

# Strata Sustainability Retrofits

## CASE STUDY: Freesia Gardens, Chatswood

Never Stand Still

Built Environment

ESTIMATED  
ENERGY USE  
REDUCTION

64%

Electricity Bills

ESTIMATED  
COST SAVINGS  
(PER ANNUM)

\$18,905

Energy & Maintenance

Excerpt from Wattblock Energy Progress Assessment

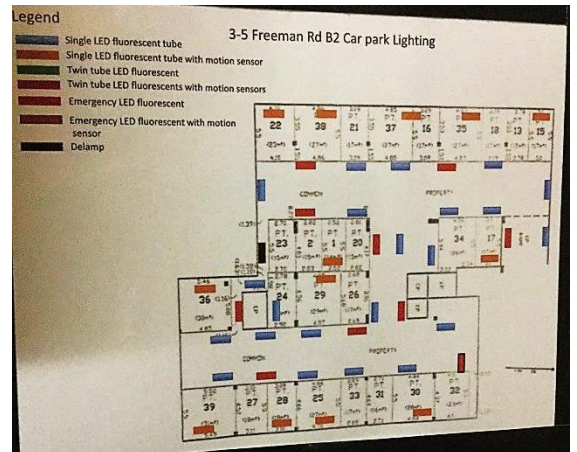
### The Case:

In 2011, the 40 unit apartment block in Chatswood, had an electrical fault from the street to the building which resulted in a 3 day power outage. This made electricity issues a high priority for the building's Executive Committee (EC). The EC found that electricity was the biggest cost in the building's accounts, and had gone up 80% in the previous 6-7 years. The EC went about finding a solution to reduce these costs.

**Innovation:** Utilising the Climate Clever free report undertaken by the local council, and taking measures outlined in the report, the EC saved on unnecessary electricity usage and used those savings to make aesthetic upgrades to the building that residents were very happy with.

### Retrofits:

- Long-term energy contract (2 years)
- Timers on lighting in garbage chute and ventilation fans
- New lagging around pipes
- Turned off 24/7 water pumping
- Fixed leaks
- De-lamped foyer and unnecessary garden lights
- Replaced all lighting with LED where possible – changes to exit, lift bay, common areas, carpark lights



Incorporation of LED bulbs to the carpark lighting

### Challenges

### Overcoming these challenges

#### Communication

There were many issues with communication that required targeted strategies.

The previous chairperson didn't live in the building and found it hard to connect with the other owners and residents. Having a chairperson who was more connected with the residents was important in creating change.

The EC let people know about the things that had been done and that were planned at the building's Annual General Meetings (e.g. energy savings through the lights).

There was no list of residents in the building, so one was created by an EC member through a Google document database. Names, email addresses, phone numbers and real estate agent names were collected for better communication with everyone in the building.

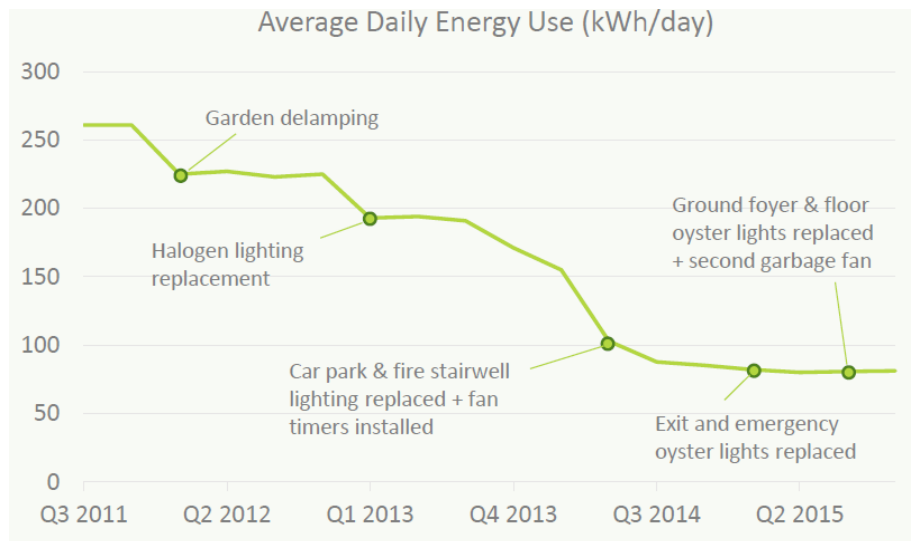
EC members also actively communicated with the residents in passing at the lifts, and through notices in both the doorways and lifts where people were most likely to see them.

Challenges	Overcoming these challenges
<p><b>Costs</b></p> <p>Although the retrofits were ultimately cost-saving, there were upfront costs.</p>	<p>Upfront costs were minimised by utilising expertise within the building. Communication with residents helped to uncover prior knowledge and experience that will benefit all owners.</p> <p>The building had a lot of residents who were professionals. Committee members include two engineers, an IT professional and one finance professional.</p>
<p><b>Time</b></p> <p>"Everyone has their own life, this is voluntary work but it takes a lot of effort to make things happen"</p>	<p>The EC saved time by being proactive with their strata manager, through frequent updates on any outstanding projects.</p> <p>Due to the time commitment involved in planning the retrofits, residents can be reluctant to volunteer their time. One resident stated the importance of fostering a positive environment to keep people involved:</p> <p><i>"It's similar to working in a corporation – you need to build a rapport with the other owners, know where people are coming from, create an environment where people can share their ideas and not be put down - when people can open up - it works."</i></p> <p>In this case the various projects made up 13 executive committee decisions in total. Retrospectively, a committee member noted that more time could have been saved by bundling projects and hence decisions together.</p>

Good communication between the Executive Committee, Committee Chairperson and residents and owners was an important factor in producing successful outcomes for the retrofits work.

*"Our committee really know how to drive the strata manager to help them on the way... they don't wait for the strata manager to tell them. It's quite proactive. I think the strata manager finds that we're...easy to talk to because we know what we're doing and we want to solve the problems – and people living here can give suggestions/ideas"*

**Freesia Gardens Resident 7/12/2015**



Excerpt from Wattblock Energy Progress Assessment - decrease in energy consumption with each retrofit by quarter

## Outcomes:

- The original \$27,000 investment resulted in a 77% saving on common area electricity – with bills decreasing from \$22,800 to \$5,200 in one quarter.
- The upgrades paid for themselves within 2 years.
- Units in the building are receiving record valuations.
- The building was able to invest in other projects with the saved funds, including:
  - a new fence and gate, and a new roof over the outside water boilers
  - garden upgrades
  - painting the building, fence and garage
  - recarpeting the common areas
  - installation of security camera system



The City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales is Australia's leading urban policy research centre. Spanning the interrelated areas of urban planning, housing, design, development and social policy, our work aims to advance the understanding of Australia's cities, their people, the policies that manage their growth, and their impacts on our environment and economy. Our research can be viewed at [www.cityfutures.net.au](http://www.cityfutures.net.au).

Research supported under the Australian Research Council's Future Fellowship funding scheme [FT130100511]