



Integrated Condominium Security Solutions

By Scott Hill, RCM, PSP

It is often repeated that property managers wear many hats as they service the facilities and the owners within the corporation. This is also valid when it comes to safeguarding the assets and the residents of buildings. Condominium security has evolved over the years – historically, it was a simple matter of ensuring that all door closures functioned, the locks were working, and that there was a fresh (daily) tape in the CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) system.

Modern times have shown a significant evolution in the security solutions that are available to condominiums, as well as a decrease in the cost of some of the more popular items. Unfortunately, as the sophistication of the security solutions continue to develop, so do the technical abilities and daring of the perpetrators. We are currently seeing an unprecedented rise in petty theft and damage incidents within the condominium industry. The usual targets for these criminals are the

common elements – hallways, stairwells, parking garages, vehicles, etc. Most of the security events that are reported are crimes of opportunity (little or no planning on the part of the perpetrator).

There are two important points that condominium managers must keep in mind when considering security:

1. The goal of any security solution is to ensure that a would-be intruder is deterred, detected and/or delayed when trying to access the facility.

2. Any security solution, in addition to accomplishing the goal above, must work in harmony with the other security measures within the condominium. This is what we refer to as the Integrated Condominium Security Solution.

By ensuring that the above two points are considered, managers can avoid some past mistakes that were implemented following a security event. In our assessments of condominiums, we have seen that reactions to security

events (such as a vehicle break-in or vandalism) include assigning half-way measures such as scheduling random patrols of security personnel, or installing a camera in a new location. Where these measures are certainly an improvement over doing nothing, they rarely adhere to the points above as they do not fulfil a long-range security plan.

Security Audit and Risk Levels

One advantage that condominium managers enjoy is the availability of information and resources to address any ongoing issues and concerns. Organizations like ACMO set the standard in providing vital and current information on certification, proper governance and management of condominiums. ASIS is an international association that is also a world leader in providing security solutions and education.

Gone are the days where condo-



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minium managers were expected to operate in a vacuum and to provide all the answers in-house. Engineers, lawyers and security consultants are now routinely brought into buildings to provide expert advice so that the manager can provide the very best recommendations to their boards.

This is where a Security Audit is utilized by the condominium. A Security Audit will review the security systems within the condominium to ensure that they are working in synchronization with each other. These systems include:

- Access Control
- Intrusion Detection
- Security Lighting
- Video Surveillance System (formally CCTV)
- Physical Protection Systems
- Perimeter Protection
- Incident Response
- Security Redundancies and Contingencies
- Security Personnel – Guard Force, Policy, Procedures, Security Control Room, and Post Orders

The Security Audit (or assessment) goes beyond a simple reporting device that is read and then filed. In addition to providing a written verification of the vulnerabilities within the corporation, it also assigns a risk rating to each vulnerability as well as recommendations to mitigate the risk to a lower level. This will allow a condominium manager to prioritize the implementation of security solutions in a professional and organized manner, addressing the highest risks first. These recommendations are used by the manager when preparing the first draft of the Operating Budget, as well as provided to the engineers when they are updating the Reserve Fund study.

Condominium managers may face two challenges when commissioning a Security Audit / Assessment:

1. The first hurdle they usually face is defining the need for the security audit and/or recommendations. One of our favourite quotes from William Webster (former FBI Director) is “Security is always seen as too much until the day it is not enough.”

As operating funds and reserve funds come from the same source (the owner’s pocket), security budgets must compete with other, more visible, projects for the necessary funds. Further complicat-

ing the issue is that when an Integrated Condominium Security Solution is in place, it is transparent or invisible to the owners – this may cause some owners or board members to not fully appreciate the protection that the manager has put in place.

2. The second challenge is the funding of the report and its recommendations. Is it a reserve fund expense or an operating expense? When it comes to budgeting for the Security Audit, condominium corporations have the option to fund from the operating account or, under certain circumstances, from the reserve account. In the case of *Little vs. Metropolitan Toronto Condominium Corporation No. 590*, the judge made two rulings that may relate to the security audit. First and foremost, the judge ruled that an expansion of the security system, including additional cameras and updating to a digital system, was a legitimate reserve fund expense (even though it was an enhancement to the existing system).

A second ruling that came from the case was that consultation fees (in this case – the cost of the Security Audit), when incorporated into a Reserve Fund project, is a legitimate reserve expense. For example, if a condominium planned on upgrading the security system (common element), then the cost of the Security Audit can rightfully be charged to the Reserve Fund.

Conclusion

Security Awareness is a factor in everyday life. Managers and board members must ensure that their valuable security dollars are spent in the most effective manner that allows for the best return on their investment. Consultation and a security audit provide a long-term plan to ensure that the facility, the owners, and their belongings are appropriately sheltered from harm. ■



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