

Owning your own slip

As others have said, you need to read the contract. It's possible that the original property owner legally separated the marina from the rest of the property and sold the slips in condominium form referred to as a "dockominium." If this was done, you should have received a document called a Declaration of Dockominium as well as a set of Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation. These documents set out the legal form of ownership as well as the rules and regulations you agreed to at the time of purchase, how expenses will be shared, your voting rights, etc. If the marina is in dockominium form, you probably own your slip outright as a separate piece of "property" but also own an undivided percentage of the common property (aka common elements). That is usually the docks, sidewalks, power pedestals, swimming pool, clubhouse, road, parking areas, etc. You'll also be on the hook for a share of the common expenses, the cost to maintain the common elements. You're also on the hook for any property taxes assessed by the state/municipality on your slip. This is all spelled out in the documents. The state has a statute that controls dockominiums. The statutes usually state how often meetings of the owners and/or board of directors must be held, how reserve funding for major repairs must be assessed and held, how board members are elected and how long they serve, how to remove board members, the rights, and responsibilities of members, property owners, etc. Some key things you might want to know is who owns the pilings and finger piers and power pedestals, who pays for them if they get damaged or need repair, how much liability insurance you're required to have, whether you own the bottom of your slip or whether it's leased from the state, what your parking rights are, assigned parking, number of vehicles allowed, whether you can make improvements to your slip such as dock boxes, taller pilings, upgraded electrical, etc., and whether living-aboard is allowed.

Irrespective of how your dockominium is legally organized, you should read the documents carefully and consult an attorney familiar with common ownership property in your state if you don't understand what you've bought into.

As to whether they are scamming you out of money or not, everything you are obligated to pay should be spelled out in the documents you received or in the applicable state statute.

Like owning any other piece of real estate, owning a boat slip may or may not be a good deal. If the form of ownership was organized properly per the state statutes and if the association has a conscientious board of directors who fairly represent the owners (vs a bunch of dockominium Nazi's who force everybody to do things their way with lots of onerous rules and regulations), then you're probably OK. The advantage of owning your slip vs renting is the same as owning a house vs renting an apartment. The value of the slip might appreciate, you won't face rent increases (although common expenses can, and most likely will, go up with inflation), and you can have a say in how the marina is managed. And they can't kick you out because they don't like you or want to rent your slip to someone willing to pay more. On the other hand, you'll be responsible for the cost of maintenance, usually must maintain liability insurance, must pay property taxes, and can lose money if the value goes down or the dockominium is destroyed in a storm. You pay your money, and you take your chances!

With respect to your electricity, you have what's called a sub-meter. This is a meter that measures electricity to your slip but is not read by the utility company. The Dockominium Association must have applied for and gained permission from the State of Connecticut – Public Utilities Regulatory Authority to use an Electricity Submetering System. Whoever owns the main meter, usually the Dockominium Association, is responsible for paying the electric bill and then they subsequently bill you for the portion of the total that your sub-meter shows you used. Whether they can mark up the cost of your electricity above what they are charged per kilowatt hour is regulated by the state. In Connecticut, per the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, the dockominium association is not allowed to markup sub-metered electricity, i.e., they cannot sell you electricity at a profit. They must take the total electric bill and divide it by the total kilowatt hours used to get a cost per kilowatt hour. They then multiply this cost per kilowatt hour by the number of kilowatt hours your submeter shows you used and that's your electric bill. They may be allowed to add a monthly administrative fee on top of that. Check with your state utility regulator to see if that is allowed or ask an attorney familiar with the law regarding common ownership of property.