, but for those of you who are just trying to get expensive repair or remedial works projects across the line while keeping your communities intact.

And that word expensive just goes hand in hand with strata remedial works. Now you will hear a number of pieces of gold from Kareem in this chat, including his recognition that he doesn't just own an apartment, he is a part owner of all of the common property, and in that way apartments are not at all like little houses, which is what some people mistake them for, only to enter a world of pain when they realise that other people can and are making decisions that impact their own home.

But as Kareem says, that's strata. He talks about the importance of using the empathy muscle, how to stay calm and not take tough situations personally, and how he has tapped into a support network of other owners and strata professionals to make sure that his education in strata is as thorough as it can be, helping him make more informed decisions and fulfil a valuable leadership role for the communities that he's part of now.

Kareem and his strata committee are members of the Your Strata Property online community and you'll hear Kareem talk about that. If you are interested in joining Kareem and the other switched-on people Kareem talks about inside our online membership

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community, then there has never been a better time. As we get closer to the end of the financial year, only a couple of weeks to go until the 30th of June.

At the time of recording this, we are also getting closer to the membership price rise that's happening on the 1 July, the price of our membership subscriptions will increase by at least 18% on the 1 July. That is for new members joining us from that date onwards, there is no price increase for current members. I want to make that really clear. The current price for a monthly owner membership is \$67.

After midnight on the 30th of June, that price is increasing to dollar 79. So if you are not yet a your strata property member, membership will never be as cheap as it is today. If you've been thinking about joining us on the inside, now's the time to come on in and for the life of your membership, you will secure that \$67 a month pricing. You'll actually pay even less than that if you choose to pay annually.

As you're hearing, current members are not subject to future price rises, so the earlier you get in, the less you'll pay for the life of your membership. Even though the value of what's available to our members on the inside increases each month, the place to go to find out more and join us is stratamembership.com. Now, if you're tuning in and you are a member and you have a friend, a neighbour, a colleague, a family member who you know will love our membership community and will benefit from all that we share, do encourage them to join us before the 1st of July so they can get that current pricing before it goes up.

Now, I know some of you have been doing that because I've seen new members joining us over the last couple of weeks who were telling me that they were referred by their friends. So that is really great to hear that you are out there supporting each other to secure your lifetime membership saving head over to strata.membership.com. With that, I will take you over now to my chat with Kareem Tawansi.

Amanda Farmer: It is time to welcome in our guest for this week and I can tell by how many eyes we got here live that today's topic, and today's promises have piqued your interest. Our guest this week is Kareem Tawansi. Kareem is a tech entrepreneur with over 30 years of experience building highly innovative, sometimes world-first digital platforms for use by both businesses and consumers. Kareem has a degree in psychology and computer science.

I want you to listen carefully to Kareem's skillset here because it may have some hints as to why he and his community are so successful when it comes to strata issues. Kareem is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He sits on advisory boards with a specialty in digital technologies, innovation and cyber security. Now, Kareem says that he discovered the joys, and in Kareem's notes here, joys in quotation marks of strata management.

About four years ago, after noticing many years before that, this space is quite far behind when it comes to tech. Kareem's been the owner of a strata property since 2003, and I say Kareem is one of those committee members who we all wish for, someone who is experienced in corporate governance, who is tech savvy, who is energetic, who is forward thinking. Kareem has also given me his permission to share that his strata committee are members of the Your Strata Property online membership community.

You will have seen on the screen earlier that Kareem and I have previously had a one-on-one chat inside the membership, and if you want to hear more from Kareem after today, then our members can definitely access the recording of that chat in the member video library. I titled that chat how to disagree agreeably. And Kareem might be able to share some of that with us today as he joins us.

Welcome, Kareem.

Kareem Tawansi: Hi, Amanda. Very happy to be here today.

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Amanda Farmer: So happy to have you here with us, Kareem. As I can see, those who are here live, tuning in, are too keen to hear from you. Now, I've just given a bit of your background there. I'm going to invite you to share a bit more about you, maybe about your building, and your position on the strata committee. I know that you're involved in a few committees across a few buildings, so fill us in on your strata background.

Kareem Tawansi: Okay, so, as you mentioned, the property in which I live, I've had since 2003, I'm actually involved in four buildings. I'm the secretary of two. So the one I'm in is 54 lots, and the other one that I'm secretary of is 164 lots. So I think there's a bit of a division between 101 and sub-100. So there's like different legislation around there. They actually operate quite differently, which is interesting for me because I get to see a sort of a diverse set of challenges to deal with.

But I also am working with two very different committees. Thankfully, though, both committees are very constructive and things are being done in both buildings, but in quite a different way. And one of the things I've been doing is trying to use technology to help the buildings. And I won't go into any detail right now, but it does make a bit of difference from an organizational perspective, because I think there's a lot of organizational matters involved in strata, and some of those things, I think, if not handled correctly, can cause some friction. And that's sort of part of what I'm trying to do, is to try to take out that friction from people's lives who live in strata.

Amanda Farmer: Yeah, well, look, speak to the tech. To the extent that you're comfortable with that you're using. I know that it's very likely that we'll have you back on the show, whether it's on a podcast or on a Friday live chat in the future, to talk about some of those innovations, let's say, when the time is right.

Today, I wanted to dig a little deeper into a specific project that your building has been working on and some wins and some challenges you've had around that. Before I get there, you said you live in strata, you sit on four committees, you own in a couple of different strata buildings. I'm going to make the assumption that you like living in strata, that you like owning in strata so what is it? What attracts you to this?

Kareem Tawansi: Strata is wonderful. It's wonderful, but it's also crazy at the same time. I came across you about four years ago, and prior to that, I was like, probably like most owners, I really kind of avoided it. I didn't really think about it, and the mindset I had was that I live in a space that is mine, like a house connected to a whole bunch of other houses.

I didn't really have any concept of the fact that I don't really own my apartment as such, I'm a part owner of all the common property, and nor did I have any understanding of all the legislation that governs it and the idea of true communal living. So the last four years since coming across you has been a real journey for me in discovering the ins and outs of strata.

Now, I'm not a trained lawyer, although I have, in my career, I've spent a lot of time with lawyers, but I have spent quite a bit of time trying to get my head around the related law. I'm based in New South Wales, obviously, so it's the Strata Schemes Management Act 2015, so there's a lot of that involved. And as I was saying off camera, I was out on Friday night seeing a band, and I was half thinking about the music and half thinking about strata,

Amanda Farmer: And I said, welcome to my life constant.

Kareem Tawansi: I think the thing about strata is it's one of these things where there's a lot of rules. I mean, ultimately, strata is about rules, and those rules are either in legislation or in by-laws. But the funny thing about it, where the friction comes from, is I think people treat it a lot more subjectively than that. It's a lot more personal, because this is a very large investment for them, and so it does create some friction.

Now, with regards to living in strata, I live in Surry Hills, and for anybody that's spending time in Surry Hills, Surry Hills has lots of very beautiful terrace houses, and I've lived in four terrace houses in my life. And I can tell you the best part of a terrace house is the outside. They're very pretty to look at, but they're not great to live in, regardless of whether or not they're renovated.

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And I apologize if any of the viewers love their terrace houses. Maybe I've been unlucky, but I love living in Surry Hills. So my choice is either live in a terrace house and all the things that go with that, or living in an apartment. So I live in an apartment that looks. Well, actually, it's a bit high. So looks down onto the terrace houses. So it's sort of the best of both worlds for me, really.

The only challenge, of course, is navigating through all the issues around strata. And so that's something that I've been getting better at. And at some point, we're going to talk about what my AGM, which occurred last week, because there's a bit of a story with that.

Amanda Farmer: Yeah, look, I think we can jump straight into that. I know you were tuning into Friday live last week, and I was talking about my AGM that I attended a few days prior. And I was saying it went for 40 minutes, it was fantastic. And we all sort of had our flak jackets on and were prepared for a bit of conflict. Didn't happen. And I spoke to how we were able to manage that and I. And you were there, Kareem live, and everyone's gonna know who you are. Now, you posted in hours when I think it was 3 hours. Was it?

Kareem Tawansi: 3 hours? Yeah, 3 hours.

Amanda Farmer: All right, so maybe take us back a few steps as to why you were having a three-hour AGM. What this important topic was. What is this project that your building has been working on?

Kareem Tawansi: Okay, so our building was built in the late eighties, and as you can imagine, it's dated quite a bit. And meanwhile, all the beautiful terraces have been upgraded on. It's double-fronted. So on both of the streets, all the terraces are all renovated and they all look really nice. Our building still has an eighties look. So previous versions of the strata committee decided that we're going to embark on a journey of upgrades and some renovations. And so it was divided up into stages, and stage one was an internal courtyard uplift. And that happened in sort of 2013, which is a whole decade ago.

And then the committee obviously was starting to plan stage two, which was the external upgrade. Now, meanwhile, there's been a whole bunch of things going on at the committee level. And by the way, I hadn't joined the committee at this stage. I didn't really know much about this, details of what was going on until I looked back once I had joined the committee. And so apparently there was all kinds of fights between various committee members.

So we had engaged an architect, he put together some designs, and I think that started in 2016, 2017. But come 2019, we still haven't made any progress. And I was invited by a committee member to join the renovations working group or subcommittee. So I got involved with that and then I joined the committee in November 2019. So we started the process to push the project forward. And then Covid hit and everything sort of slowed down.

So post-COVID, I picked up the mantle, kept on pushing and pushing. I did thousands of hours worth of work, and you can imagine there's so many moving parts here. So of course, you've got all the funding on one side and then you've got all the works on the other. And because we hadn't been spending money on the building as we should be, and for reasons that I don't pass any judgment on, because I wasn't involved with previous decisions, we sort of had a backlog of remediation work.

So we had sort of remediation work, renovation work. But on top of that, we had the whole insurance drama that everybody else, I think, has been going through, where our insurance company said, you've got some engineering reports here that say you have all these structural issues, and if you don't get them fixed, we're not going to reinsure you. So when that was discussed, of course, that threw the cat amongst the pigeons with regards to the owners worrying about losing insurance.

So we had all these things going on, and meanwhile, we had a cohort of newer owners buy into the building at the height of COVID. So they probably paid quite a bit, but interest rates were low. A portion of those new owners, as things progressed, were resistant to spending extra money on renovations. So we ended up with a schism in the building. And so there were a lot of the existing owners who have known about these renovations for some time, and a portion of the new owners who have bought in knowing renovations weren't going to occur.

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But there was also a portion of the new owners who didn't want their innovations to occur, at least not now. And so we had all these, if you like, disagreements around what we should do, when we should do it, how much it'll cost, et cetera, et cetera. Then, of course, I mean, it took a long time to get all the information together, to put together a motion for the AGM.

But finally, with the assistance of some other owners, we put together the pack, created an appendix to the agenda, and we put it out for a collection of votes. And so what I learned along the way is even though we had approved the designs and changing of common property by special resolution in 2019, we needed an ordinary resolution for the funding. So we just needed a 50% vote to get this over the line.

Amanda Farmer: Can I just stop you there, Kareem, and just clarify for our viewers? So we're talking about this project involved repair and maintenance work that needed to be done and was long overdue. It also involved upgrading, I think you mentioned it was the facade of the building, the external, basically pretty building up, and you needed to borrow funds to do all of the above.

Kareem Tawansi: So we had actually saved quite a bit in our capital works fund. And then the question was, what were we going to do to fund the gap? And we looked into strata loans, the hybrid loan company that, whose name escapes me, but Australia, which I picked up from watching your shows. But there was a bit of trepidation among some of the owners around actually having a loan going, because it's not. The thought process was, it wasn't a good look to have a loan.

So what I was trying to do was to come up with a solution that try to take into account all the various thought processes. And so we have a particular DA. It has a scope of works. But my understanding was we've got five years from the time we start the project to the time we end the project to get all the scope done. So what I ended up doing was proposing a reduced scope, had most things in it, but we just took one or two things, big-ticket items out to bring down the cost.

And then to fill the gap, we would have a special levy that would be amortized over a long period. And so that's what I brought to the owners corporation at the AGM, rather than a strata loan, if that makes sense.

Amanda Farmer: Right. And so you were your AGM. That happened last week. You were bringing a motion, you'd already passed the special resolutions for the upgrade work, otherwise this was repair and maintenance work, so we didn't need a special resolution. But you do need a resolution for the funding. And what was being proposed, was it just the one option on the table, special levy?

Kareem Tawansi: Yes, that was the only option. We couldn't do a hybrid loan because it wasn't enough so we could do a regular loan. But I took on board. I think it's really important when you've got 54 owners, you've got so many different opinions. So what I was trying to do was to cater as many as possible.

And so I sort of got feet, let's call it feedback from one side saying, we don't want to spend any money, and you're sort of pushing to spend money. And then I have it from the other side saying, well, we want all the renovations, and you're capitulating to the other side. So sometimes when you annoy everybody, it's probably because you're doing the right thing. So what I brought in the end was what I thought was the best possible compromise to get as many people over the line as possible.

Amanda Farmer: And did you have any formal process for gathering this feedback or asking for this feedback? Or are there committee meetings happening here where owners are being kept up to date? How's that working?

Kareem Tawansi: Okay, great question. Again, it's probably under the headline of radical transparency. So I ended up becoming the secretary by default because our actual secretary had some health issues and had to step back. And I remember listening to you about making sure that you engage as many people as possible. And so I think sometimes, people sometimes think the best thing is not to engage people too early because they'll start to give you negative feedback and slow you down. The reality is that's going to come anyway, so you might as well engage people early on in the piece. And so I was very active in inviting people to come to strata committee meetings, also inviting them to speak at meetings.

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We created a building-wide WhatsApp group, but there was some discussions going on there. And then I held a few town halls as well. So I'd hop online, send out links to people and people could ask questions and I'd point them to the direction where all the content was, etcetera. So that was ongoing and that was probably 18 months worth of effort there in terms of 18 months from beginning to the AGM.

Amanda Farmer: So you put the agenda pack together. It has this proposal for a special levy to fill this gap in funding. The agenda goes out. You've got by law at least seven days. The owners are sitting with that agenda. What's happening in that period before the AGM? You get angry emails, text messages, knocks on the door.

Kareem Tawansi: Okay, so you know the questions to ask, don't you? So it came down to three motions. And the first motion, so what we did was we partitioned off the motion that addressed the items that the insurance company had raised. And the good news was it was only about 35k. So I knew that, that motion was going to be a no brainer. I don't think there was going to be any hesitation around that one. Then the next two motions. One was the money and then two.

And the advice I got from our strata manager was also get approval for the preferred builder because you don't want to be making that decision without the owners corporation. So those two are sort of hand in hand. Meanwhile, there was conversations going on about it, there were questions being asked. And you can imagine at this point there were two camps. And I was the public face of the pro renovations camp.

But if you like, the leader of the other camp was quite a formidable opponent. He is very articulate, very well educated, has a law degree, but is a journalist for one of the major newspapers. Son of a law professor. Very good at saying what he wants to say in a really calm fashion, which is very important in strata, because you lose cool and you sort of lose your audience a bit.

And he was one of the newer owners, and he said quite openly that he didn't really want to be spending the money now. So what I have pieced together since then is that there was his camp, and then there was my camp, and then there was the unknowns, and then there was the people that were known, but were sort of in between. And really that was the battleground, the people.

Amanda Farmer: Like any good political exercise.

Kareem Tawansi: I never signed up to be a politician, but I found myself being a politician.

Amanda Farmer: Yeah.

Kareem Tawansi: And I think the interesting thing about all of this was the one thing about this, it's a very emotional topic because you have people who have spent so much of their money to buy a property that they think it's their home, right? And they feel that they should be allowed to do what they want to do with it, and they certainly don't want somebody else making decisions that's going to impact them, which I totally understand, but that's the reality of strata.

And so there are so many emotional arguments going on. It's all right for you. I had one, two owners having a debate at the AGM. It's okay for you because you've paid off your mortgage. Well, the response from the other owner was, you vote your way and I'll vote my way. And so there was quite a bit of that going on. My opponent, on the other hand, though, kept his calm and he put it all together.

He put together an alternative number set, which I didn't see or he hadn't distributed until the AGM. So I walk into the AGM and he's handing out this two-page thing that he put together. His partner is an economist at UBS or one of the big banks, and she'd helped him. And so he's now trying to coax people into his camp, which is, let's not spend money, or let's spend the least amount of money possible.

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So I thought, this is going to be interesting. I knew I had some votes, we had some proxies, but also knew, because I was a secretary, that he had some proxies. And then I walked into the room and there were more people than I expected. So there's a whole bunch of people had no idea which way they were going to vote. And at that point, I thought to myself, oh, no, this may not go well.

And remember, of course, that I had been the face of this for many years, so there was a little bit of personal pride in it. But I did make it really clear to everybody that I had a job to do. And if the owners didn't want to go forward, then I would totally accept that. You know, there'd be no sour grapes. As long as everybody was well informed and they made the decision, I would accept it.

And I made sure that I felt that too, because egos can creep into things and you can end up behaving in a way that's not really best for the owners. And I actually said that to the owner, to the owners publicly. And to be fair, I mean, they were very kind to clap for me, including owners that were against the renovations. And I was quite impressed that they at least appreciated the work I'd done.

Amanda Farmer: Yeah. And I think that's a really important exercise to engage in taking your own personal preferences, certainly your ego, out of these exercises where you are the leader of a subcommittee or where you are the committee secretary and you're driving something. At some point, you do need to say, ultimately, this is a democratic process, and it's a decision of the owners at that meeting. And whatever they decide has nothing to do with me or what they think about me or what I've done or haven't done, at least up to that point.

And that can be quite freeing. You know, I find that when I'm telling clients that, and I do the same thing at meetings, say, look, put the motion to the vote. It is what it is. There's no point back and forth anymore. That can be a way of freeing yourself of that burden of responsibility, I suppose, for the outcome.

Kareem Tawansi: So to that very point. I think part of what kept me calm was remembering some of the things that you had said in some of your podcasts. And I remember some of the things I took away from your podcast include being transparent and just the style that I've picked up from you. I mean, you're a lawyer dealing with strata, and you managed to do it with a smile on your face. And so, I think that that's really important because at the end of the day, we're just all people trying to live together. It's not something that we should, you know, have running battles over, even if we have a difference of opinion.

So I was really careful about making sure that I was respectful to everybody that I was as transparent as I possibly can. I didn't take anything personally. Just because somebody doesn't agree with me doesn't mean that they're a bad person. They just have a different point of view. And these things, I think, require a little bit of training, though, in the sense that, I mean, I do spend a lot of time studying psychology, like continuing studying psychology.

I did my degree 30 years ago, so things have moved on since then. But there's quite a bit of social science around, a whole bunch of things. But also in terms of, if you attack somebody, the first thing they're going to do, they're not going to listen to you, they're going to defend themselves. If I want people to listen to me, I cannot attack them. And so when it came to the actual meeting, it all started off very cordial and people were being sort of nice to each other.

But then came the two motions up on the agenda. And, well, actually, we started with the very first one, the one that wasn't controversial, but then it just sort of bled over into the big issue. And there had been some feedback around the order, which I, as the secretary, had ordered the AGM, and I had ordered it in accordance with the way I thought the meeting might go.

Some people weren't happy with that, and that was discussed. And so we sort of agreed to discuss a whole bunch of motions all at the same time. And so I did my bit. I sort of took some people on the journey. I opened to the floor for questions. I got some questions from both sides. I did my best to answer them and then sat down. And of course, my opponent stood up and put forward the alternative position. And it went on for some time between the two of us, probably it would have been 45, 50 minutes. And then there was, what are we going to vote on? And some people were trying to defer the vote, some people were trying to change the motion. In the end, we agreed to vote on the motion because we were never going to really know until we had the vote.

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About five motions earlier, there was a motion about increasing our levies to top up our admin fund, and I thought that was going to be a bit of a bellwether about which way it was going to go. And so we had this discussion and the proposal was to put in extra 200 grand. There was a counter proposal from those who want to spend less, and it ended up at 170 that was put for a vote, and those that wanted to spend less won that vote.

It went 112, I think. So at this point, I'm thinking, oh, no, this isn't looking good. So, obviously, this vote was coming up. I was feeling a little bit nervous, but we finally put it to a vote, and it ended up going twelve against 18 four.

Amanda Farmer: And that was for. Let me just clarify, because you said earlier that you partitioned the motions, which I thought was clever, you had a motion for the necessary remedial work that the insurer said you had to do, approving about 35 k's worth. And then I imagine you had a separate motion for the upgrade, renovation work, funding that additional work. So how did each tranche go?

Kareem Tawansi: I said the first one was 100%. Nobody argued that one.

Amanda Farmer: Right.

Kareem Tawansi: And the second one was the 1218, and then the third one was the builder. And then actually a few people sort of flipped, and I think it was 20 to ten or something. What I didn't tell the viewers was that it was about \$2.7 million of upgrades. So that meant that a special levy was going to be in the order of tens of thousands of dollars. And so when you're asking people to come up with tens of thousands of dollars, it's not something that they can just sort of pull aside from their regular pay packet. So, I mean, people knew this was coming, and it's been discussed for years, but it's still a significant amount of money, I think, for most people.

Amanda Farmer: Well, congratulations on getting that across the line, and thank you for sort of sharing that. The steps leading up to that and the work that went into getting that result, which on one view was pretty borderline and could have gone either way. And I often find I've been in situations with clients before who are trying to get fairly simple renovation works, projects across the line, and it can be one or two votes difference in their favour.

And it is that work that they've done in the lead-up, getting certain people to a meeting, putting packs together, answering questions ahead of time, that is really the difference between that motion succeeding in that motion failing. So, excellent work.

Kareem Tawansi: Thank you. It took me about three days to unwind and actually get a good night's sleep again.

Amanda Farmer: I'm sure. Now, a few questions here Megan is asking, are there any specific soft skills training that you would recommend for committee representatives? I'm assuming that's a question for you, Kareem. Also, with your psychology expertise, it would be great to see more of this. Megan says, measured and ego-less leadership in strata.

Kareem Tawansi: Yes. Okay, so specifically for strata, no, but there's a bunch of people that I do follow that I get a lot of this stuff from. I mean, many people know Brene Brown. There is a relationship expert who's a psychologist called Doctor Wendy Walsh, who I follow.

She's about relationships and. But she talks about some of the things that go on in people's heads in terms of reactions to conversations, etcetera. So I think it's really, the whole area is all about how people listen to what you say. And there's quite a bit of content out there around ways to communicate better, but they're probably the two that come off top of my head. Brene Brown and Doctor Wendy Walsh, both American, of course.

So it's not local specifically for strata. I don't know of any other than what I said, the things I've been learning from you. And obviously, you know, we are members and so we use our membership benefits. I spend a lot of time on your portal reading and

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I've asked you a number of questions anonymously and, you know, always get an answer within two or three days and it's always clear, but I also noticed that some of the conversations from other members is really beneficial. So I can tell there's some pretty switched-on people on that forum, so I find that to be really useful as well.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, thank you for those tips, and thank you, Megan, for that. Great question. Kareem, you had said to me when you reached out to let me know what the result of the meeting was. You mentioned also that there were some preliminary discussions, maybe about solar or EV charging or something along those lines, even though that wasn't on the agenda. Can you speak a bit to that?

Kareem Tawansi: Actually, one of them was on the agenda, which was EV charging, and I'll get to that. Oh, great. In a previous AGM, I think I may have missed this one. We approved the concept of getting solar. Problem is that we have to replace our roof to put the solar panels onto it. Unfortunately, that puts the roof replacement as a precursor to the solar. The roof replacement is not going to be inexpensive, but there's a few more years left in the roof. So that's going to come after the renovation. So it's an aging building but in a fantastic location. So hopefully when we get to do all these things, it's going to be an amazing building, what we have done, and we've reached out.

I don't want to plug another business, but there's a consulting. Okay, there's a consulting company called Wattblock, the principal, there is a guy called Brent Clark, and we engaged the Surry Hills building, engaged Brent a few years ago to do some analysis on our building. He came back, gave us some recommendations, ran a competitive process for us last year, gave us a recommendation. So we were about to put that to an AGM, and there was a whole bunch of conversations about, oh, it's too early, it's a lot of money.

And just to give you a little bit of context, the solutions that we were looking for was to manage the power coming centrally into the building, and then from the centrally managed location at a lot owner's expense, they could then wire out to their own parking spot. So that central bit was about \$120,000, and that would be shared. That's an owner's corporation cost. And then if you wanted to wire in your own parking spot, that's another three to \$5,000 at your expense in your own time.

So there was a whole bunch of conversation around that. And is the timing right? Meanwhile, we had two or three owners now who had EVs, and that number has increased. And so I had put together an AGM, and we were the early. Because it was online voting, the early numbers indicated that it was going to go through. But then when the insurance came up, that number dropped and it wasn't going to pass.

So what happened was one of the owners, who has an EV, found the New South Wales government grant form. So we've applied for that grant. And so the motion that actually ended up in the AGM was based on us actually getting that grant. So if we get that grant, the owners corporation has agreed to pay the balance. If we don't, then we have to start again. So it's possible that we'll get it straight up. Otherwise, we might have to go back and try again. With regards to connecting solar to EV charging, which is the holy Grail. I hope we'll get there one day, but that's probably a few years away in our particular building.

Amanda Farmer: Yeah. Well, look, I'm happy that you've mentioned Brent Clark and Wattblock. I was chatting to Brent just a couple of days ago. We've recorded a podcast episode because he's doing a lot of exciting things in terms of mapping where buildings are located that have solar, EV, other sustainable infrastructure installations, and really being clear and spreading.

I think the important message that these buildings that have these additions are indeed, we've already got the data coming through. More valuable people are paying more money to buy these apartments, renters are paying more rent to rent in these buildings. And Brent actually said, you know, solar, I think there might only be maybe one building that he's come across that powers their EV charging with solar. So you're right. That is the holy grail. Yeah.

Kareem Tawansi: And we've now, in my other, the 164 building, we've just engaged Brent to do the same thing. So it's happening. He's going to be a very busy man.

Amanda Farmer: I think he already is.

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Kareem Tawansi: Yeah. I assume he's got a team. I don't know, like he fronts it, but, yeah, everybody talks about it. So that's the way to go, I think.

Amanda Farmer: Now, Kareem, thank you for sharing that experience. I want to see if we can leave our viewers with maybe three top three recommendations for other committee members, other owners, indeed, who might see themselves in your position or might be in your position in the future trying to get these valuable projects across the line. What are three top things that now, with the benefit of hindsight, you can say, make sure you do this.

Kareem Tawansi: Okay. I would say, obviously, the radical transparency that you talked about, do not do it in any kind of clandestine, hidden way. There is that mindset that I'll just go and do it and then I'll present it to people and they'll have no choice. I don't think that's the right way to do it. So there's that. I think the more people that you can get involved in the tasks, the better. So that way. One of the things that I've learned was I was the face of it and of the renovations in my building, but I didn't start the renovations.

It wasn't my idea, but I ended up being the face. And I had to sort of diversify that a little bit. So get a nice group of people getting involved and maybe allocate the work to different people and really listen, because if we pushed forward with the full scope, I don't think it would have passed. So you really got to have that, use that empathy muscle, as I like to say, and take on board what everybody has to say, because these are the people that you live with, right?

If you're an occupier, if not. If they're not the people you live with, they're the people you're in business with. So go for that sort of diverse input and have some empathy for all the different mindsets. I think the other thing is, in regardless of how people behave when anybody treats you badly, that's about them, not about you. And so the key to that is to stay calm under all circumstances.

Don't lose your cool. Don't take it personally. Let's reflect it back to them. It's about them. They have their reasons for behaving that way, and it's not you. And that might sound obvious, but, you know, in the heat of battle, I think sometimes people just forget that it's not as personal as we think.

Amanda Farmer: Oh, that is so true, and thank you for reminding us of that. I also love what you said about, even if you don't live in the building, you're an investor, then these are people, other owners are people you're in business with.

And I really like that take because I was chatting on another podcast last week, and I've got a short video snippet from it on the Facebook page, and I think I put it on LinkedIn as well, where there's a caption of me saying, you know, strata is so unusual because you've had these disputes, you have this conflict, and then you got to go home and see these people and live with them and park next to them and share the lift with them.

So that's why I think, as a lawyer, the conflicts can reach such a fever pitch. And when you characterize this as not only people necessarily you're living with, but people you're in business with, you know, it's one of those golden rules of, like, small business, isn't it? Don't employ your family member because it just doesn't work. That's what's happening in strata. Unavoidably happening in strata, isn't it?

Kareem Tawansi: Absolutely. This is a. I often say it's a multi-million dollar asset and it needs to be governed and managed like one. A lot of people don't necessarily get that at first, so I think we have to think very carefully about that, and we also have to think about the fact that we are in business with other people and we need to be thinking about their assets too. So it's multifaceted. That's why, you know, when you asked me what I thought about strata, just to bring it all back to the beginning, the more I get into it, the more I really do. I like it. I'm certainly fascinated by it. I'm fascinated by it. It's got so many moving parts. And I do believe that apparently I was told that we in Australia, specifically New South Wales, have some of the most advanced strata laws in the world.

So as bad as it might be here, it's worse everywhere else. So we are kind of trailblazers. And I think with a combination of education and the implementation of good technology, we can make strata much easier to live in, and I can see why. So I'm actually really excited about where strata could go and I can't stop watching your shows and listening to your podcast. There's some really interesting, proactive people doing things to improve strata, so I'm excited about that.

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Amanda Farmer: And I'm excited to see what you have in store for the future. Kareem when it comes to the tech that you're using, that you're investing in for your community that you're building, even. I would love to have you back to share more about that when the time is right. And I'm so pleased to have a fellow positive strata dweller and investor here on the show. So thank you for being here to share your energy and your positivity.

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