

Non-Smokers' Rights Association Smoking and Health Action Foundation

December 2009

VANCITY ENTERPRISES

Verdant – a LEED-certified “green” condominium

Vancity Enterprises, operated by the Vancouver City Savings Credit Union, has a mandate to build socially and environmentally responsible real estate through partnerships with community-based groups. Their recent completion of Verdant, a “green” condominium in Burnaby certified through the Canada Green Building Council’s LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program, thrust them headlong into the no-smoking issue.

Gold certification required the building to meet a certain air infiltration standard to reduce air leakage between units. As explained by acting CEO Dan Paris, Verdant was designed and built before the Canada Green Building Council understood the construction implications of this prerequisite on multi-unit residential construction. Verdant consequently failed the air infiltration tests and was facing the possibility of not being Gold certified—a serious problem for this Vancity flagship project. As such, an exemption to the air infiltration prerequisite was negotiated for the project—a process that took a full year for approval.

Eight months into the exemption negotiations, a no-smoking bylaw with a grandfathering clause for existing owners was proposed to and accepted by the condominium council. That process took one meeting and one follow-up email. A subsequent informal survey of the condo’s owners found that only three of 60 households had resident smokers, and that the vast majority of Verdant’s owners were in favour of a no-smoking bylaw.

The final bylaw that was approved and passed by Verdant’s owners was vetted by the Condominium Home Owners Association in BC and continues to be used as a template by the BC Healthy Living Alliance. The key take-away messages are to be prepared with all of the information necessary to make the case in favour of a no-smoking bylaw, to be patient and to reference other condominiums’ successes. In addition, having a proposed bylaw vetted by an independent, third-party advocacy group is critically important. Finally, for new buildings under development, a no-smoking bylaw must be properly advertised and marketed from the outset.