



**Moderator: Steve Ilkiw**  
Founder, CondoHive



**Round Table**

# Our Lives, Our Condos, Our Tech

## Technology in Condos Round Table

*Over the last decade, new, evolving and even disruptive technology have been a major catalyst of change to our communities. Uber has turned the taxi industry on its head. Smartphones have made us more connected to our world. And drones, autonomous cars and artificial intelligence offer even more change. As governments and multinational organizations struggle to keep up with the ever increasing pace of change, how are our condo communities positioned to adapt?*

Assembled for their varied set of perspectives on the condo world, this diverse group of technology and condo leaders offer their insight to what boards should be thinking when making technology related decisions.



**Jesse Albiston**  
Customer Success Lead, Zoom.ai

A technology and innovation guru, Jesse leads customer success for Zoom.ai, a company focused on revolutionizing the workplace through artificial intelligence. Jesse's also a downtown condo renter and currently in the market to buy.



**Brian Bosscher**  
President and Founder,  
Condo Control Central

Creating new technology to help condos run better and more smoothly has been top of mind for Brian since founding Condo Control Central over 10 years ago.



**Jon Juffs**  
Director, Condominium/Strata  
Group, McIntosh Perry

An industry veteran who's seen Canadian condos evolve for over 30 years. Jon knows how technology impacts condos from windows and concrete to security and communications.



**Gene Lewis**  
Director, Business Development,  
FirstService Residential

Tasked with understanding what directors need to help their condos thrive, Gene works closely with boards to ensure they have the right management to run their buildings.

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**Steve Ilkiw:** Are condo developers in the GTA effective in incorporating new technologies for residents?

**Gene Lewis:** From a management company's perspective, there are times that we do see developers who we wish had put more forethought into how they're laying out the building from a technology standpoint. Clearly developers make the decision, probably for cost reasons or perhaps because the marketplace doesn't yet see the value in certain technologies.

**Jon Juffs:** The trouble is, the market is so competitive that it's very difficult for them to make decisions from a technology perspective. There's also been a lot of change in technologies, and a lot of developers are very risk-averse, so they're a little reluctant to start down the path of building a building that has all fiber optic technology in it when they know it's likely to go wireless in the next few years, and they don't even know whether they're trying to provide cell coverage inside or not.

With that said, they can be very, very effective in doing it. I look at some of the developers who provided the e-concierge services, where you are talking to somebody not even located on the premises, and it's a 24/7 electronic access to a concierge; a nice live person shows up on the television screen and explains to you how to enter the code and get to the unit that you're visiting, or to the office that you're visiting.

**At the end of the day it really isn't about the hardware or the software, it's really about your strategy for communicating to your resident population in a way that makes the best sense for your community."**

**- Gene Lewis**

So, they can be very effective in those sorts of services, but the market has to be clear on what it wants. And quite frankly, condo buyers are diverse enough that there is no clarity in what they want, and so, I think builders will, understandably, build to the lowest common denominator and proceed from there.

**Jesse Albiston:** Currently I'm in the market to buy a new condo, and with my search focused on downtown Toronto, there are certain things I'm looking for. Namely, I'm also keen to buy a new Tesla, so will there be parking with charging stations? This is key to my current decision making. I'm also a tech focused individual, so maybe these types of amenities are more important to me than the typical person buying in this market.

**Brian Bosscher:** My company works with a number of developers in the GTA. Developers are, by nature, very focused on the building of the condo. They don't want to spend money on technology that may become quickly outdated. I think developers want to adopt and incorporate the latest technologies, but again, what is the right thing that people are going to be willing to pay for?

**Steve Ilkiw:** So how should a condo board prioritize technology in their plans?

**Brian Bosscher:** It's going to be things that give you the biggest bang for your buck. Technology hardware or infrastructure projects can be very expensive and a bit more challenging to roll out, whereas some of the software technologies, apps or websites can help boards realize huge improvement quickly and cost effectively.

**Gene Lewis:** The number one issue for most boards I speak to are communication based. Brian will certainly understand and appreciate this. Everything from, "How do I get updates on what's going on in my community," to, "How do I provide the necessary documents, to make sure that owners and residents are informed about what's going on in their community" and "How do I work better with our management team".

We're all trying to figure out how to make it as efficient and effective for the person



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receiving the information, which is really about providing it to them in the form and in the format and in a timely basis that works for them, whether that's text, SMS, e-mail, voice, whatever. And that's further enhanced by hardware like Maxtv, or DigiNotice.

At the end of the day it really isn't about the hardware or the software, it's really about your strategy for communicating to your resident population in a way that makes the best sense for your community.

**Brian Bosscher:** I agree with a lot of what Gene said in that communication is a huge challenge. And whether that's communication with owners and residents or communication between board and management. It's a real struggle unless you have a nicely laid out plan for the tools you're going to use and how you're going to use them.

**Steve Ilkiw:** Jon, of our panelists, you've been in the condo industry the longest. If you encounter a building that hasn't done technology upgrades in 30+ years, what are you recommending they pursue first?

**Jon Juffs:** I would say there are two areas, communications and security. Communications is, without a doubt, the biggest challenge for older buildings. They typically have great bones and structures,

**"I think AI is definitely interesting. And it's the sexy hot topic right now. But from what I've seen in the industry, we are so behind, that we really have to walk before we can run."**

**- Brian Bosscher**

but those bones interfere with wireless communications, so you've got some challenges there.

The other is security. Sometimes the security people overthink it. Sometimes it's just a matter of having the existing peephole adapted to take a picture of whoever arrives at the door, so that if something bad does happen, the data can be downloaded from the device to help solve the issue. And they're very, very inexpensive. And that's a great security system for individual unit owners, and with very little investment you've communicated to your members that we are trying keep up with the times.

**Steve Ilkiw:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is seen as the most significant future

disrupter to our world. What are some changes AI could bring to condos?

**Jesse Albiston:** AI is not going to reinvent condo living or replace the people working in our condos, but it will augment certain things. The company I work for we automate things in the workplace. Scheduling meetings, doing research on tasks answering simple questions like as, "What's the wifi password," or "What's the vacation policy?"

This could exist in a condo by having an AI Concierge that helps answer condo specific questions. "What time does the gym shut?", "When's the AGM?", "What's the name of our building manager?" "Where can I find a copy of our by-laws?"

**Jon Juffs:** One of the greatest opportunities for AI is the data we'll gather. That data can help give directors insight to what others are doing. Just like we might ask Amazon's Alexa what the weather is, we can ask it, "Is it unusual to have a no pet provision in condos?" And Alexa would be able to mine the data and say, "Well, the 3,000 condos I know about, 2,900 don't have a no pet provision." Take that a step further and ask, "how many condos in a 1 km radius have a pet provision." You get the idea. Directors and management will have easier access to more data to allow them to make better decisions.



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**Brian Bosscher:** I think AI is definitely interesting. And it's the sexy hot topic right now. But from what I've seen in the industry, we are so behind, that we really have to walk before we can run.

There are so many capabilities that we can deploy with existing solutions now, that are rather basic from technology perspective, but they're mind blowing to people. New clients respond with, "Wow, you can do that? It's incredible, I didn't realize it was possible." Many of the tools are very basic. Being able to send out notices by e-mail, being able to send a voice and text blasts, tracking consent forms, etc...

These are all things that have been in place for over a decade in other industries, but the condo industry is generally behind. Companies like ours are helping move that along. Down the road AI will help. But again, as an industry, we've got to walk before we can run.

**Gene Lewis:** I think the topic of AI is beyond most directors consideration set at the moment. For us, it really is around, what are those algorithms that are going to allow you to anticipate, and provide owners with the information in a timely fashion, maybe even before they know if they want it. What comes to mind is when the new resident moves into a building.

The industry as a whole pretty well knows what's going to happen. They need to book an elevator. They're going to need to know how to dispose of the garbage, and they're probably only going to need to know how to do that once. Is there an app for that? There may be one, or there should be one. It's certainly something we have the data to support, but not something anyone is doing anything about.

This aligns with what Brian said. We need to walk before we run.

**Brian Bosscher:** If I can just jump in to add onto that answer. Gene mentions data mining and using data to be proactive, and I think we've identified that as a huge opportunity, but we've done nothing with it. Primary concern is communication. Their second concern, almost always, is

**"[Imagine] an AI Concierge that helps answer condo specific questions. "What time does the gym shut?", "When's the AGM?", "What's the name of our building manager?" "Where can I find a copy of our by-laws?"**  
-Jesse Albiston

privacy. As much as people want to move ahead with new technologies, they're really, really concerned about protecting their data, protecting their information, and making sure that nobody has access to it, and it's not used for anything that they haven't explicitly authorized.

So, we as an organization have been super cautious about that, and so, it limits us. We can only feedback reports and stats about an individual building's own data. We're not able to position one building's data against another's. So I think in this industry, as we see AI evolving and being implemented, privacy is going to be one of the concerns that stays front and centre throughout the conversation.

**Jon Juffs:** Here's a little anecdote from a property I visited in Eastern Ontario yesterday. They have a network of, people who every day go out for a walk in the community. But it's more than that, it's the neighborhood watch program. And, if they see that somebody hasn't put out their garbage that week, they knock on the door, say, "Hey, Alice, how's it going?" "Actually, not too good, I need to get to the doctor's appointment and I can't get there because I can't drive." And then somebody goes, "Oh, you know what? I'll get you to do the doctor's appointment."

So this is not artificial intelligence, this is real people intelligence. But that process can easily apply to community living, where somebody can say, "You know, Alice's front door hasn't been activated for 14 days in a row, and she hasn't been away,

she was here. She used her fob 14 days ago to get into the building." Obviously 14 days isn't an exceptionally long time, but perhaps a simple phone call, an automated phone call saying, "We noticed you haven't been out of your unit, is everything okay? Press 1 if you need help."

That kind of thing might be great for security. Now, is it invasive? I think a lot of people would say "Oh yeah. That's getting a little overboard. Big brother's watching all the time." But you know what? If you allow Alice to enjoy the last few years of her life in a much more comfortable way without the fear of falling down one day in her living room, then she's going to appreciate that. And I think it's going to take an awful lot of family work to make people understand that this is a system that's in place for their benefit. It all boils back to having the data to analyze it to know whether or not that phone call should even be made.

**Steve Ilkiw:** So with all these technology concerns and questions, what should a board do to effectively plan for the future of their community?

**Gene Lewis:** I think the simple answer is to reflect on the conversation related to electric vehicle charging stations right now. It's the shining pebble issue that many boards are having to deal with because an owner has come forward and said, "I've just bought," or "I'm considering buying an electric car, and I want to know what facilities are available, or will be available in my building."

I won't get into the specifics of that conversation, rather point to what boards should really be doing to be proactive. And that's step back from shiny pebble issues and create a bigger plan. What is the strategy for energy management, and what is the strategy for service enhancement in your community? What is the vision for your community?

And what we find, and what I find, typically, is boards really don't have a good answer. They're just focused, maybe, on the one to two years, and occasionally on the three year reserve plan. They don't actually have a plan. I think that's where, really, the conversation needs to

go. What is your strategic plan for your community? This allows people to either buy into that community or opt out of that community, depending on where it's going to go.

**Jon Juffs:** Yes, I think the strategizing as to where the community wants to go and wants to get to is very important, because it will help direct other future changes. For example, we did an underground garage restoration where we deliberately installed in the new slab, empty conduits to allow future wiring for any purpose. We spaced the port, if you will, the junction boxes at very regular intervals in the ceiling. So they are capable of running wiring.

At the time, the thought was communication wiring, but it turns out the system is actually going to be used for electrical wiring and probably for charging stations. So we didn't know at the time that that was what it was going to be, but a simple act of, "Yes, of course we can put in some conduits in the restoration job at no additional cost." It really made no difference at all in the overall project. But that came as a result of a forward thinking board that had people on the board strategizing and saying, "You know, there might be a use for conduits, and we don't want them to be surface mounted. Headroom is precious enough as it is, so we don't certainly want to reduce it if we can help it," so that was an interesting one.

**Brian Bosscher:** One of the things we've seen that's really affected condo boards, is that they'll do a pretty thorough survey of their owners as they're establishing their vision. Sometimes we see short little practical surveys, you know, I want to get feedback on this issue or that issue. The really high-functioning boards where they've got a good team, they're working well together, will go and do a really detailed survey of "What is it that you guys want for the community? What's important to you? Are there gaps in service or gaps in offering?" It goes back to that communication. In this case, it's sort of a two-way communication, asking the question and then analyzing the answer and helping to use that to build a strategy, and the long term plan. **CV**

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