VANCOUVER HVAC PRO

Strata & Condo HVAC

Heat pumps and AC in condos and townhouses, strata approval, noise and placement rules, and in-suite fan coils and PTACs

4 Expert Answers from HVAC IQ

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Q1

Is a through-wall AC unit possible in a concrete Brentwood tower?

Through-wall AC units are technically possible in concrete Burnaby towers, but the barriers in a strata building usually matter more than the technical side. Budget roughly $1,500–$4,500 for a through-wall sleeve and unit installed, though concrete core-drilling and any electrical work can push that higher depending on what the suite already has.

The Strata Hurdle Comes First

In a concrete high-rise, the exterior wall is common property under the Strata Property Act. That means you need written council approval before any contractor touches the wall, and many Burnaby strata corporations have blanket rules against new penetrations because of waterproofing, structural and aesthetic concerns. Check your bylaws and get a council resolution in writing before spending anything on quotes. If the building already has sleeve openings from a previous unit, your path is much easier.

Assuming council says yes, a contractor will core-drill through the concrete, install a metal sleeve, fit the through-wall unit and connect it to a dedicated electrical circuit. The drilling itself is noisy, dusty and takes a specialist, which is part of why some stratas refuse it outright.

Burnaby issues its own electrical permits, so the contractor pulling the circuit for the unit will apply to the City of Burnaby, not Technical Safety BC. Make sure that permit is included in any quote you receive.

On placement and noise: Burnaby's noise bylaw sets limits of 55 dBA by day and 45 dBA at night for mechanical equipment. A through-wall unit exhausts directly through the sleeve rather than sitting on a pad, so the sound question is mainly about the exhaust grille facing a neighbour's window or a shared outdoor space. Confirm the proposed location with your strata before the contractor finalises the sleeve position.

One important City of Vancouver rule does not apply here: the requirement that new permanent cooling in a detached house or duplex must be a heat pump is a City of Vancouver rule only. That rule does not cover Burnaby, so ask the contractor to confirm what the City of Burnaby allows for a cooling-only unit.

That said, a ductless mini-split is worth comparing. A single-zone mini-split in the $4,500–$8,000 range typically delivers better efficiency, quieter operation and no core-drilling, since the line set runs through a much smaller penetration. It still needs strata approval and an electrical permit from the City of Burnaby, but the wall impact is far less, which often makes council approval easier to obtain.

Before hiring anyone, ask the contractor for their refrigerant certification under BC's Ozone Depleting Substances and Other Halocarbons Regulation, their WorkSafeBC coverage, and confirm the electrical permit is in the quoted

price.

Timing matters here: contractors book up quickly ahead of Metro Vancouver's summer heat season, and concrete core-drilling crews are in demand from April onward. If you want cooling in place before July, getting strata approval and contractor quotes in February or March gives you the best chance of a smooth install. Once council has said yes, a few Burnaby strata-experienced contractors can price it, and Vancouver HVAC Pro takes one request to reach them.

Q2

Can townhouse owners in Langley add central air on their own?

Adding central air to a Langley townhouse is possible, but "on your own" runs into several hard stops before you even pick a unit.

What the rules actually require

Central air conditioning in a townhouse means refrigerant lines, an outdoor condenser, electrical work and almost always a new dedicated circuit. In Langley, both the gas permit (if you are disconnecting or capping a gas line) and the electrical permit for the new AC circuit come from Technical Safety BC, not the municipality. This is not a DIY job: homeowner electrical permits generally do not cover strata properties. Refrigerant work is a separate barrier entirely. Under BC's Ozone Depleting Substances and Other Halocarbons Regulation, only an approved, certified person may install, charge or handle refrigerant.

Then there is the strata. A Langley townhouse almost certainly sits within a strata corporation, and strata bylaws under the Strata Property Act typically require written approval before any alteration that affects common property or the building envelope. An outdoor condenser, a wall or roof penetration for the line set, and a condensate drain all typically touch common property. Starting work without that approval risks a strata order to remove the equipment at your cost.

One City of Vancouver rule does not apply here. Vancouver's 2023 requirement that new permanent AC in a detached house or duplex must be a heat pump is a City of Vancouver bylaw only. In Langley, a cooling-only central air conditioner remains an option, though a heat pump gives you both heating and cooling and may make more financial sense over time.

On the cost side, adding central AC to existing forced-air ducts in a Langley townhouse typically runs $5,500 to $10,000 installed, depending on duct condition, the size of the unit needed, electrical capacity and how the line set is routed. If the panel needs upgrading, add roughly $3,500 to $6,000 more.

A proper quote should include a heat loss and cooling load calculation (not just matching the old unit's capacity), the exact model and SEER rating, all electrical work and permits, the line set, a pad or wall bracket for the outdoor unit, removal of any old equipment and a labour warranty. Ask the contractor to confirm strata approval is your responsibility before they schedule the install.

Rebates are limited here. BC Hydro's Home Renovation Rebate applies only when a heat pump replaces all-electric heat. If your townhouse heats with gas, there is currently no general fuel-switching rebate available for Metro Vancouver homeowners who are not income-qualified. Confirm your situation with BC Hydro or Better Homes BC before purchasing.

Before signing anything, ask the contractor: "Are you certified under BC's refrigerant regulations, and will you pull the Technical Safety BC electrical permit as part of this job?" Vancouver HVAC Pro can send your details to local contractors in the Langley area if you'd like a few quotes to compare.

Q3

My strata keeps saying no to heat pumps, what are my options in Delta?

Strata approval is a real barrier, but you have more options than you might think, and some of them sidestep the outdoor-unit question entirely.

When the Strata Says No to an Outdoor Unit

The core issue is almost always the outdoor compressor. Strata councils in Delta frequently cite noise, visual impact, roof or balcony loading, or simply a blanket "no modifications" policy. Before treating that as final, it is worth asking the council for the specific bylaw or rule they are relying on, because a well-written proposal addressing noise levels, placement and condensate drainage sometimes changes the answer. The Strata Property Act gives councils authority over common property and the building envelope, but owners do have the right to request a bylaw amendment at a general meeting if enough owners support it.

That said, if the answer stays no, here are the realistic paths forward.

Electric baseboard heating is the simplest status quo. If your suite already has baseboards, they need no permits, no outdoor unit and no strata approval. The downside is operating cost: baseboards are 100% efficient but electricity in BC is not free, and they provide no cooling.

A **ductless mini-split with strata approval for a smaller wall penetration** is sometimes possible even when a full heat pump was refused. A single-zone unit with a compact outdoor head, mounted on a ground-level pad or a small

bracket in a location the council finds acceptable, is a narrower ask than a multi-zone system. Bring a noise spec sheet showing the unit is well under Delta's municipal noise bylaw limits and a drawing of the proposed placement. This still needs strata approval in writing before any work starts.

A high-efficiency electric panel heater (a modern convective unit, not a 1970s baseboard) requires no outdoor equipment and no permits beyond what the strata already allows for in-suite electrical work. These are not as efficient as a heat pump but are quieter and less intrusive than old baseboards.

Portable heat pumps are a middle ground. A single-hose or dual-hose portable unit sits entirely inside the suite and vents through a window or a small sleeve in the wall. Performance is modest compared to a split system, and they are not ideal for heating a whole suite through a Delta winter, but they need no strata approval for the unit itself (check whether the window kit or wall sleeve counts as a modification under your bylaws).

On the permit side: any electrical work in Delta, including a new circuit for a heat pump or upgraded baseboard, requires a permit from Technical Safety BC, not from the municipality. Gas work in Delta also goes through Technical Safety BC. A licensed contractor pulls those permits and includes them in the quote.

For rebates, the picture depends on what heats your suite now. If you currently rely entirely on electric heat and you can get strata approval for a heat pump, BC Hydro's Home Renovation Rebate offers up to $4,000 for a whole-home replacement system. If you heat with gas, or if the strata blocks the heat pump altogether, that rebate does not apply.

Before a contractor visits, have these ready: a copy of your strata's bylaws and any written refusal, your current electrical panel size (usually on the breaker panel door), and a rough floor plan of the suite so they can assess load and placement options. Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with local Delta HVAC contractors who work in strata buildings and can help you build a proposal the council is more likely to accept.

Q4

Why is my condo fan coil blowing lukewarm air in New Westminster?

Lukewarm air from a condo fan coil in New Westminster almost always points to one of four things: a dirty filter starving the unit of airflow, a chilled or hot water valve that is not opening fully, a fan speed set too low, or the building's central plant not delivering water at the right temperature.

What to Check First

Start with the filter. Fan coil filters in strata buildings are often neglected for years, and a clogged filter drops airflow so dramatically that the coil cannot transfer heat properly. Most slide out from the front of the unit without tools. If it is grey and matted, replace it, run the fan on high for 20 minutes and see whether the air temperature improves. That is the one part of this job a resident can do themselves.

If the filter is clean, the next question is whether the problem is in your suite or building-wide. Ask a neighbour on a different floor whether their unit is doing the same thing. If it is, the issue is likely the central boiler or chiller plant, or the building's circulation pumps, and your strata council needs to know so the building's mechanical contractor can investigate. If it is only your unit, the problem is almost certainly the control valve on your fan coil, the thermostat wiring, or the coil itself.

A stuck or partially closed water valve is the most common single-suite cause. These valves open and close to regulate how much hot or chilled water flows through the coil. When they stick, you get a trickle of water and lukewarm air no matter what the thermostat says. A technician can test valve operation and water temperature at the coil in about an hour.

A few other things worth checking before calling anyone: confirm the thermostat is set to the right mode (heat versus cool), replace the batteries if the display looks dim, and make sure no furniture or curtains are blocking the return air grille at the bottom of the unit.

What the repair involves and who does it

Fan coil work in a strata suite is not gas work and not refrigerant work; it is hydronic and electrical. That said, any repair that involves the building's common piping or mechanical room is the strata's responsibility, not yours. Work inside your suite on the fan coil itself is typically the owner's cost. Permits for this kind of repair in New Westminster come from Technical Safety BC, and the contractor you hire should be able to pull whatever is needed. Before anyone opens the unit, confirm they carry WorkSafeBC coverage and liability insurance, and check with your strata council before authorising any work that touches shared systems.

A diagnostic service call in Metro Vancouver typically runs $120 to $250, and a valve replacement or coil cleaning usually falls in the $250 to $600 range depending on access and parts.

A lukewarm fan coil is annoying but almost always fixable in a single visit once the cause is pinned down. If you would like, Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with a local contractor who handles strata fan coil work in New Westminster, free of charge.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver HVAC Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local permit authority (your municipality or Technical Safety BC) before starting any heating, cooling or gas project. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **vancouverhvacpro.com** for the latest answers.