

# **Whiskeyjack Cohousing Membership Manual**

# Document Change Log

As documents are revised, important information is added or removed. Enter changes in this table so users know what has changed. Refer to this table to make sure you haven't missed the latest information.

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## Table of Contents

Welcome Statement.....	4
Section I: Introduction .....	5
The Vision and People of Whiskeyjack .....	5
FAQs About Cohousing.....	6
Section II: Life at Whiskeyjack .....	11
Organizational Structure: Teams.....	11
Types of Meetings .....	12
Quorum .....	12
Meeting Ground Rules .....	12
Decision-Making and Meeting Processes .....	13
Membership Policies .....	16
Section III: History.....	18
Section IV: Legal Structure and Documents .....	19
Legal Structure .....	19
Appendices .....	20

## Welcome Statement

Thank you for your interest in **Whiskeyjack Cohousing**. We are a group of Calgarians dedicated to creating a new way to live in this city. Through consensus-based decision making and our shared vision of urban living, environmental sustainability and a vibrant community, we are working to create a new co-housing project.

This Manual contains:

- information about our community
- FAQs on co-housing
- details on our organizational and legal structure
- information on the consensus decision-making model

Developing this cohousing community is a participatory process – as is typical of all co-housing projects. While we are all actively involved in developing this project, it is not the sole focus of our meetings to discuss building plans. Of equal importance is the time we spend together now, creating the bonds which will sustain us through the building process and be the true foundation for our community.

## **Section I: Introduction**

### **THE VISION AND PEOPLE OF WHISKEYJACK**

Whiskeyjack Cohousing has the following vision. We are still in the process of forming our principles:

#### **Vision statement**

At Whiskeyjack we value relationships with each other and the world around us. Within community we foster respectful relationships, appreciate diversity and delight in friendships. As a community, we strive towards healthy sustainable living through wise stewardship, conservation of resources and interconnection with nature.

## **FAQs ABOUT COHOUSING**

Some of the most commonly asked questions<sup>1</sup> about cohousing, and answers, are given below:

### **What is Cohousing, and Why Choose it?**

#### **What is Cohousing?**

The term cohousing describes the process by which a group of people work together to create and maintain their own neighbourhood. By participating in the planning and design of their housing development, residents form the bonds that are the basis of ongoing community.

Cohousing emphasizes a supportive, inter-generational community, common facilities and participation by all members using a consensus process to make decisions. Its setting can be urban, suburban or rural and can involve building houses or rehabilitating existing structures. The design can take a variety of forms, depending on the wishes of the group, however the homes are always self-contained, have access to shared facilities and the overall intention is to create opportunities for interaction among neighbours.

#### **What is the purpose of creating a cohousing community?**

Every group creates their own mission statement – Ours is at the beginning of this section. In general, the desire is to have a safe, friendly community that is affordable, accessible and environmentally conscious.

### **About People and Community**

#### **Is cohousing best for certain kinds of families?**

Cohousing is for everybody who wants to participate in their community. Typically cohousing communities would like to include a diverse group ranging in age from babies to seniors, with couples, families, singles and single parents.

#### **Do cohousing groups have religious or political affiliations?**

Not generally. The goal of most cohousers is to have a community that is diverse in age, background and family type, which is sustainable both socially and environmentally. The emphasis is on quality of life, including the nurture of children, youth and elders. There is no social agenda beyond creating a friendly neighbourhood where all residents feel accepted and comfortable.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Canadian Cohousing Network Website, ([www.cohousing.ca/cohsng1/faq\\_hp.htm](http://www.cohousing.ca/cohsng1/faq_hp.htm))

### **How are the members selected?**

Typically cohousing is a very effective self-selection process – the people to whom the lifestyle and values appeal are likely to be the people who will fit well as members.

### **What kinds of people live in cohousing?**

Based on the experience of past groups, the following generalization gives an overview of who is typically attracted to cohousing. They tend to be people who have thought about this idea of creating community long before they heard the term cohousing. They tend to be people seeking to improve their quality of life; people who are interested in the larger community around them and people who tend to think globally and act locally. To the best of their ability they take responsibility for themselves, for the world they experience, and for the world their children will inherit.

### **Do members share all meals in the common house?**

Each home is complete with its own kitchen, living room, bathroom and bedrooms. The kitchen and dining room in the Common House are available for shared meals as often as members want and people always have the option of eating in their own homes. In other communities, shared meals are available from 1 or 2 nights to as many as 7 nights per week.

### **Would I have privacy?**

Yes! Members value privacy as well as social contact, and it is important to members to have their own homes and private space.

The following statement is taken from a 1997 study on Planning Cohousing, funded by CMHC:

"While the shared amenities are integral to cohousing, some believe privacy is more respected in cohousing communities than elsewhere. The common house becomes the meeting place, play area, party room, guest space, etc., while the individual dwelling is the place for privacy and retreat. The idea of a shared kitchen and dining facilities does not stem from a notion that meals should be communal but a recognition that sometimes communal meals are desirable and benefit everyone."

### **How can I get to know the people in the group?**

The best way for prospective members to meet the community is to attend the regularly held meetings. Community relationships are strengthened through discussion at meetings, working together on committees, socializing at

community functions and through whatever other informal contacts people initiate. Through working and making decisions together a cohesive community is formed.

### **Do I have to like everyone?**

As in any healthy community, people will be tolerant and respectful toward others. Since cohousing communities usually attract members through a process of networking, it is likely that a high degree of friendship will exist among members. Some people, of course, are very private individuals and may feel comfortable with only a few, whereas others will form friendships with everyone in the community. As in other areas of life, individuals will create their own experience.

### **Do I get free day care, elder care or help if I get sick?**

As among any friends and neighbors, people help each other in informal ways and Cohousing is envisioned as a community in which people are friendly and supportive to each other, especially in times of need. Ongoing group care arrangements will be decided by the membership and any particular ongoing care for individuals would be arranged privately.

## **Legal / Ownership / Cost**

### **What is the legal status of the Community?**

Each cohousing project that has been built to date in Canada has had a different structure to develop the project. The land and common facilities are usually owned by the cooperative with all members owning a share. The units are owned individually. As a co-op we have the right to control membership and thus to ensure respect for the community's interests.

## **Decisions / Meetings**

### **Who makes the decisions?**

Members do. Most members work on one of the teams that will be created to keep the complex organized, and also occasionally work on DTFs or Disappearing Task Forces which will be set up to undertake a special project or to deal with a particular issue. Teams and DTFs pave the way for decision-making by researching issues and preparing recommendations in the form of proposals that they present to the full membership.



### **What is the decision making process?**

Decision-making and responsibilities are shared by all members. Decisions are made at business meetings using consensus. This puts everyone on an equal footing, avoids power struggles or political efforts to gain a majority, encourages everyone to participate by communicating openly and ensures that all aspects of an issue are considered. It is a powerful dynamic for building and sustaining community.

### **How much meeting time is involved?**

Regular business meetings occur twice a month. Team and DTF meetings are scheduled as needed depending on tasks or planning requiring their attention.

### **Do I need to attend the meetings?**

Someone does. The whole reason for meetings is to provide an opportunity for the group to work together to keep community life running smoothly. Some degree of participation is expected of all members. However, we recognize that not everyone is able to attend every meeting.

## **Membership**

### **If my family includes more than one person, how many members is that?**

Each household counts as one member for ownership purposes. All individuals belonging to member households have a voice in decision-making. If we need to “vote” on an issue (see Section II), each household would have only one vote.

### **What is the process of becoming a member?**

The steps to membership are outlined in our Membership Agreement, as well as the difference between associate and equity membership. Policies surrounding membership are outlined under Membership Policies.

### **What if I change my mind and want to move out?**

If an equity member withdraws from the group before the buildings are in existence, they will be refunded their contributions (minus the nonrefundable \$1000) when another equity member joins the group.

When Whiskeyjack becomes a physical entity, each unit will be able to be sold individually. Closer to this date, we will develop lists clarifying and distinguishing the responsibilities of the unit seller from those of the Cohousing complex.

## **Resource Material / Contacts**

### **Are there any books about cohousing?**

The book Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett is an excellent book to get an overall view of what cohousing is about. The Cohousing Handbook by Chris Hanson is a wonderful companion to the cohousing process of building community. Both of these books, as well as a Cohousing Video and copies of the Cohousing Journal, are available through the public library.

### **How do I get my questions answered?**

Talk to one of us, check out our website at [www.wjcohousing.ca](http://www.wjcohousing.ca) or link from it to the Canadian Cohousing Network, where you can find out lots more about Cohousing.

## **Section II: Life at Whiskeyjack**

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: TEAMS**

Currently we have 4 basic teams established to move our project forward:

#### **Community Building:**

The Community Building team (nicknamed the “Team Team”) is all about bringing us together both “officially” and socially. The Team Team is guiding us through the processes of developing our vision, principles and values as well as focusing on training our group in consensus decision-making processes and proper meeting facilitation.

#### **Legal/Financial:**

The Legal/Finance team is all about where the money goes. We are the accountants and book-keepers for the group and will be the ones that will develop and implement the legal identity. As time goes on, we will be involved with the lawyers and other professionals to ensure that all the “i”s are dotted and the “t”s are crossed as we create the physical structure that will best suit the goals of our community.

#### **Membership**

The membership team maintains regular contact with all members, potential members and other interested parties. They keep a general overview of meetings (agendas, minutes and a decision log) as well as manage a Yahoo Group for tracking group documentation and communication. The membership team is also involved in planning and organizing marketing for the group (fairs, festivals, publications, website, etc.) including promotional materials.

#### **Building**

The building team is starting the ball rolling on our “design program”. This is a comprehensive list of physical features essential to our community. This program will enable us to effectively collaborate with our developer and architectural team when we are closer to the building stage of our community development.

## **TYPES OF MEETINGS**

### *General Meetings*

- To conduct the normal business of the community and requires full community participation.

### *Team Meetings*

- To conduct the normal business of the community as it has been delegated to a committee.

### *Information Meetings*

- To introduce the project and the group to potential new members.

### *Retreats*

- To periodically reconsider the “big picture” issues: where we’re at, the nature of the group, our Vision, Values and Goals.

## **QUORUM**

Quorum at a business meeting is achieved when 50% of equity member households are present. Due to the fact that absent members do not benefit from group discussions in meetings, voting by proxy (or email) is currently not used by Whiskeyjack.

## **MEETING GROUND RULES**

Ground rules are commonly used by a group to record the assumptions, expectations, and framework that underlie its meeting and decision-making processes. They are intended to make these things explicit so that everyone knows what they can count on from others and from the group as a whole.

### **1. Show Up**

- ◆ Respect time commitments/Be on time
- ◆ RSVP – always!!
- ◆ Come prepared (read the previous minutes and the agenda)

### **2. Get Present**

- ◆ Bring yourself fully into the here and now
- ◆ Pay attention: to yourself, to others, to the meeting tasks and process
- ◆ Listen respectfully to others, including feelings, body language
- ◆ Ask yourself regularly “Can I support these decisions?”

### **3. Speak Your Truth**

- ◆ Be concise – ensure space for others
- ◆ Express yourself fully – feelings are important

- ◆ Provide direct feedback – voice concerns as well as support but be RESPECTFUL at all times

#### **4. Release the Results**

- ◆ Avoid getting attached to your position or to any particular result
- ◆ Allow for synergy, group wisdom
- ◆ Be open to outcome, change
- ◆ Keep open to co-creating new ideas

## **DECISION-MAKING AND MEETING PROCESSES**

### **Using the Consensus Process**

Consensus is different from most other kinds of decision making because it stresses group members working together to cooperatively develop a decision. Since the goal is group unity, rather than winning a majority of votes, every member is considered important and the group tries to listen to and respond to each person's needs and opinions. Because of this process of incorporating all members' wisdom, consensus can create better decisions.

A consensus decision has 3 essential ingredients:

- It is made with the community's best interest in mind.
- Everyone takes responsibility to speak their point of view and to listen to others.
- Everyone agrees not to hinder its implementation.

We believe that making a decision by consensus allows us, as a group, to create a solution greater than any one of us could reach alone. We recognize that the consensus process requires commitment and patience but we believe that the resulting decisions are better, more effective and, in the long term, more time efficient. A true consensus decision reflects the concerns and creativity of all the members of the group, and the process of uniting these generates the solution that best responds to the needs of that group.

### **Reaching Consensus**

Reaching consensus requires gathering and blending the ideas and concerns of individual members, and synthesizing these into a decision with which everyone in the group can live. **Full consent does not mean that everyone must be completely satisfied with the final outcome. The decision must be acceptable enough; however, that everyone will commit to support the group in choosing it.** The object is to create a process in which each person feels that his or her concerns are heard, and a solution that everyone agrees to support.

A consensus decision relies on the assumption that every individual's contribution is valuable and important to the final solution. Some people's

contributions may be more difficult to reach or understand than others, but respecting each one is key to the process.

Consensus strives to incorporate every voice, acknowledging both the validity and the importance of each contribution, and leaving no residual minority to feel that a decision has been imposed on them. When decisions do not belong to one person, but are a creation of the whole group, not only are ego issues avoided, but decisions are more enthusiastically implemented. When everyone is in support of the action, both ownership and responsibility are shared.

### ***Principles of Consensus***

#### **Unity of Purpose**

We are working together to make the best decisions possible for the good of the group. We are guided by our shared beliefs, which are described in our Vision and Values statement.

#### **Cooperation**

We share information and resources and provide mutual support and suggestions. We are all working to find a solution that best meets everyone's needs. Our ability to reach agreement will depend on truth, creativity, logic, respect, and love, and will not involve deception, coercion, lobbying or malice.

#### **Trust**

Consensus only works in conditions of trust. We trust that each person is honestly keeping the best interest of the group in mind and that every contribution will be offered and received with respect and patience.

#### **Differences are Valued**

In an atmosphere of trust, we appreciate that difference and disagreement are not damaging but are, in fact, important and creative processes. Conflict, when dealt with in the safety of the group, can often lead to the greatest solutions.

#### **Feelings are Valued**

Knowledge does not just exist at an intellectual level and we believe that emotion and intuition are powerful tools for understanding an issue. Emotions and gut reactions are valued for the breadth and depth of understanding they provide. If emotions are not addressed, the process suffers and good decisions cannot be made.

#### **Equal Power, Equal Responsibility**

Because consensus decision-making requires a high level of involvement and responsibility from all participants, we strive to ensure that we all have equal opportunity for participation, leadership roles and access to information. Each of us needs to feel responsible for every decision made and every meeting we attend.

## **Common Ownership of Ideas**

A consensus decision is owned equally by all of us. All members agree to support the decision and not hinder its implementation.

## **Time & Process**

In order to make good decisions and nurture our community, we respect the process and give it the time that it needs.

## **Willingness to Learn Skills**

Consensus decision-making requires skills such as communication, facilitation, and meeting participation that we may not have yet developed. In order to develop these skills, we are willing to work to learn them.

## **CONSENSUS MODEL**

Whiskeyjack uses a consensus model for decision making. We believe that all people have a voice and that this voice must be heard not only for the sake of the person but for the sake of the group.

Whiskeyjack meetings are moderated by the **Facilitator**. This individual ensures that the agenda is being followed, that time constraints are respected and that all members have an opportunity to voice their concerns in a manner that respects the group's rules and regulations.

The Facilitator is aided by the **Timekeeper** who reminds the group when they have surpassed or are about to surpass the estimated amount of time for a specific topic within a meeting.

Whiskeyjack uses a system of cards to ensure that when a person has something to add to a discussion or to vote, that they can be 'heard' without any unseemingly shouting taking place.

The cards used are as follows:

<b><u>Colour</u></b>	<b><u>Discussion phase</u></b>	<b><u>Voting phase</u></b>
Green	I am ready to vote	I agree to the proposal
Orange	Raise a point	I have reservations but I will stand aside
Yellow	Ask a question for clarity	I am neutral
Red	Raise a point of order	I disagree

A point of order shall have precedence over other concerns. It is used to indicate that due process is not being followed.

The **Cardwatcher** sits beside the Facilitator and as the discussion progresses and writes down the names in order and precedence to allow the Facilitator to

fully follow the discussion while still keeping track of members who wish to be heard.

Any member may block a proposal's adoption by voting *I disagree* with the proposal. A person blocking a proposal automatically becomes chairperson of the ad hoc committee of 3 or more members whose specific task is to compose a counter-proposal which will take into account both the concerns of the blocking member(s) but also the wishes of the people who supported the initial proposal, unless the initiator of the proposal withdraws the initial proposal. In the advent of more than one dissenter, one of the dissenters may volunteer to be the chairperson. If no one volunteers, a name is drawn from a hat. The ad hoc committee has until the next monthly meeting (or as decided upon by the group at large) to make its counter-proposal. In the subsequent meeting, both the initial proposal and the counter-proposal are re-examined (discussed) by the membership. A 2-step vote will be held contrasting the two proposals. The first vote determines the preferred proposal and the second vote determines whether a sufficient percentage of the membership support it. If  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the membership vote to "BLOCK" the proposal then the motion is tabled.

It is hoped that blocks should very rarely be used if community members listen to each other, give time to each other, build up trust in each other and strive for what is best for the community.

## **MEMBERSHIP POLICIES**

- Members shall inform the group if and why they will be unable to attend meetings for an extended period of time. Failure to provide reasonable grounds for absenteeism will lead to loss of good standing.
- A Member may request to defer payment of Membership fees up to six months in case of unemployment or financial hardship. Should the group agree, at the end of six months the Member must begin payment, this may be done in instalments and must be completed within another six months.
- Upon request the Equity Membership fee can be paid in four monthly instalments of \$250, payable with post-dated cheques.
- If a Member is not in good standing the following actions will be taken by the group:
  - After 30 days the appropriate team will approach the Member (eg: the financial team would approach the Member about unpaid fees, the Membership team would approach the Member about attendance and work load issues). Based on



- If the issue is unresolved within 30 days of this meeting (60 days since the issue began), the formal notice of the problem will be brought to the attention of the entire group
  - If the issue is unresolved within 30 days of the whole group meeting (90 days since the issue began), the entire group will vote on whether or not to revoke Membership of the Member
- If a Member fails to meet the criteria of Membership in good standing three times in a rolling 12 month period:
  - After 30 days the appropriate team will approach the Member (eg: the financial team would approach the Member about unpaid fees, the Membership team would approach the Member about attendance and work load issues)
  - If the issue is unresolved within 30 days of this meeting (60 days since the issue began), the formal notice of the problem will be brought to the attention of the entire group
  - If the issue is unresolved within 30 days of the whole group meeting (90 days since the issue began), the entire group will vote on whether or not to revoke Membership of the Member
- Each team shall have at least one Equity Member
- Voting by proxy or electronically is not acceptable
- The choice of unit is will be done on a first come, first served basis

## Section III: History

In the summer of 2008, Tim Cassidy, Jana Vander Kloet and Heather Hendrie met with the folks at Prairie Sky for a community meal. At that time we were already convinced that cohousing is the right living model for us.

In early September we met for the first time officially, where we agreed upon the name of *Whiskeyjack* for our community. Anne Kleffner, a friend of Jana and Tim's, had been following the developments and also joined us, along with her partner Tony Southwell. Karen Thompson (and daughter Livia) learned of our initiative when Prairie Sky informed their mailing list of the creation of Whiskeyjack Cohousing.

In the fall of 2008, we formed four teams:

- Community-building
- Membership
- Building
- Legal/Finance

These teams are crucial for helping us focus our efforts on the various aspects of our project, as well as for forming relationships between members. By the end of January 2009, we were meeting twice a month.

Our group continued to expand in 2009. In April we welcomed Julia Graham, Nolan and Sherry Archer to the group and at the end of June, Trish and Curtis Konelsky (with children Mercy and Cedar) joined our ranks.

The summer and early fall of 2009 were exciting times as we focused on promoting our project (Calgary Folk Festival, EcoLiving Fair) and "building" our community. We began to meet socially and informally, as well as for business meetings. In this time, we also encountered some obstacles to our development as a group and fortunately we were able not only to find solutions to these difficulties but also to grow as group, relying and trusting each other in working together.

At the beginning of 2010, we began spreading the word in earnest by increasing our advertising and holding our first big information session which was very well attended. As a result, Zaak and Amber (with children Blaise and ???) joined us and interest is growing in many others as well.

## **Section IV: Legal Structure and Documents**

- Legal Structure
- Membership Process
- Legal Documents
- Buying and Selling a Unit? (Section VI in Prairie Sky's manual)

### **LEGAL STRUCTURE**

Eventually, every group must form a legal entity in order to buy land and enter into contracts. Each Cohousing project that has been built to date in Canada has had a different structure to develop the project.

It is the intent of Whiskeyjack Cohousing to incorporate when the time is appropriate, but to date, there has not been a need. We are currently identified as an Association for banking purposes.

Currently, we have established a non-refundable membership fee of \$150 which will enable us to move forward with the process of building our Cohousing complex.

The group has the right to control membership. Having final say over who lives in the Cohousing project enables the group to ensure respect for the community's interests. If a serious matter develops with a resident, the group is able to buy back that member's unit. Such a step would be undertaken with careful consideration of fairness to all concerned parties, including ensuring a fair market price for the unit.

We have elected to become a home ownership cooperative because we believe this is the ownership structure that will best facilitate our Cohousing goals. Specifically:

- Co-operative principles are compatible with our vision and principles.
- Community ownership of the land and common facilities and individual ownership of the units expresses what we intended in creating our Cohousing project.
- In the co-operative structure, the interests of individuals are considered in the context of the group, providing a means for ensuring that community interests are respected, which closely parallels Whiskeyjack's values and processes (e.g. consensus decision-making.)

## Appendices