Heat pump retrofit guide for stratas

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BC Hydro
Power smart

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Guide for strata owners and councils in B.C.

This step-by-step guide is designed to help strata owners and strata councils in B.C. navigate the process of switching from electric baseboards to high-efficiency electric heat pumps.

This guide outlines the key steps, roles, and resources to help make retrofits easier, faster, and code compliant.

Note: This guide is based on typical retrofit stages and strata decision-making processes. Every building is different. Be sure to consult your strata bylaws and seek legal counsel where needed.

Roles and responsibilities in the heat pump retrofit

Every building is different, so it's important to identify the right people to guide the heat pump retrofit, make decisions, and support coordination between parties.

Owners of a strata lot (suite): Acts as the main point of contact for heat pump installation in their suite. This includes navigating strata council approval processes and bylaws, selecting a contractor, and scheduling the installation. Owners should also review and understand the requirements, terms and conditions of any available rebate programs.

Strata council: Provides oversight and manages the strata corporation to ensure it operates in accordance with the Strata Property Act, regulations, bylaws and rules. The strata council is responsible for maintaining common property and assets for the benefit of all its owners. The strata council is responsible for approving, in writing, if a heat pump can be installed in a suite. Strata councils may also consider developing clear bylaws to provide a consistent framework for decision–making and guidance for owners and contractors.

Contractors: Provide technical expertise to ensure the heat pump is installed in compliance with the BC Building Code, local government bylaws, manufacture installation guidelines, strata bylaws, and any rebate program eligibility requirements. Contractors should deliver high–quality installations, educate owners on basic operations, provide warranties, and recommend regular maintenance and servicing schedules.

Energy consultant: Strata councils may choose to engage an energy consultant to provide technical advice, support decision–making, guide the process, and offer building–specific recommendations for heat pump retrofits.

Registered professional: Architects and engineers are typically required for heat pump installations in Part 3 buildings and provide support on items related to structural impacts of installations, changes to building appearance, and building penetrations.

Lawyers: Legal advice may be required if the strata council plans to update its bylaws or develop an Alteration and Indemnity Agreement for owners to sign prior to installing a heat pump.

Resources

- **Roles and responsibilities in stratas**.
- **Handing requests for heat pumps and air conditioning**
- **Heat pumps and air conditioning—What councils need to know**

Registered professional can provide support on issues such as structural load impacts (e.g. for balcony or roof installations), changes to the building's exterior appearance, and building envelope penetrations.

Energy consultants can help strata owners and councils navigate the process of switching from electric baseboards to high-efficiency electric heat pumps. They can assess building electrical capacity, calculate heat loads for suites, and provide advice on heat pump system sizing and selection.

Strata's considering multiple heat pump installations may be eligible for funding to support a Feasibility Study led by a qualified consulting engineer who is a member of the BC Hydro Alliance of Energy Professionals.

If your strata has already completed an Electrical Planning Report (EPR), be sure to provide this to your consultant. If not, an EPR may be completed at the same time as the Feasibility Study.

Learn more about working with energy consultants and accessing Feasibility Study support through BC Hydro: **BC Hydro Feasibility Study Offer—Multi-Unit Residential Buildings**

Seven steps to a successful retrofit

1. Knowledge building and early engagement
2. Pre-planning—Understand strata bylaws, building systems and rebates
3. Engage a qualified contractor and develop a retrofit plan
4. Strata approval process and bylaws
5. Obtain strata and rebate program approvals
6. Heat pump installation and documentation
7. Post-installation responsibilities

Step 1

Knowledge building and early engagement

Action

Lay the groundwork by building awareness about heat pumps and identifying support

Responsible party

Unit owner

Installing a heat pump in a multi-unit condo or apartment building isn't just a technical decision, it's an upgrade that can affect the building systems and common property. Even if only one or two units are planning to upgrade, the project may require updates to strata bylaws, approval and coordination. That's why it's important to get informed and start conversations early, share clear information, and build trust and understanding among residents and strata council.

1.1 Gather and share information about heat pump benefits

Start by learning how heat pumps work and helping others in your building understand their benefits, like cooling during hot summers and energy efficiency. You may want to prepare a short summary or presentation for your next strata council meeting or Annual General Meeting to build support using the benefits, case studies and resources in this guide.

Benefits of heat pumps include:

- Increased comfort and climate resilience by providing both heating and cooling.
- Use clean electricity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Up to 300% more efficient than electric baseboards.
- Up to 70% more efficient for cooling than typical window air conditioner units.
- Many heat pumps improve indoor air quality, which supports occupant health.

Resources: BC Hydro, Better Homes, NRCan Heat Pump Guide.

Case studies: See how other buildings approached installations:

- **B2E MURB Electrification Project: Getting Strata Approval for Heat Pump Installation**
- **Electric Baseboards to Electric Mini-Split Heat Pumps in a MURB Co-op**

1.2 Identify interest and support across the building

Find out how many other residents are interested in installing a heat pump. If several people are exploring upgrades, you may be able to reduce costs by bundling quotes or installations.

Even if only one owner is ready to move ahead, knowing where others stand can help guide decision-making. For example, if interest is limited, the strata may only need a bylaw amendment for a single case. But if many residents are interested, a broader building-wide policy may be more efficient.

Tip: Consider conducting a short survey to gauge interest, concerns, or questions. A simple form with checkboxes is often enough to surface input.

1.3 Start the conversation with your strata council

Even if you're just beginning to explore a heat pump for your suite, it's helpful to check in with your strata council early. This creates transparency, avoids confusion, and may reveal important context—such as whether other residents have made similar requests or whether the strata has existing preferences or concerns.

Early conversations can:

- Help strata councils prepare for potential approvals or bylaw updates (see Step 4)
- Encourage coordinated installations, reducing costs and disruption
- Surface opportunities for whole-building planning or funding support

Tip: If interest is growing across the building, the strata may want to explore a coordinated approach—such as internal installation guidelines or applying for support through BC Hydro's MURB Retrofit Program.

Step 2

Pre-planning—Understand strata bylaws, building systems and rebates

Action

Before committing to a retrofit, learn what's technically and legally possible.

Responsible party

Suite owners (as lead) and strata council (for guidance)

Before moving ahead, take time to review your strata bylaws to understand what's currently permitted, and to find out about available rebates and the approval processes. This early groundwork helps avoid costly surprises and supports a smoother installation.

2.1 Review your strata bylaws

Your strata's bylaws define what's allowed and how decisions are made about in-suite upgrades.

- Review existing bylaws to see if they address individual heat pump installations.
- If bylaws are unclear or missing information on heat pump installations, it's a good idea to seek legal advice: Lawyer Referral Service | Access Pro Bono

Note: Bylaw updates may be required to support approval and installation. For more details on updating your strata bylaws see Step 4.

2.2 Understand your building's heating and electrical systems and plan for future upgrades

Understanding how your suite is currently heated and whether the building has enough electrical capacity helps guide your retrofit approach.

If your building is heated with electricity (e.g. electric baseboards) your existing electrical system may already support a heat pump—and switching can reduce your electricity use overall.

As part of pre-planning, consider:

- What type of heating is currently in the suite?
- Are electrical upgrades needed?
- Are there limits to outdoor unit placement (e.g., is the balcony big enough, are balcony installations allowed in your strata, is a structural assessment needed)?
- Are others in the building also interested? Coordinating can reduce costs and complexity.
- Is your building considering other building upgrades, like EV charging?

An Electric Planning Reports (EPR) estimates your building's available electrical capacity and provides an order-of-magnitude estimate of the electrical capacity needed to add new electrical loads, including heat pumps and EV chargers.

The EPR may also identify:

- Potential upgrades or modifications to the electrical system
- Opportunities to reduce electrical loads
- Load management solutions that could delay or avoid costly upgrades

It is important to note that an EPR cannot be used to proceed with the installation of new electrical loads. If the strata corporation plans to add or modify electrical system, such as installing a heat pump, a qualified professional must be engaged to:

- Select appropriate equipment
- Confirm electrical capacity at the suite and building level
- Determine whether electrical upgrades are needed
- Ensure compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements

2.3 Review available rebate programs

Before moving forward with your retrofit, find out which rebate programs are available to support your project. In B.C., there are three main rebate options available for in-suite heat pump installations in condos and apartments:

BC Hydro's Condo and Apartment Rebate Program

Provides rebates to individual suite owners switching from electric baseboards to qualifying heat pumps.

CleanBC's Energy Savings Program

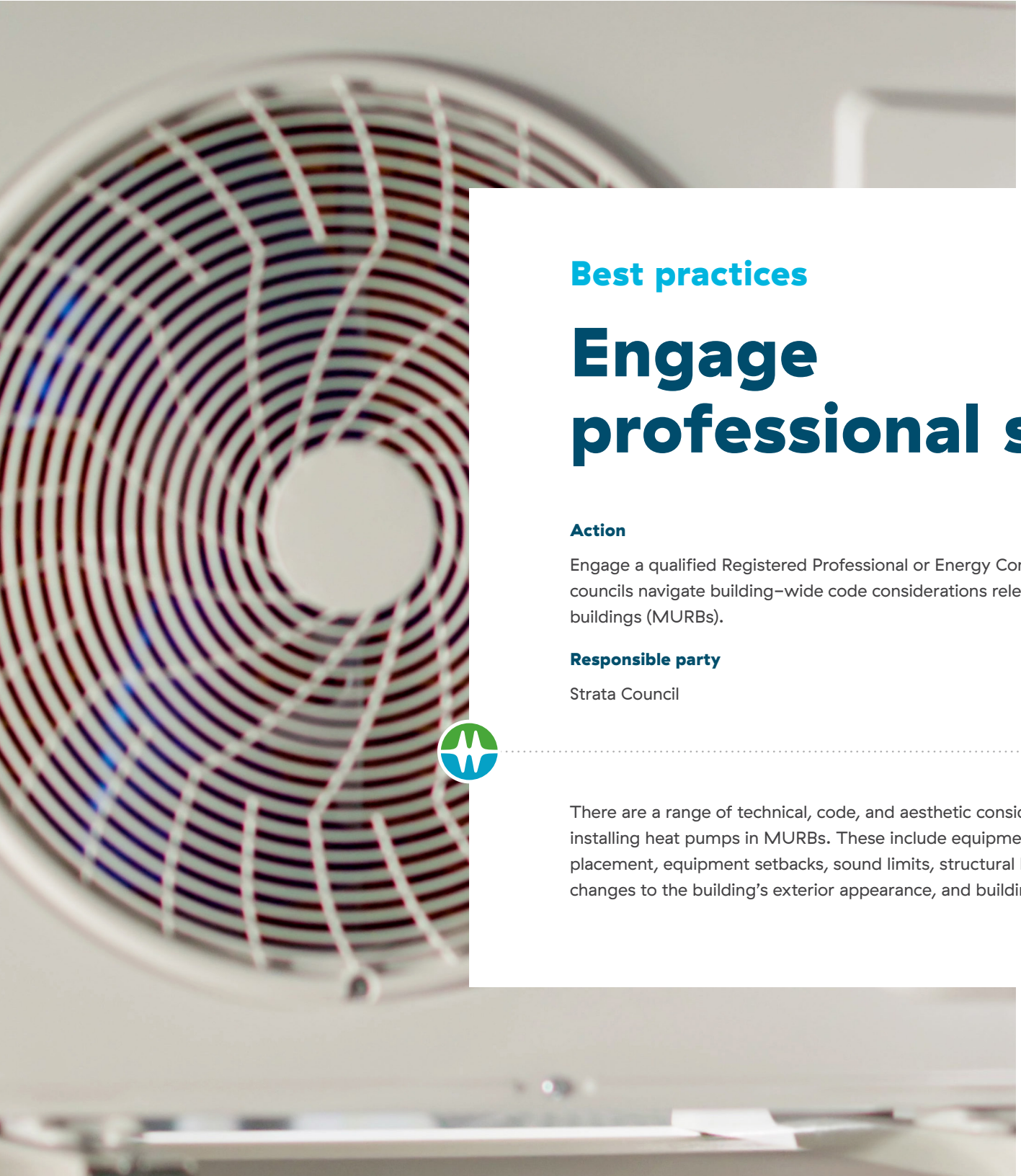
Offers enhanced rebates for low- and moderate-income households in condo and apartment buildings who are switching from electric baseboard heating to a qualifying heat pump.

CleanBC Multi-Unit Residential Building Retrofit Program

Supports buildings planning to install in-suite heat pumps in multiple suites. The program includes a free Retrofit Opportunities Assessment, and eligible buildings may receive funding for a Feasibility Study led by a qualified consultant.

Note: By 2026 or 2028 (depending on where your strata building is located), strata corporations will be required to get an Electrical Planning Report (EPR) under new provincial regulations.

Useful Resource: Maintenance Matters #23—Electrical Planning for Multi-Unit Residential Buildings



Best practices

Engage professional support

Action

Engage a qualified Registered Professional or Energy Consultant to support strata owners and councils navigate building-wide code considerations relevant to multi-unit residential buildings (MURBs).

Responsible party

Strata Council

There are a range of technical, code, and aesthetic considerations and requirements when installing heat pumps in MURBs. These include equipment sizing and selection, outdoor unit placement, equipment setbacks, sound limits, structural load impacts, condensate drainage, changes to the building's exterior appearance, and building envelope penetrations.

Step 3

Engage a qualified contractor and develop a retrofit plan

Action

Choose a qualified installer to provide a detailed retrofit plan and quote.

Responsible party

Unit owner (or strata council, if there are multiple heat pump retrofits)

Choosing the right contractor helps avoid costly and sets your project up for success. You'll want to find a contractor with experience installing heat pump systems in MURBs, who understands the BC Building Code, local government bylaws, manufacture installation guidelines, rebate program requirements and strata bylaws.

3.1 Select a qualified contractor

It's the responsibility of the unit owner or strata council (if there are multiple heat pump retrofits) to hire a contractor who is:

- Licensed and insured
- Experienced installing heat pumps in apartment buildings
- Knowledgeable about local bylaws, permit and code requirements
- Familiar with rebate program requirements
- Able to meet strata bylaw requirements

Start by selecting a contractor listed with the Home Performance Stakeholder Council (HPCN). These contractors meet program quality assurance standards and are required for eligibility under B.C. Hydro or CleanBC rebate programs. Heat pump must be installed by a HPCN-qualified contractor, self-installations are not eligible.

Find your contractor here

3.2 Building code and local regulations consideration

Your contractor is responsible for ensuring the heat pump installation complies with all applicable codes, permits, and technical requirements. This includes meeting the BC Building Code, Electrical Code, municipal bylaws, municipal permits (building, development, mechanical and electrical permits), and any relevant strata bylaws or policies.

As a condo owner, it's important to confirm that your contractor understands the full scope of requirements.

Examples of local requirements include:

- Climb hazards (setback of outdoor unit of heat pump from balcony railing)
- Setbacks from property line (for ground units) or from roof edges (for roof units)
- Equipment sound limits (maximum allowable decibel ratings)
- Structural load impacts (for balcony and roof installations)
- Electrical capacity assessment
- Condensate drainage requirements
- Exterior appearance considerations
- Penetrations and attachments to the building enclosure

Tip: Most B.C. municipalities and regional districts have bylaws online. Search: "[Municipality or Regional District Name] + heat pump permit".

You can also find links to many **municipal bylaws here**.

Understanding what's already required helps your strata decide whether to introduce additional requirements through updated bylaws (see Step 4).

3.3 Request detailed scope of work and quote

Ask your contractor for a quote that outlines what will be installed, how it will be installed, and confirmation that the installation will comply with all applicable code, bylaw and permit requirements. This quote will form the basis of your application to the strata council in Step 5 and may be required for rebate pre-approval.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROPOSAL SHOULD INCLUDE:

System details:

- Heat pump make and model (indoor and outdoor units)
- AHRI number
- SEER/HSPF
- Tonnage (BTU)
- Decibel (noise) rating of outdoor unit
- Proposed location of outdoor unit (e.g., balcony)
- Status of electric baseboards (removed, decommissioned or retained)

Confirmation of compliance with:

- Eligible rebate programs' Terms and Conditions and Contractor eligibility requirements
- Strata bylaws
- Local bylaws and permitting
- BC Building Code and Electrical Code

Financial quote:

- Total project cost (including tax)
- Potential rebate amounts(s)
- Net cost / balance due

Best practice:

Ask your contractor to include compliance documentation in the quote. For example, note the decibel rating of the heat pump to show it meets municipal or strata noise limits. If required, this document will be submitted to your strata council for approval in Step 5.

Step 4

Strata approval process and bylaws

Action

Establish a clear, consistent process for reviewing and approving heat pump installations and update strata bylaws, as needed.

Responsible party

Strata council with legal support

Heat pump retrofits involve building–level considerations such as penetrations through the building envelop and placement of outdoor units. While contractors are responsible for building code and permit compliance, strata councils must ensure that their bylaws governance processes support these upgrades and protect the building over the long term and clearly define strata preferences (i.e. where heat pump outdoor units can be installed and other aesthetic considerations).

4.1 Define a strata approval process

Strata councils can choose to establish an internal process to review heat pump requests and guide decision-making, even if bylaws are not yet updated. Having a consistent approach helps strata councils make fair, informed decisions and gives owners clarity on what's expected.

This process doesn't need to be complex—even a simple checklist or information sheet can help ensure that all the key considerations are addressed before a decision is made.

Strata councils may wish to:

- Outline what information owners should submit with their request (e.g., contractor quote, equipment specifications, outdoor unit location)
- Clarify when and how requests will be reviewed (e.g., at regular council meetings or by email)
- Identify key factors that will be considered, such as:
  - Noise levels
  - Aesthetic impact
  - Location and visibility of outdoor units
  - Contractor qualifications

This internal process can also help the strata track requests over time and prepare for possible bylaw updates if more installations are expected.

Tip: Consider creating a heat pump application checklist to guide owners through the process and reduce case-by-case confusion.

4.2 Update strata bylaws, if needed

Strata bylaws help ensure heat pump installations are safe and aligned with the building's long-term needs. Bylaw updates help ensure clarity, consistency, and enforceability.

A strata might want to set clear standards for things like noise levels, aesthetics, or equipment types, or exterior unit placement that go beyond the municipal bylaws and Building Code. This is also a chance to clarify who is responsible for ongoing maintenance, repairs, or liability. This ensures that installations not only comply with local regulations but also align with the preferences and comfort levels of residents in the building.

Note: Some strata councils may choose a light-touch approach, only requiring owners to follow rebate program guidelines and hire qualified contractors. Others may wish to set standardized technical, aesthetic, or insurance requirements to ensure consistency and protect the building.

Tip: Early, transparent engagement with building residents builds trust, increases awareness, and improves the likelihood of a successful vote.

BEST PRACTICES—TIPS TO UPDATE BYLAWS FOR HEAT PUMP INSTALLATION

Updating bylaws can help streamline approvals and ensure installations are consistent, code-compliant, and protect the building's aesthetics and infrastructure.

Strata councils can update bylaws to include:

- **Approved equipment types:** Specify the types of heat pumps allowed (e.g., mini-splits) and ensure alignment with rebate programs.
- **Permitted models**: Set minimum energy performance standards or limit approvals to specify models for aesthetic consistency.
- **Noise limits:** Stratas may choose to set stricter decibel limits higher than local municipal bylaws to ensure resident comfort.
- **Installation methods:** Outline how and where heat pump units can be installed (e.g., specific balcony positioning), or require anti-vibration pads on outdoor units, etc.
- **Electrical upgrades:** Require a licensed electrician's assessment and obtain electrical permits.
- **Responsibility for maintenance:** Update bylaws (e.g., Standard Bylaws 2 & 8) to clearly assign responsibility for system maintenance and repairs.
- **Alteration approval process:** Clarify what the owner must submit for permission (e.g., plans, documentation) for approval when owners want to make alterations to a strata lot or common property (e.g., Standard Bylaws 5 & 6).
- **Indemnity agreement:** Require unit owners to sign an Indemnity Agreement or Assumption of Liability Agreement before approval, especially where common property is impacted.

- **Cooling alternatives:** Consider bylaws that allow exterior shading (e.g., awnings, shutters, etc.) to reduce heat load and maintain building aesthetics.

To draft bylaws, consult a strata lawyer to ensure enforceability and consistency with the *Strata Property Act*. Learn more in VISOA's 10 Tips for Heat Pump Bylaws for Stratas video.

Resources:

Vancouver Island Strata Owners Association (VISOA)—10 Tips for Heat Pump Bylaws for Stratas

Condominium Home Owners Association (CHOA)—What a strata council needs to know

4.3 Confirm insurance coverage and warranty implications

Before installation, confirm how a heat pump retrofit could affect your building's insurance and warranty coverage. Earlier due diligence helps avoid unintentionally voiding coverage or missing critical conditions.

Insurance policies

- Strata corporation insurance: Confirm what's covered if damage occurs during installation or while the system is operating. This includes any work done on common property, such as balconies or exterior walls.
- Homeowner's insurance: Unit owner should confirm coverage for damages or malfunctions related to the heat pump, any exclusions or requirements tied to renovations, and whether the policy needs updating after installation.

Warranty

- The strata council should contact the building warranty provider to check whether heat pump installations affect existing warranties (e.g., envelope, electrical, or mechanical systems).

Tip: Keep all records related to your installation, including permits, contractor qualifications, and system specifications.

Step 5

Obtain strata and rebate program approvals

Action

Gather required documents, engage the strata approval process, and request rebate pre-approval.

Responsible party

Unit owner (strata council reviews and approves)

Once your contractor has prepared a complete project proposal, and strata bylaws have been updated (if applicable), you'll need formal written approval from your strata council before moving forward with the installation. You'll also need to apply for rebate pre-approval to qualify for program funding. Early engagement and a clear, complete application package can help streamline this step.

5.1 Prepare your strata application package

Your application to the strata council should be clear, complete, and tailored to your strata's requirements.

A complete application package may include:

- Confirmation of contractor qualifications (e.g. HPCN membership, valid business license, general liability insurance, WorkSafeBC coverage, GST number.)
- Detailed scope of work and installation plan (from Step 3)
- Heat pump specifications (AHRI number, model, decibel rating)
- Visuals showing proposed outdoor unit placement

Confirmation of compliance with:

- Local bylaws and permitting
- Strata bylaws
- BC Building Code and Electrical Code
- Description of wall penetrations and sealing methods
- Signed alteration or indemnity agreement (if required)
- Any other documents required in your strata's approval process (see Step 4)

Best practice: Ask your contractor to include documentation confirming the system meets all applicable bylaws, such as the heat pump's decibel rating to show compliance with municipal noise bylaws.

5.2 Submit application to strata council and obtain written approval

Submit your application to the strata council for review. Approval timelines may vary depending on meeting schedules or whether a ¾ vote is required. Be sure to wait for written approval before moving forward or applying for rebates.

5.3 Seek rebate program pre-approval

Once you've received written approval from your strata, apply for rebate pre-approval. You may be eligible for one of the following programs (see Step 2.3 for more details):

- BC Hydro's Condo and Apartment Rebate Program
- CleanBC Energy Savings Program

To qualify, a valid rebate pre-approval code is required before installation.

Step 6

Heat pump installation and documentation

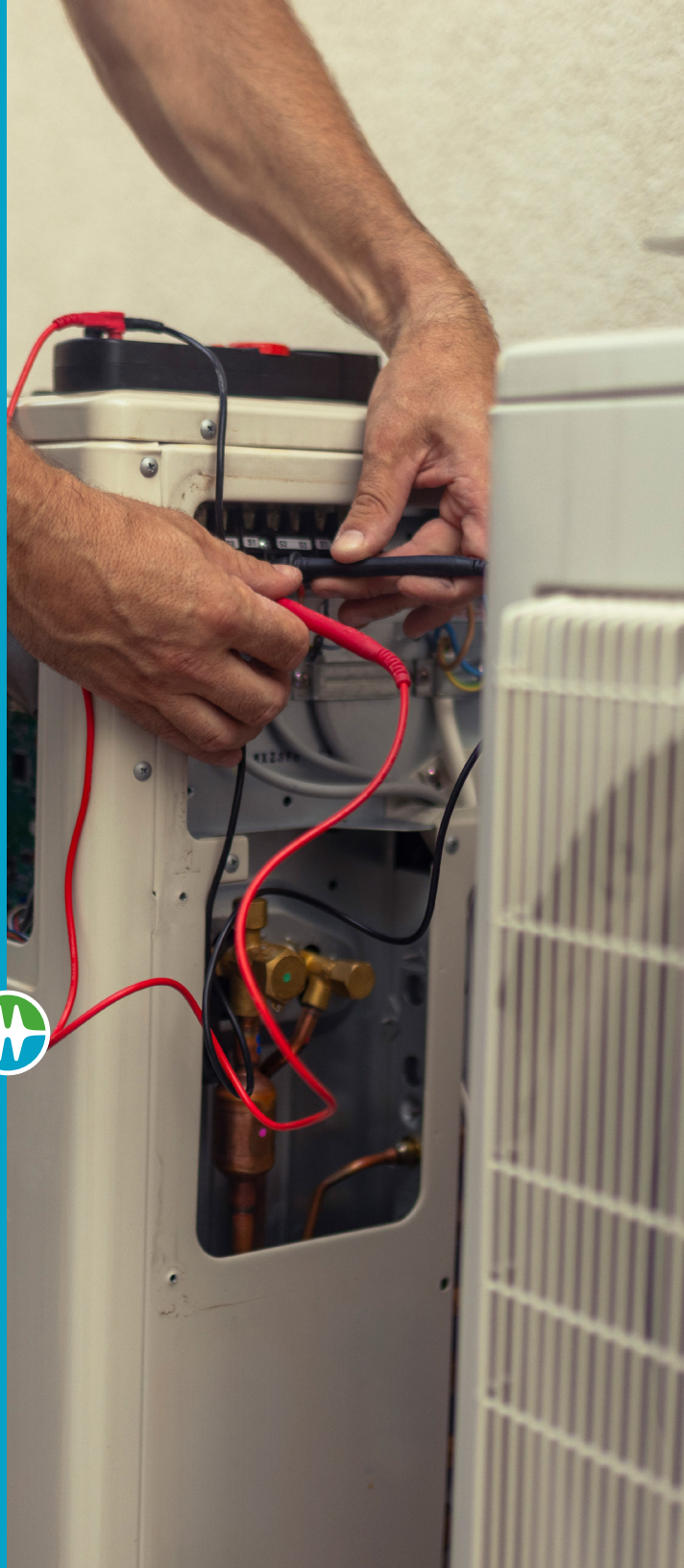
Action

Complete the retrofit in accordance with strata, permit, and building code requirements.

Responsible party

Contractor and unit owner

Once strata council approval is secured and a pre-approval code is received from the rebate program (if applicable), your contractor can begin the installation. Clear communication between the owner, contractor, and strata ensures a smooth and minimally disruptive process.



6.1 Coordinate installation logistics

- Approve your quote with the selected contractor
- Schedule installation with your contractor
- Notify neighbours and strata about installation dates and access needs, if applicable
- Follow any strata-specific protocols for noise, hours of work, or unit access
- Minimize disruption and respect common areas

6.2 Follow codes and best practices

- Adhere to municipal permit and building code requirements
- Comply with strata council conditions
- Use BC Housing's Guide on Wall Penetrations to protect the building envelope

6.3 Collect final installation documentation

Ask your contractor to:

- Provide a walk-through of how the system works
- Share user manuals, warranty information, and maintenance instructions
- Provide **documentation** for the rebate and strata council records

6.4 Rebate application documentation

- BC Hydro's Condo and Apartment Rebate Program: Submit your online rebate application with all the **required documentation** within six months of receiving pre-approval.
- **CleanBC Better Homes Energy Savings Program**: Your contractor will submit the rebate application on your behalf and deduct the rebate from your final invoice.

Tip: Make a copy of all documents submitted and retain them for your records.

Step 7

Post-installation responsibilities

Action

Complete final documentation and commit to ongoing care.

Responsible party

Unit owner and strata council

After the installation is complete, take a moment to celebrate the project and progress you've made. This is also the time to make sure all documentation is gathered (and submitted, if necessary), and maintenance responsibilities are clearly understood.

7.1 Gather documentation

Gather completion documents and submit the relevant ones to your strata council:

- Final inspection checklist or permit sign-off (if applicable)
- Heat pump model info and installation documentation
- Manufacturer warranties and user manuals
- Proof that all strata conditions were met

7.2 Heat pump usage tips

A few best practices for optimal performance:

- Use your heat pump as the primary heating system in the heating season. Ensure electric baseboards are turned off and only use for heating if required in extreme cold weather.
- Turn off electric baseboards during cooling season to avoid conflicting heating/cooling signals
- In heating season, set back your thermostat by 2 degrees when out for the day, so that it can quickly come back up to your preferred temperature when you return home.

7.3 Maintenance practices

Ongoing maintenance ensures your heat pump operates efficiently and lasts for years. Maintenance is typically the owner's responsibility, but the strata may wish to set a standard for all residents.

Recommended practices:

- Follow contractor and manufacturer recommendations for servicing, typically once a year.
- Clean or replace filters regularly
- Ensure outdoor units are free of debris, leaves, or snow
- Maintain access clearance around outdoor units

Helpful resources

Heat Pump rebate programs

- BC Hydro's Condo and Apartment Rebate Program
- CleanBC's new Energy Savings Program Condo and Apartment Rebate

Heat pumps

- About heat pumps—types, how they work, benefits, things to consider
- So you want to buy a heat pump? Insider tips for homeowners
- Heat Pumps—Know before you buy

Strata guidance

- Condominium Home Owners Association (CHOA)—Heat Pumps and Air Conditioners—What A Council Needs to Know
- Vancouver Island Strata Owners Association (VISOA): Handling requests for heat pumps and air conditioners—VISOA—Vancouver Island Strata Owners Association
- Vancouver Island Strata Owners Association (VISOA)—Top 10 Tips for Heat Pump Bylaws for Strata
  - This video covers many of the most common questions and processes needed to install heat pumps in strata buildings.
- B2E Electrification—Getting Strata Approval
- Hiring a contractor

Energy coaching

- Better Homes BC

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