

CONDO CHECKLIST

If you're looking for a new condo, you'll want to ask many of the questions covered in the **Single-Family Home Checklist** section, especially those related to location, green rating systems, energy efficiency and water efficiency. However, condominiums also include additional common areas and unique amenities and you need to know how green they are. Even if the condo you buy doesn't have all of these things, you could work with the condo board to see if some of them can be implemented. Here are some additional questions that pertain to multi-family condominiums:

QUESTIONS TO ASK

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

BENEFITS

IN EACH UNIT

How is heat supplied to the unit?

Look for hydronic heat (hot water radiators or in-floor radiant heating) instead of electric baseboard heaters. Ask how efficient the boiler is and about its service record.

An energy-efficient boiler has an annual fuel utilization efficiency (AFUE) of 85% or more. It's also important to see a history of utility bills for the building. If heating costs have changed over time, it's important to know why.

Space heating is the single largest consumer of energy in a building. Hydronic heating is considered one of the most efficient ways of heating multi-unit residential buildings. However, if the condominium unit comes with a forced-air furnace, look for tips in the Single-Family Home Checklist section.

How will you be charged for electricity, gas and water?

Find out if each of the units has its own electricity and water meter. Very few buildings have individual meters for gas heating at this time (but it saves you money if the building has them).

Individual unit meters help save money, water and energy as you'll pay less if you use less.

If there's a gas fireplace in the unit or in the common area, does it have electronic ignition, and is it on a timer?

Make sure that any gas fireplaces turn off automatically. New gas fireplaces with electronic ignition save gas associated with keeping a pilot light on.

Gas fireplaces consume a significant amount of natural gas and are easy to leave on by accident. Also, the pilot lights on older fireplace models consume gas. They're often tricky to light and tend to be left on throughout the summer months.



QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	BENEFITS
IN THE BUILDING		
Is the window-to-wall ratio optimized?	Look for units that provide a good amount of daylight but minimize windows (for example, glazing). As a rule of thumb, if the proportion of window-to-wall area is more than 50%, then the building has too much window and not enough insulated wall area.	Although a lot of windows can be a great addition to your condo unit, they provide less insulation than walls. An over-glazed building becomes more expensive to heat in winter, and can be uncomfortably warm in summer.
Are there low-energy lights and automatic timer controls in the common areas?	Look for light emitting diode (LED) and compact fluorescent (CFL) light bulbs in the hallways, front entrance, exterior lighting locations and parking area. Also look for lighting controls that are motion-activated or on timers/photocells.	CFL lights use 1/4 of the energy and last up to 10-times longer than incandescent lights. LED lights use even less energy. Both types of lights save additional energy when controlled by photocells, timers, or motion sensors.
Are the hot water recirculation tanks in the building on a timer?	Ask if timers are used to reduce the hot water temperature during early morning hours, when there's almost no demand for hot water.	Hot water tank timers can save a significant amount of money over the course of a year, and they're very inexpensive to install.
Is there drain-water heat recovery?	In larger (and mostly newer) condominium buildings, it's cost-effective to capture and recirculate the heat in waste water from showers, kitchens, etc. Find out if the building has been fitted with heat recovery coils around drain pipes.	Hot water heating typically consumes the second-largest amount of energy in condominiums. The heat recovered from the outflowing bathroom and kitchen drains can be used to pre-heat hot water for future use, saving you money and energy.
Does the building have any renewable energy equipment?	Ask if any solar hot water or photovoltaic (PV) systems have been installed in the building.	After the capital costs of these renewable technologies have been recouped, they can reduce energy costs significantly.
Are there accessible and secure bike facilities?	Look for bike racks that are easily accessible, secure and large enough to accommodate all those who would use them.	Bike racks encourage you and your visitors to use more sustainable forms of transportation more often.
Are electric bikes welcome in the building?	Look for designated areas in the building for secure storage of electric bicycles and scooters, preferably with access to a few electrical outlets for recharging.	For city driving distances of 25 minutes or less, electric bikes can often get their riders to their destination faster and at a far lower fuel cost than a car. It costs less than 20 cents to charge an electric bike (distance coverage: about 40 kilometres).



**QUESTIONS
TO ASK****WHAT TO LOOK FOR****BENEFITS****IN THE BUILDING Cont.**

What energy-saving and health-oriented initiatives are being pursued by the condominium board?

When reviewing condo documents, look for evidence that the condo board is making energy-saving improvements such as maintaining or adding controls on the air exchanger, changing boiler filters regularly, sealing air leaks, insulating pipes, using non-toxic paints and adhesives, buying eco-friendly cleaners, etc. Also ask if the condo board is purchasing any green power.

An energy-aware condo board and property management company ensures you're keeping your energy costs low while maintaining good levels of building comfort and health.

Are green landscaping techniques being used?

Ask if the plants outside the building are watered on a water-saving drip irrigation system with timers, and whether the plants are fed with organic nutrients instead of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

A drip irrigation system conserves water and saves money. The use of organic soil amendments (like fish bones) reduces health risks for kids and pets playing among the plants.

Does the building have a good system for waste recycling and composting?

Look for an ample, well-ventilated, well-lit and clean area with clearly marked bins: A blue one for recyclables and one for general waste. (If the building doesn't have a blue bin, check for the nearest recycling depot at: edmonton.ca/waste). Also look for outdoor bins for on-site composting or grasscycling.

Recycling costs less and keeps valuable materials out of landfills. On-site composting is the single most cost-effective way to reduce waste at the source and can add nutrients to the plants around the condo. (Organic food and yard waste make up about 30% of total waste.)

If there's a pool, is it being operated in an energy-efficient manner?

Ask about the pool operation and see if the temperature is turned down in the summer months, or if thermal blankets are placed over the pool at night.

Pools and hot tubs can be a great addition to any lifestyle but they require a lot of energy. Adding a thermal blanket at night can reduce energy consumption by 50% in an indoor pool and 70% in an outdoor pool.

If there's a fitness room, is the fitness equipment energy-efficient?

Ask if any of the equipment is energy-efficient. While no fitness equipment has been certified ENERGY STAR, non-electric versions are available for some of the most popular exercise machines. Some fitness equipment is energy-generating and is used to power the lights and music in the fitness room!

Not only does using fitness equipment that produces energy make you feel good, it can even make you healthier. Studies have shown that people exercise longer on fitness equipment that generates energy, especially if they can see a read-out of the energy they're generating.

