

BCSPCA

STRATA COUNCIL GUIDE

- Pet-Friendly Housing Overview
- Sample Pet Policy
- Pet Registration Form
- Letter to Strata Council from the BC SPCA

INTRODUCTION

The BC SPCA frequently receives calls from condo owners and tenants frustrated by their inability to bring a pet into their home. We recognize the need for both pet-friendly housing and responsible residents who acknowledge the privilege of having pets in their homes. We have created this toolkit to help strata councils prepare for residents who have or want to have pets, discuss options with them and better understand the complexities of the issue.

PET-FRIENDLY HOUSING OVERVIEW

THE PROBLEM

Pet-friendly housing is considerably limited in British Columbia. Landlords and stratas can choose whether they will permit pets. They can also restrict the size, kind or number of pets.

Winston the beagle and Pepinot the miniature schnauzer were not accepted in most houses and apartments in Vancouver. The two were adopted from an animal shelter after having been abandoned in an apartment on moving day. Their new guardians agreed to pay \$400 more per month in order to keep these strongly bonded companions together and have a home for their entire family.



Not all pet guardians can afford to pay more to keep their family members. Across the province, about 25 per cent of cats and dogs surrendered to the BC SPCA are given up by their guardians due to a lack of available pet-friendly housing. This represents about 1,150 pets annually.

One restriction that is not based on scientific evidence is limiting the number of pets to one so that no animals can serve as companions to each other. Another unscientific restriction limits the height or weight of dogs or all pets. These policies have no grounding in research and cause unnecessary distress and conflict for owners, tenants, occupants and visitors.

Almost 80 per cent of B.C. residents favour legislation that allows pet guardians the right to keep companion animals, according to a 2008 poll (McIntyre & Mustel). The BC SPCA believes that if more strata councils were aware of the significant benefits of pet-friendly housing, they would be more inclined to offer it.

BENEFITS OF PET-FRIENDLY HOUSING

A direct benefit of pets is increased security for the building, as pet guardians are the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood during late-night and early-morning dog walks. Plus, dogs often stay behind to protect the home when their guardians go out.

Companion animals have even greater benefits to society at large. Studies have shown that they help reduce feelings of loneliness, anxiety and stress in people. They also assist children with development of language skills, empathy, responsibility and self-esteem.

CHALLENGES OF PET-FRIENDLY HOUSING

Strata councils volunteer their time to take on a sizable workload. In some cases, one pet guardian who is unaware or indifferent to fellow residents will cause conflict in the building, including unnecessary repair costs or discomfort due to noise. Although there are owners and tenants who will not respect policies, a preventative approach can be taken to create a culture of respect before problems occur.

The BC SPCA has provided guidelines below that will help to mitigate this conflict and ensure all residents have peaceable enjoyment of their property. Thank you for doing your part to realize the benefits of pets and ensure their place in your community!

SAMPLE PET POLICY

The BC SPCA recommends that the Strata Property Act Schedule of Standard Bylaws be modified by each Strata Council to state: Use of property 3(4): “An owner, tenant or occupant must follow the local municipal bylaw to determine the number of pets that may be kept on a strata lot.” The BC SPCA also provides the following policies for Strata Councils who are experiencing conflict regarding animal interactions, cleanliness or noise, or would like more regulation of pets on their property in order to provide more clarity for owners regarding the “Use of property” section of the bylaw.

- 1.** The owner must submit a pet registration form for each pet. Should the owner, tenant, occupant or visitor acquire a new or additional pet, the owner must complete a new form.

- 2.** All dogs, cats and rabbits must be spayed or neutered. If there is a reason the pet(s) cannot be neutered or spayed, please provide explanation in writing.

- 3.** All pets must be licensed or registered annually in accordance with any existing municipal bylaw.

- 4.** All dogs, cats and rabbits must have permanent identification in the form of a tattoo or microchip.

- 5.** The owner, tenant, occupant or visitor will pick up waste from the pet(s) immediately from any area on the residential property. Failure to act promptly will be a breach of the Schedule of Standard Bylaws Use of property 3(2).

- 6.** The owner, tenant, occupant or visitor will maintain a regular flea control and vaccination program appropriate to the type of pet. Should flea infestation from these pet(s) occur on the residential property, the Strata Council may require all owners who use the space to have the carpets shampooed and de-fleaed. Failure by the owners to act promptly on the Strata Council’s request will be a breach of the Schedule of Standard Bylaws Use of property 3(2).

7. The owner must act in accordance with the Schedule of Standard Bylaws Use of property 3(1)(b). If the owner, tenant, occupant or visitor's pet(s) are disturbing the quiet enjoyment of others, the owner, tenant, occupant or visitor will remediate the problem through work with a pet trainer, behaviourist, daycare or sitter/walker.

8. The owner must ensure that all pets are kept well-groomed, in particular that the nails of dogs and cats are kept trimmed to limit potential noise and damage related to pacing and scratching.

9. The pet(s) must not be left in the unit if the owner, tenant, occupant or visitor will be absent from the unit for an extended period of time. If the pet(s) are left in the care of an alternate caregiver in the unit, the name and telephone number for the caregiver must be provided to the Strata Council.

10. Prohibited or restricted exotic animals, as defined by the B.C. Wildlife Act Controlled Alien Species Regulation, are not permitted as pets.

BCSPCA

Pet Registration Form

INFORMATION		
Resident(s)		
Address		
Home Phone	Mobile Phone	Work Phone

Type of pet:

Dog
 Cat
 Rabbit
 Other (specify): _____

Pet is spayed/neutered (resident may be asked to provide documentation)

Pet is up to date on vaccinations (resident may be asked to provide documentation)

Pet's physical description (list size, age, weight, breed, etc.):

Emergency Contact	Name	Address	Phone Number
Veterinarian	Name	Clinic	Phone Number

Declarations

Resident(s) declare the above information to be correct and agree to abide by the established Pet Policy.

Resident Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Strata Council grants approval to keep the pet described above.

Strata Council Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Dear Strata Corporation,

Each year, **one in every four pets surrendered to the BC SPCA is given up by their guardian due to a lack of available pet-friendly housing.** This represents about 1,150 pets annually. These numbers do not account for the thousands of pets, often cats, who are abandoned in the streets or left behind in apartments by their previous owners who were unable to find more affordable pet friendly housing.

Pets have proven physiological, psychological and social benefits to humans. A review by the organization Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS) in 2007 showed that dog ownership slows heart rates, decreases risk for cardiovascular disease and decreases blood pressure. Studies have also found increased dopamine and endorphins and decreased cortisol (a stress hormone) following time spent with a dog. Children who are introduced to pets at an early age tend to have fewer allergies, less asthma and wheezing and less frequent illness.

Furthermore, subjects recovering from grief who had pets reported lower medication use and less depression. Female pet guardians who have suffered physical abuse identified their pets as an important source of emotional support.

These benefits affect people of all ages and from all walks of life, demonstrated by the reality that over 50 per cent of the population has pets. Discriminating against a potential owner or tenant based on their positive relationship with their pet creates additional stress for all involved. Conversely, when housing and community environments are supportive of animal ownership, it has been found that the human-animal relationship is strengthened.

Will you consider adopting a strata bylaw that demonstrates compassion and humanity? Good, fair policies restrict unwanted behaviour rather than prohibiting the “enjoyment of property” outright. Think of policies written to regulate liquor, parks or transit; each of these ensures that unwanted behaviours are curbed while still allowing for shared enjoyment of the associated benefits.

WE RECOMMEND STRATA OR RENTAL BUILDING BYLAWS:

- Permit the same number of pets as regulated by the municipality.
- Mandate a registry of owned and frequently cared for animals in the building so that any reported issues can be easily resolved.
- Encourage pet guardians to spay or neuter their pets, as evidence has shown that this can reduce conflict and aggression.
- Mandate annual licensing with the municipality.
- Mandate permanent identification for dogs, cats and rabbits.
- Mandate all waste in common areas be immediately removed and the area cleaned.
- Mandate flea control and vaccination programs appropriate to the type of pet.
- Provide owners and tenants with information about their rights and responsibilities related to noise.
- Encourage pet guardians to provide their pets with regular exercise and use walkers, sitters or daycares for dogs who experience anxiety being left alone during the day.
- Mandate regular grooming and nail trimming to limit the sound of scratching on the floors.
- Ensure the information of a caregiver is available to the strata council should the guardian be away for an extended period of time.
- Prohibit exotic animals in line with B.C.'s Controlled Alien Species Regulation.

A sample pet policy is available at spca.bc.ca/petfriendlyhousing.

Across the province, animals in shelters are relying on you to make housing stock available so that they can have a long-lasting place to call home.

Please do not hesitate to contact us directly with any questions or concerns, or to access our resources to make housing pets a positive experience for all involved. Thank you for doing your part to realize the benefits of pets and ensure their place in your community!

Kind regards,

The BC SPCA Companion Animal Welfare Science & Policy Team

advocacy@spca.bc.ca

1-800-665-1868