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Sustainability Starts with Procurement

A Strategic Approach to Refurbishment Projects

By Joff Evans



Sustainability has become an increasingly important consideration for condominium boards and owners, particularly during major refurbishment projects. But successful sustainability initiatives do not happen by accident. They need to be realistic, planned early, and built directly into procurement, budgeting, and project coordination.

In refurbishment projects, sustainability extends well beyond recycling. It begins with selecting appropriate materials, understanding their life cycles, and planning for how those materials will be managed at end-of-life. Recycling remains an important part of the process, but it is only one component of a broader strategy.

At the same time, sustainability conversations can become polarized between cost concerns and environmental objectives. Questions around greenwashing, inconsistent recycling programs, and fluctuating markets often create uncertainty about what measures are practical or achievable. Despite these challenges, the larger issue remains significant: Ontario continues to generate substantial volumes of construction and renovation waste, much of which still ends up in landfill.

Planning for Practical Outcomes

Manufacturers, suppliers, and recyclers all play a role in improving sustainability outcomes. Some manufacturers now offer take-back or recycling programs, while specialized

recyclers can process materials such as carpet, wallcoverings, ceiling tiles, lighting components, and vinyl flooring into raw material for future products.

However, successful diversion depends on practical project conditions. Material composition, contamination, quantities, transportation logistics, storage limitations, and labour coordination all affect what can realistically be recycled or reused. Higher diversion targets may also introduce additional costs and complexity, making it important for condominium communities to establish priorities early in the process.

Sustainability initiatives should also be incorporated into reserve fund planning whenever possible. Based on current conditions, recycling and diversion costs can add approximately



4.6% to 5.8% to the value of new material being installed. Addressing these costs during early budgeting allows boards to make informed decisions rather than treating sustainability as an unexpected expense during construction.

Clear communication with owners is equally important. Projects tend to be more successful when boards explain objectives, expectations, and associated costs from the outset instead of unveiling them halfway through demolition.

Where to Focus

The first step is evaluating the refurbishment scope to identify which materials present the best opportunities for diversion or reuse. While items such as decorative lighting or hardware often receive attention, larger-volume materials such as carpet and wallcovering may provide a greater environmental impact when diverted from landfill.

Importantly, sustainability need not apply to every component of a project. Boards can prioritize specific materials or systems based on budget, logistics, and achievable outcomes.

Once priorities are established, sustainability requirements should be incorporated directly into procurement documents and tender specifications. This ensures designers, contractors, suppliers, and recycling partners clearly understand handling procedures, diver-

sion requirements, and associated costs before pricing begins.

Some items, such as furniture, appliances, or reusable fixtures, may also require separate coordination for donation, resale, repurposing, or recycling outside the primary construction contract.

Case Study

A downtown Toronto condominium corporation incorporated sustainability objectives early in the planning stages of its corridor refurbishment project. The Board identified opportunities to reduce landfill waste while maintaining practical project budgeting and coordination.

As part of the initiative, existing light fixtures were removed and donated to Habitat for Humanity for reuse. The project team also specified carpet from a manufacturer offering a take-back and recycling program for end-of-life material.

To support the recycling process, demolition specifications included labour requirements for cutting, separating, and palletizing the removed carpet prior to pick-up. These handling costs were incorporated directly into the tender package so contractors could accurately price the work from the outset.

By addressing sustainability requirements during procurement and specification development, the condominium aligned its environmental

objectives with clear project execution requirements for contractors and suppliers.

Ultimately, sustainable refurbishment projects are most successful when sustainability is integrated into procurement, planning, and project coordination from the very beginning.

CondoSense

CondoSense was developed as a practical guide to help condominium Managers, Boards, and Residents better understand waste diversion opportunities during refurbishment projects. The guide focuses on practical implementation by helping project teams evaluate realistic recycling and reuse opportunities based on project scope, budgets, logistics, and community priorities.

It outlines common refurbishment materials such as flooring, wallcoverings, lighting, and furnishings while explaining how procurement and planning decisions influence what can realistically be diverted from landfill. For a free copy of *CondoSense*, email sustainability@thewiklemgroup.com. ■

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A downtown Toronto condominium corporation incorporated sustainability objectives early in the planning stages of its corridor refurbishment project, specifying carpet from a manufacturer offering a take-back and recycling program for end-of-life material. Images supplied.