

Alterations within flats

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Joint ownership of premises and sharing of common facilities are two very important aspects of Cooperative Housing Societies (CHS). Therefore, each member of the society should treat the structural stability of the building to be of paramount importance. Due to scarcity of space and an urge to renovate one's home, alterations within flats are very common. Sadly, many times, such alterations are carried out in a casual or reckless manner thereby compromising on the stability of the building. Before trying to find out a solution to this problem, let us first understand its nature.

Common alterations:

These may be as follows:

- Modifying internal layout (e.g. removing walls, rearranging toilets)
- Enclosing external areas by constructing walls (e.g. balcony, attached terrace)
- Changing the mode of use (e.g. converting a large balcony or bath into kitchen, a kitchen into bedroom, or using the flat as an office or a store)
- Creating fixed storage (e.g. lofts, niches, water storage tanks)
- Providing or relocating utilities (e.g. a wash basin, bath tub, air conditioner)
- Concealing or relocating electrical or plumbing pipes
- Renovating flat (e.g. changing tiles, creating levels, stone furniture, false ceiling)

Major alterations:

A few examples of structurally intensive alterations are:

- Extending balconies
- Constructing a mezzanine
- Combining adjacent flats with major alterations
- Constructing internal staircase to connect upper and lower flats
- Lowering the floor level in a ground floor flat

Concerns:

Following are the main concerns here:

- Structural damage
- Damage to walls, plaster, waterproofing, plumbing etc
- Overloading
- Violation of municipal regulations
- Change in the elevation (appearance) of building
- Unsupervised work
- Inconvenience to other members
- Misuse of building premises or common facilities
- Responsibility

Common lapses:

Following lapses/ problems are commonly observed for works of alteration:

- A description & drawing of the intended work is not submitted to managing committee for approval.
- A structural engineer is not consulted.
- Work is carried out without permission of the managing committee.
- The work actually carried out may be different from the proposed work.
- Structural engineer's certificate, if submitted, may be too general or vague and may not be accompanied by an approved drawing.
- Permissions from the municipal corporation/ authorities are not obtained.
- There is no provision for addressing problems likely to be faced by the neighbouring flats during or after such work.
- An indecisive managing committee delays or disallows, without valid reasons, a safe proposal, which has been approved by a structural engineer.

Control:

Some alterations may be need based and reasonable whereas some other may be potentially risky for the building. It is, therefore, necessary to regulate them on a case-by-case basis.

We can identify the following people (or entities), who can regulate alterations:

1. *Owner* of the flat concerned
2. *Structural Consultant* who checks the structural feasibility of the proposed work
3. *Municipal Corporation* or such other body in charge of the laws of development
4. *Managing Committee* of the CHS, which lays down the procedure for approving a proposal of alterations, monitors compliance by the owner, sets guidelines and conditions for the execution of the work and finally regularizes it.

The role of the Managing Committee would be to control such proposals through a checklist.

Next week we will see a step-by-step procedure, which the Managing Committee can enforce to regulate such alterations ...

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