



**CANOPY**  
cohousing

## MEMBERSHIP MANUAL



March 2016

## Welcome to new and potential new Members

Thank you for your interest in **Canopy Cohousing**. We are a group of Torontonians 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 cohousing project.

Developing this cohousing community is a participatory process – a core value of all cohousing projects. While we are all 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 creating the bonds that will sustain us through the building process and be the true foundation for our community.

Our membership is multigenerational, with ages ranging from toddlers to seniors. Our members include two-parent families, couples, singles, and single-parent families. We warmly welcome any combination of people who count themselves a household. We do not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, or any other category.

In 2012 we incorporated and put our operating By-Law in place, scanned the west end for potential building sites and started looking for a project management consultant. In 2013 a wider scan for potential consultants was completed and resulted in hiring SHS Consultants in December 2013.

Almost all of our meetings include a potluck meal, and we like to have some strictly social gatherings, such as picnics in the park, Sunday brunch, or holiday parties.

## Section II: Canopy Cohousing Organizational Structure

### The Committees

Three committees have been established to date to move our project forward. As our membership grows we expect to create more committees to take on other tasks. Committees pave the way for decision-making by researching issues and preparing recommendations (in the form of proposals) that they present to the full membership.

**Steering Committee** (consists of 3 to 5 members appointed annually by the Membership, including at least 2 Officers) whose duties supplement those of the Officers and include:

- Coordinating and overseeing administrative tasks (e.g. meetings, proposals, etc. See By-Law)
- Developing and overseeing organizational structures and documents
- Being the principal point of contact with the Development Consultant and other professionals
- Identifying aspects of the community where development of policies and procedures would be beneficial
- Developing policies and procedures in consultation with the whole group
- Planning ahead for future needs of group
- Reviewing the big picture and setting agendas for general meetings

**The Membership Committee** is charged with carrying out all activities related to recruiting new members. Specifically to:

- Developing draft policies regarding membership and marketing to bring to Canopy's Business Meetings
- Proposing and managing the Committee budget
- Developing and organizing marketing, relationship-building, social activities, and promotional strategies
- Responding to initial inquiries (e.g. from the web site) and refer to appropriate parties as needed
- Maintaining records of interested people, 'friends' lists, etc
- Accepting and vetting applications for membership, including reference reviews and capacity-to-buy information
- Proposing new applicants for membership to Business meetings

**The Finance & Legal Committee** (consists of up to 5 members and must include the Treasurer) is charged with

- Developing financing options
- Monitoring and overseeing finances
- Monitoring and planning budgets
- Overseeing the transition to a condo corporation, including the establishment of bylaws, condo fees, etc.
- Working with our legal counsel to address legal matters
- Reviewing and developing contracts with the Steering Committee

As our membership grows and the development process proceeds we expect to establish committees along the following lines.

Land Search Committee

Process Committee

Social Committee

Design Committee

## Section III: Meetings and Decision-Making

### TYPES OF MEETINGS

#### General Meetings

- To conduct the normal business of the community. These require full community participation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Committee Meetings

- To conduct the business of the community that has been delegated to a committee.

#### Information Sessions

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

### QUORUM

Quorum at a business meeting is necessary for decisions to be made. The standard of quorum for Canopy meetings is a simple majority or 50% + 1 of Members.

### MEETING GROUND RULES

#### 1. *Show Up*

- RSVP in writing to meeting notices – always!!
- Respect time commitments, be on time
- Come prepared (read the previous minutes, the agenda and current proposals)

#### 2. *Get Present*

- Bring yourself fully into the here and now
- Pay attention: to yourself, to others, to the meeting process and tasks
- Listen respectfully to others, including feelings and 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

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<sup>1</sup> A Board of Directors is dormant and normally defers to the governance of General Meetings. All members are entitled to a position on the Board of Directors until further notice.

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

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

#### **Child Care**

In general, childcare is provided at the meeting location, or very close by. All members share child care costs. Children of guests are welcome with advance notice without charge.

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

#### **About 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. The foundation of consensus is that everyone has a right to be heard and understood. The object is to create a process in which each person feels that his or her concerns are heard, and to build 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 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. *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 Canopy Cohousing Commitment to Consensus**

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; it is not enough for a person to be heard but that his/her concerns must also be understood for the group to benefit.

As the raison d'être of our project is community, we believe that by working together we shall learn to know about each other and each other's concerns. Thus, when we enter into discussion, we shall be armed with empathy, wisdom, and open hearts to make decisions.

Therefore, each member of Canopy Cohousing has an equal voice in decision-making.

**The Process**

Our model allows the group to move rapidly when need be and to deal with the unfortunate and rare circumstances when consensus cannot be reached.

Blocking a decision, as described below, 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. Blocking should not be used for personal preference.

Canopy meetings are moderated by a **Chairperson**, usually the President. 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.

At the request of the Chairperson a **Timekeeper** will be appointed and remind the group when they have surpassed or are about to surpass the estimated amount of time for a specific topic within a meeting.

At the request of the Chairperson Canopy Cohousing uses a system of cards to facilitate discussion or to vote. The cards used are as follows:

Colour	Discussion phase	Voting phase
Green	Raise a point	I agree to the proposal
Yellow	Ask a question for clarity	I have reservations but I will stand aside
Orange	I am ready to vote	I am neutral
PURPLE	Raise a point of order *	---
RED	---	I disagree

*\* A point of order shall have precedence over other concerns since it is to indicate that due process is not being followed.*

When cards are being used, a **Cardwatcher** sits with the Chairperson, and as the discussion progresses, records the names in order and precedence to allow the Chairperson to fully follow the discussion while still keeping track of members who wish to be heard.

A **Vibewatcher**, when requested by any member, sits beside and supports the Chairperson. S/he has a function to watch the members and to take note of their emotional state that might be missed by the Chairperson especially as the group gets larger. Specifically, the Vibewatcher is to take note of members' verbal tone, language used, body language, facial expressions, or silence and to keep the facilitator up to date. The role of the Vibewatcher may continue after meetings in order to respond to residual concerns or feelings resulting from the meeting.

### ***Getting to Consensus***

When the Chairperson finds that all voices have been heard and the discussion is complete s/he calls the question.

*When no-one is blocking a decision, a consensus has been achieved.*

Any member may block a proposal's adoption by voting *I disagree (or by using a red card)*. A person blocking a proposal automatically becomes the leader of a task force of 3 or more members whose specific task is to compose a counterproposal that will take into account both the concerns of the blocking member(s) but also the perspectives of the people who supported the initial proposal, unless the initiator of the proposal withdraws it. In the event of more than one dissenter, one of the dissenters may volunteer to lead the task force . If no one volunteers, a name is drawn from a hat. The task force has until the next general meeting, or in the case of time-sensitive decisions, a time/date as decided by the group at large, to make its counter-proposal.

In addition, some decisions may be urgent and require a decision promptly. Decisions in this category must be identified by the Chairperson at the outset of the discussion.

### ***When consensus cannot be reached***

In the case of a situation needing an urgent decision, a fallback two-thirds majority (at least two-thirds of the votes cast) will be used if consensus cannot be achieved.

In circumstances that need a decision, but not immediately, the fallback process will be used after 3 meetings if no consensus has yet been reached.

After the second meeting the initial proposal, not having gained consensus, would be deferred until the next meeting. In the third meeting, which may be the same day (or even later in the same meeting if a decision is needed expeditiously), the counter proposal will be presented and discussed. At this stage, any proposal coming to a vote will need a two-thirds majority to be accepted by the group.

The proposal voted on may be the counter-proposal, the initial proposal, or a modification of either. The fallback threshold is intended to deal with the unlikely event that someone is egregiously obstructionist (i.e. raising red cards for issues not associated with the organization's core values or safety issues) or simply to address specific and firmly held differences of opinion.

Further information on Canopy Cohousing governance is found in By-Law #1.

## Section IV: Membership in Canopy Cohousing

### BECOMING A MEMBER

Anyone interested in learning more or becoming a member should contact the Membership Committee at [info@canopycohousing.ca](mailto:info@canopycohousing.ca). Our social events are always open to visitors and in fact, this is the best way to get to know us. Prospective members should contact the Membership Committee, who can also arrange for a membership information session.

Cohousing communities are typically designed and developed by the members, with the help of professionals as required, during both the community development and physical development phases.

We expect that members will share the key values of cohousing and of the rest of the group. People will join the group at different times and at different phases in the development of the group and of the project. Since there is some history to learn and a lot going on, prospective members (“Associates”) need some time to participate and learn about Canopy until they are ready to join as members.

Associates are exploring the possibility of becoming members and living in and being a participant in the life and growth of Canopy Cohousing. Associates actively participate in design and community process discussions.

Members want to live at Canopy when it is built and have made a large commitment to drive the project forward, both through financial contributions and time invested in developing group processes.

The details of the roles of Associates and Members are outlined in the following section.

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### **In order to become an Associate you must:**

- attend an information session
- have discussed with a member of the Membership Committee about their involvement with the group

#### **Associates must:**

- complete the membership survey
- attend at least 1 Canopy social event
- join and actively participate on a committee
- regularly attend general and committee meetings
- learn about the consensus process for discussion and decision-making. How?
  - Review carefully the Meetings & Decision-Making chapter in this manual
  - Attend and participate in General Meetings
  - Ask your ‘buddy’ (see below)

- attend Canopy workshops
- not block decisions

Associates are expected to decide whether cohousing is for them and apply for membership within six months of their first General Meeting. At the three month point there will be a check-in with the Membership Committee to ensure your questions are being answered. A second three month term is available at a cost of \$75 if undecided at three months.

## **The Buddy System**

Associates are paired with a 'buddy' and join a committee.

The Canopy Cohousing Buddy system pairs new Associates with members who have experience with the history and workings of our group. The member who takes on the role of a Buddy is responsible for contacting the Associate and is the primary source for information about the community.

Some ways the Buddy might help:

- maintain regular contact (phone calls, email, etc.)
- available before and after meetings to answer questions
- help learn about decision-making processes
- guide the Associate through the process of learning about our group
- make introductions to other members
- relate existing decisions and documents
- provide information as needed

## **In order to become a Member you must:**

- have attended at least two general meetings
- along with their buddy, meet with representatives of the Membership Committee to thoroughly discuss the implications of Membership, including the rights and responsibilities as Members
- agree to attend general meetings regularly, sit on a Committee and respond to communications in a timely manner
- complete and submit a Membership Application (see Appendix)
- pay the applicable annual membership fee
- provide information sufficient to demonstrate your financial ability to purchase a housing unit at Canopy Cohousing
- make a member loan as a financial contribution in order to contribute to the planning and development costs of the cohousing project. These loans will be credited to the member at the time of purchase of a unit, as described in the Membership Application & Agreement.

## **Members:**

- have full rights and privileges on all decisions affecting the group and project
- have a right to buy a unit in Canopy Cohousing when they become available
- are future neighbours!

## **MEMBERSHIP IN GOOD STANDING**

Membership is by household.

Members in good standing

- have paid all dues and other payments in full
- are involved on an ongoing basis
- strive to attend all general meetings and their committee meetings
- shall inform the group if they are unable to attend meetings, and where necessary shall take responsibility for transferring their responsibilities to other members
- follow the Canopy Cohousing procedure for consensus-based discussion and decision-making

If there is a loss of good standing by a member household, an appropriate committee will work to address the issue with the member.

## **Membership seniority — choice of units**

When choosing which units we want to live in, members will choose in the order based on the accumulated time we have spent as active members, referred to as seniority.

Seniority begins to accumulate on the date of becoming a member. If a member should take a temporary leave from participation, they do not accrue seniority for the months they are on leave. Taking leave is defined as either:

- ▶ Missing 3 General Meetings in a row. The leave will be considered to have started with the first meeting missed. The Board can waive this in special circumstances.
- ▶ Requesting a leave. Members can request a leave by petitioning the Board.

If the member household taking leave is represented on the Board of Directors, the director from that household will be expected to resign from the Board for the term of the leave. Nothing in this policy waives any other obligations of membership.

## Section VI: Legal Structure

### LEGAL STRUCTURE

In 2012 Canopy Cohousing was incorporated as a co-operative to be responsible for the development phase. A By-Law was developed which governs Canopy's basic operations and rules.

Canopy Cohousing has also decided that it will become a condominium corporation following the development phase. Whether there will be a role for the co-op organization after occupancy is a decision to take in the future. The By-Laws and policies of the co-housing condominium corporation will be developed later in the planning process.

## Canopy Cohousing Co-operative Corp. Associate Agreement

I want to help create a cohousing community in Toronto. As an Associate of Canopy I will explore the possibility of becoming a member of the group by participating as fully as possible in the Canopy process.

1. I understand being an Associate involves active participation. I will join a Committee and contribute to the best of my ability in both committee and business meetings.
2. I will inform the group if I am unable to attend a meeting, and I will be responsible for staying updated on the group's development.
3. I will review any circulated materials and respond to communications in a timely manner.
4. I agree to past decisions made by Canopy, and will work within the structure and policies already adopted by the group, such as Canopy's consensus decision making process.
5. I have read the Membership Manual, including the section on Associates.
6. I understand that Associate status is for a 3 month term, after which I am expected to apply for membership or decide Canopy is not for me. A second 3 month term is available at a cost of \$75 if undecided at 3 months. This fee can be credited to wards membership fees if I join.
7. I am aware that some documents will be made available to me that may be confidential. I agree that unless posted on Canopy's public web site I will assume documents are confidential and treat them as such.

Associate's name (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

For Canopy \_\_\_\_\_  
(Your Buddy)

# Canopy Cohousing Co-operative Corp.

## Membership Application & Agreement

Canopy Cohousing was founded for the purpose of developing housing for its members. Membership entitles the household to a vote at all membership meetings and all the rights and benefits as defined in our bylaws and policies.

1. I want to help to create and then live in a cohousing community in Toronto. As a full member of Canopy Cohousing I will attend general business meetings, join and participate in a Committee and follow and respond to all communications in a timely manner.
2. I have reviewed the Canopy Membership Manual.
3. I agree to support all previous decisions. I will follow the consensus-based decision making process used by the group.
4. I understand that during the planning and development phase funds will be invested by all members in the form of Member loans to support the planning costs of the community. I am committing to lending Canopy \$\_\_\_\_\_ at this date as the currently applicable minimum loan amount required from each member. Interest is payable on this loan at the rate of 2% compounded annually. Interest shall accrue, and the loan amount and accrued interest shall be credited to the purchase price of the unit I purchase. If Canopy decides to increase the minimum member loan, I will loan the required additional amount promptly following notice of the decision to do so. I understand that if I do not pay the additional amount within the time set out in the notice, my membership may be terminated.
5. If my membership is terminated by me (e.g. if I choose not to buy a unit), the amount loaned with accrued interest will be repaid to me no later than one month after the successor condominium corporation assumes Canopy's obligations, and is subject to reduction of up to 10% of the principle to cover costs of replacing me with another member.
6. I am aware that these member loans carry some risks. If the development does not proceed or is not completed I am aware that I may lose all of the loan funds that I have invested. If Canopy is dissolved before the completion of the project I will be refunded a share of any remaining funds proportional to my financial contribution.
7. I attach contact information for 2 references along with this application.
8. I understand that during the construction phase I will not go on the job site independently, nor communicate with the general contractor, their sub-contractors or employees. I understand that Canopy members may participate in site tours arranged at least monthly by the Project Manager or an authorized representative of the contractor. Furthermore, I understand that any costs incurred due to my breach of this provision will be paid for by me.
9. By signing this agreement I certify that I am obtaining independent legal and financial advice, understand my financial obligations, and can qualify to purchase a unit at Canopy Cohousing. I agree to provide evidence satisfactory to Canopy of my ability to qualify financially to purchase a unit at Canopy.
10. I understand that:
  - I will have the right to purchase a condominium unit in the Canopy Cohousing development. I understand that unit prices will not be finalized until the time when construction

commences.

- I also understand that I will have priority in choosing units based on Canopy's seniority policy.

11. I enclose the applicable membership fee as outlined below.

### Fees

Membership fees are payable on January 1st, and can be paid annually or in 2 installments. Fees for new members will be prorated to the month of joining.

Regular household \$240/year, prorated to \$20/month for new members

Single parent discount \$200/year, \$16.67/month for new members,

Our household consists of \_\_\_\_\_ adult members and \_\_\_\_\_ children.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Adults)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
(List children here)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

Canopy Cohousing accepts the Applicant(s) as a member and agrees to repay the member loan in accordance with the terms set out above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
for Canopy Cohousing

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date