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The How-To Guide



Elevator lobby refurbishment
at 2411 New Street Condos
in Burlington.



Sharon Nease
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Wiklém Design

Beauty and the Budget

Striking a Balance Between Design and Cost

How do you optimize refurbishment budgets while adding value to properties and improving condominium communities? Read on for some tips and advice, along with a case study showing real-world examples.

Balancing operating and reserve fund budgets are challenging even in the of best times. Throw in a global pandemic, supply chain issues, Covid protocol expenses, and property managers are faced with a host of new challenges. Despite this, there comes a time in the life of every building when refurbishment becomes mission-critical. This was the case for 2411 New Street Condos in Burlington, where they had a long-past-due need for an update.

Take an Inventory

Start every project with an honest look at the available funds and the areas to be refurbished. Take inventory of the great elements you want to keep, the not-so-great that can be refurbished or repurposed, and everything that absolutely must go.

Work Backwards from Your Budget

Prioritize the scope of work and determine the cost to complete the bare minimum. Then assign funds to the nice-to-have items that enhance functionality and complete the look and feel of the space. Whatever remains in the budget is gravy, which will help

add that wow factor that owners – and new buyers – notice.

The New Street Condos's property manager and board of directors contracted The Wiklém Group to upgrade their six-storey property in 2020. The building needed considerable work to bring it up to par, and the scope of work was extensive. Adding to the challenge was an unrealistically low budget. Achieving even the bare minimum would go beyond the budget without significant strategic thinking.

Consider Design + Build

Historically, condominium corporations have approached refurbishment projects using the *Design-Tender-Build*



Lobby before and after. Put aside 5% to 10% of your budget for the wow factor. The wow factor is any feature that catches the eye and makes a statement.

model. There has been a shift through the years as more and more condominium boards consider the *Design+Build* model, where the client, designer, and contractor collaborate from the start of a project, putting the client in the driver seat from beginning to end.

The first budget-saving strategy in the case study was to move away from the original Design-Tender-Build approach to a Design+Build model. This afforded the team flexibility and savings on materials, opportunities for value engineering, and condensed timelines, helping them complete the project quickly, cost-effectively, and beautifully.

Don't Sacrifice Design

The overall design can make or break any refurbishment project. Whether you hire an Interior Design firm or work with a designer through your Design + Build provider, be sure to hire a company with interior designers and contractors that specialize in condominium refurbishment. Look for a designer with a diverse portfolio, extensive experience, excellent references, and a genuine appreciation for your building and owners' unique needs.

In terms of the overall design aesthetic for the case study building, the approach was to design a space where colour marries texture to create a harmonious flow from top to bottom. The central unifying element was the soft, whisper grey paint used on the walls throughout the build-

ing. The choice to use paint instead of more expensive vinyl wallcovering would require more maintenance but allowed the project to move ahead within budget parameters with beautiful, fresh results.

Have an Open Mind About Materials and Finishes

Recalibrating the approach to materials and finishes can yield gorgeous, affordable outcomes. In the case of

New Street Condos, it became clear that floor-by-floor thinking was the right approach to carpet selection.

Carpet is often the most expensive item in a corridor refurbishment budget and sets the stage for the design direction. A good quality carpet that can withstand heavy traffic, sand, and salt will keep a building looking great for years to come. Knowing that custom-designed carpet for all six floors at New Street would be too costly, the interior designer and contractor sourced small quantities of discounted, "end-roll" commercial-quality carpet from distributors' inventories. With colours from the same tonal family, carpet patterns that were cousins instead of identical twins were chosen. Suddenly, a high-end carpet with deluxe underpadding fits comfortably within the budget. Very few visitors to the building would ever know that the floors had three different carpet patterns, and the corporation would not have been able to afford such high-quality carpet otherwise. This approach saved enough money to allow for new porcelain tile in heavy traffic areas such as the main floor lobby and corridors and the elevator lobbies on each floor.

Other low-cost, high-impact solutions included installing painted MDF instead of wood millwork around the



Corridor before and after. A good quality carpet that can withstand heavy traffic, sand, and salt will keep a building looking great for years to come.

suite doors to add definition and the doors painted in a deep warm grey for contrast. Tired ceiling fixtures were replaced with updated, surface-mounted pot-lights installed directly over the junction boxes at a very reasonable price. Keeping the new-ish escutcheons plates on the suite doors helped the budget carry new fire-rated lever handles keyed with a master key system. New suite number plates and building signage made from simple laminate with a metal finish added style without spending a fortune.

Always Plan for the Wow Factor

Put aside 5% to 10% of your budget for the wow factor. The wow factor is any feature that catches the eye and makes a statement. It's those final touches that people notice and remember.

Reducing costs elsewhere meant the New Street condos could reserve 5% of their budget to splurge on wow-factor elements. The elevator lobby wall was given a facelift with 4x8-foot porcelain panels. These practical, neutral panels

made a timelessly elegant statement and would be easy to maintain for years to come. Offsetting the tone on tone neutrals was a piece of vibrant custom artwork and fire-rated commercial-grade bench seating in the main lobby.

Unrealistic budgets are not uncommon in condominium refurbishment, as owners' allocated reserve funds and expectations are often miles apart. The New Street Condos optimized their reserve fund budget to the fullest and underwent a dramatic transformation in a little over 12 weeks. While this condominium case study details a bare-bones budget application, the principles can be applied to any sized budget for timelessly beautiful outcomes that make a real difference in overall property values, functionality, quality of life, and pride of ownership. ■

Sharon Nease is a seasoned Writer and Communications Strategist who works in many sectors, including Design and Property Management, where she performs Recording Secretary Services. wiklemdesign.com

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