

“You can't live here: you're too [insert one: fat, tall, short, skinny]!” None of us can imagine saying something so rude to a person trying to buy into our condominium, yet too often we are quite happy to declare “You weigh too much to live here!” to people's four-legged companions. That was the experience for my 50-pound dog and me as I tried, for **five** long months, to find a home somewhere along New Westminster Quay.

During that five months, we encountered

1. numerous yappy, lunging, jumping, nipping dogs walking with their owners along the Quay. Without exception, they were SMALL dogs.
2. strata councils who refused to make, or even consider making, an exception for my well-behaved, highly-trained dog
3. realtors who assured me (falsely) that councils would make an exception for my dog: one person suggested that I pretend that my dog was a service-dog (it's not), a claim that, if proven to false, is against the law.

Strata councils who have by-laws restricting pets based *solely on size* demonstrate an unfortunate ignorance of dog behaviour: they fail to appreciate that little dogs are no more likely, and indeed may be LESS likely, to be better behaved than large ones. Some points to consider:

1. Because their little dogs are just so 'cute' or 'adorable', many small-dog owners fail to take their dogs for formal training.
2. As a result, and by default, many little dogs become the “leader of the pack”. They may feel the need to guard their territory, which includes their owners, by barking or nipping.
3. Little dogs are more likely to 'jump up': again, a behaviour often seen as 'cute' by their owners and yet one that can be dangerous to a child or anyone unsteady on her/his feet.

Rather than restricting dogs by size, strata councils should take a more objective, knowledge-based approach to determining which pets would be good 'residents'. Some suggestions:

1. Invite the potential buyer to bring the dog to meet Council. Ask the owner to demonstrate the dog's ability to obey simple commands. Can the dog “sit”, “stay”, “come”, “down” on command? Be wary of dogs that jump up or pull on their leash.
2. Ask if the dog has formal obedience training. If it does, ask the owner to produce certificates. (I'm not talking about a few puppy classes at PetSmart: has it completed training, and at what level, from a recognized dog training facility?)
3. Ask if the dog has its Canine Good Neighbour certificate. If it does, strata can be virtually guaranteed that this pet will be a welcome addition to the condo community. The behaviours which dogs are expected to demonstrate are listed here: <https://www.ckc.ca/en/Files/Raising-My-Dog-Section/Responsible-Ownership/CGN-12-Steps.aspx>
4. Ask if the dog belongs to a therapy-dog organization? If it does, you can rest assured that the dog has passed numerous personality and obedience tests to determine if it is suited to interact with the public, particularly with seniors and children.
5. Ask the dog's owner for references from people other than family members or friends: a dog trainer, a neighbour, a volunteer organization, etc.

Thankfully, my dog and I FINALLY found a wonderful building in which the strata council is willing to accept dogs of any size: to assume the best of its four-legged residents, to expect the best, and to deal with any infractions on a case-by-case basis. My dog and I feel welcome and appreciated. Come to think of it, we are very lucky: I'm not sure that we'd *want* to live in a building with people who would look at a dog and reject it, simply on the basis of how much it weighs!