



An Interview with Leslie Groer and Wayne Copeland of Lawrence Park Condos

Director Q&A provides a glimpse into the perspective of a condo director to provide insight on how challenges, large or small, are overcome. Owners, directors, management to service providers will benefit from these candid conversations. Recently, we sat down with Leslie Groer and Wayne Copeland of Lawrence Park Condos to discuss their board experiences highlighted by a recently completed Kitec replacement project.

Steve: What sparked your interest to serve as a director for your condo?

Wayne: I've been a community activist for

my whole life since I was young. I've been heavily involved in sports and different community activities. It was natural for me to be interested in what the community does, so getting involved was a pretty easy decision.

Leslie: I've lived at Lawrence Park Condos going on a decade now and I got up at at least three AGMs and suggested that we get a website for the condo. So, finally, when one of our directors, the former president, was leaving, he suggested that maybe I run. Also, professionally, I've been involved in complex collaborative groups

before, so this seemed like a reasonable place to try and have some influence.

Steve: What's been the highlight of your experiences on the board?

Leslie: First, I did get a website going. We also undertook some very big projects since I got on the board. This included renovations of the hallways, of the lobbies and the Kitec replacement.

Wayne: I think the redecoration of the facility has been the highlight for me. The challenge of doing it, it has its peaks and



Leslie Groer

BOARD POSITION:
President
JOINED BOARD:
2013
DAY JOB:
Researcher.
PhD in Particle Physics,
Fellow at U of T



Wayne Copeland

BOARD POSITION:
Vice President
JOINED BOARD:
2009
DAY JOB:
Business Owner,
Data On The Spot

valleys, for sure. I think the outcome is extremely good. I think the building is probably one of the best in the area and I think it comes from a pretty good job done through redecorating.

Steve: What's the most challenging aspect of being on the board?

Wayne: The most challenging aspect of the board is consensus building. As a board member, you are compelled to do the right thing for the community. But at the same time, you want your community to be involved in the decision-making.

Leslie: I would add that we went through some property management changes; not the management company, but the people involved. The on-site manager retired af-

ter nearly a decade so integrating a new manager into projects had its challenges. Also, I think the big thing that I always come back to is communication. So, I think we could have done better; as a Board, as a corporation, communicating to our community. And it wasn't so much what we communicated, but when we communicated to them.

Steve: As far as communicating, what is the obstacle that gets in the way?

Leslie: It takes a while to get to decisions that are final and ratified. So, you tend to hesitate to put out too much information until things are settled. Then there's a tendency that once the decision's made, you're on to doing other things, and tend to forget, 'Oh, maybe we should tell people what you've just done.'

Wayne: I believe that our former manager really instilled in us the board's responsibility to make decisions. That's why you're the Board. It's very difficult in a board to get a consensus from the entire community. In fact, I don't think it's possible to get a consensus. So, if you keep going back to the community to get a consensus, then you're never really moving forward.

Steve: What's your view on working with management?

Leslie: We have a good relationship with management. We had a few challenges when I first joined the board. They, subsequently, have been smoothed out. There's a general challenge of condo corporations that we don't have a CEO, which we'd have in a regular corpora-



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Steve: What advice would you give to someone who's considering becoming a director?

Wayne: The one bit of advice I would give to people is to separate their board life from their community life and don't mix with them, including your spouse. They're a board member, so what happens in the boardroom stays in the boardroom. They're not entitled to take that elsewhere to discuss, I would emphasize that to them.

Leslie: Yes, I agree with that. I would also say you have to be willing to work on consensus-building within the board and with what you're trying to get done. Just taking the time to get the education, make use of the facilities out there that help you learn ... What is your role? Responsibilities? What are the things the board should be undertaking? What should be done by management? It's like trying to make sure you understand where those divides are and making things happen within there. The educational condo classes provided by the CCI are very useful for getting a new director up to speed.

Steve: If you could say one thing to the residents and owners, what would that be?

Leslie: Just be patient with the process. We like having a lot of the input, it helps us understand where we're going. You've got to realize, you're living in a community. There's going to be a lot of opinions and there are no decisions that don't have ramifications beyond your own personal views. So, there are things you are going to have to accept about living in this sort of community lifestyle that you may not like.

Wayne: I would say be respectful that we are in a communal neighborhood. Lots of

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the things that you would do you in your home are different than you can do when you live within a small, confined community. I think people forget about that. You opted for communal living, which is neighbours and smells. It's what you bought into.

Steve: Kitec was a popular plumbing material that replaced traditional piping that was used in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Aspects of Kitec started failing earlier than expected and people have been forced to replace their piping decades earlier than planned. Let's talk about your Kitec solution. Can you talk about the problem and your journey?

Wayne: Personally, it has been a real challenge for me to go down the Kitec path and the tipping point was when our engineers said it could be catastrophic if the lines erupted. I have a lot of friends in the condo community and I learned through conversations that the entire lakeshore area in Toronto hadn't done one thing about

Kitec. They hadn't spent one penny. So why should we?

So should we replace the lines or shouldn't we? I struggled with it and without a professional background in this area it becomes that much more challenging. Plus, I will always be suspicious when we're told by any service provider to undertake a project of this scale.. There is so much money being made at this game, so I wanted to challenge it.

In the end, I was 100% behind with what we did, and I'm glad, today, that we can say we've changed all the piping. It's done. We're finished.

Leslie: I wasn't as doubtful that we were going to change the Kitec piping as Wayne was. An open question in my mind with the project was, "How are we going to do it? How do we fund it?"

We had a major leak in one of our units just a few doors down from my unit where the person was out for five months while it was being repaired. They had over a foot of water in their space ... In a span of twenty minutes at 2:00 a.m.

Even after our project began, we had another unit where the same thing happened. So, we had, at least, two catastrophic failures plus prior to that, we had over a dozen smaller leaks that were starting in different parts of the building.

The thing that helped us set the course of the project was our property management company Goldview set us on the right path. They He helped us identify that the hot water recirculation lines were the places where we were finding the most leaks and ruptures. That's a common element line because it's the one that's in your unit, but it's not for your purpose. It allows the hot water to recirculate in the building. Because of the pressure, the heat and the movement, that

tends to be area that ages more quickly as far as the Kitec is concerned.

It helped early on that as a board and as management to say, 'We are taking this on as a common element project because it's affecting everybody. It is affecting common elements aspects of the building.' So, we started funding into the reserves. The project went on for close to three years from when it started to when we actually completed the project.

Wayne: Then, the challenge was on how to finance it. There are people here who'd say, 'Give me the chequebook. How much is it? I'll write a cheque.' Yet, someone else on a limited income says, 'Oh my goodness, how am I going to pay for this? I don't have the money to pay for this.'

Our management company helped with this and did a good job by coming to an owners' meeting. They were instrumental at settling people's nerves about the finances. Ultimately, that's the only thing that people care about is, 'How much money is this going to cost me?'

'How much are we spending? And how are we going to pay for it?'

Leslie: Beyond costs, this is one of the more invasive projects we're doing because you're going into peoples' homes and cutting up their walls.

The company that did the project was very good and they had a presentation for each of the condo's buildings. They had details about which walls were being cut into and what we're going to need to do as owners.

Again, just going back to our management company, they put on a full time project manager who is now our on-site manager. She was here for the whole project. She was a godsend, because 99.9% of the issues, the board didn't even hear about it. She was there to make sure that she coordinated between the residents, between the engineering with the plumbing company and just kept them going. She would be walking around with a stack of papers every day, making sure she had everything on track.

Steve: What are your expectations with the class action lawsuit for Kitec users?

Leslie: Our expectation is that we'll get zero. If anything comes back, it's gravy, at this point. We're filling out the paperwork. If we get something back, fantastic! You know, we'll have a pizza party and that's probably all we'll get out of it.

Steve: Anything that you want to share with others about your board experience?

Wayne: I think our board has been engaged in a very challenging period of time. For as long as I've been involved, I believe that everything is very well run. I think our community is excellent and the value of our units is way up. We're in a great area and there's nobody who's going to build around us. This is a pretty sweet spot between Young Street and Lawrence Avenue. I think we're well run.


Leslie: Being a board member is definitely a rewarding and sometimes frustrating experience. However, it's definitely worthwhile in the end. 




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