

THE GROUP PROCESS

A CoHousing community is a community of equals – no matter how diverse the members may be in age, background, education or even ability. But rarely does a group of people behave as if they were all equal. The more you and your group can learn about making decisions as equals, the better you will be able to make those decisions.

TIPS ON DECISION MAKING

- A good decision is made when everyone agrees to it. Therefore, voting is not the best way to make a decision. First try to seek a consensus.
- Making decisions by consensus does not necessarily mean that everyone is in complete agreement – but rather that a solution is found that all participants can live with or are at least willing to try.
- The “process” used in making a decision is very important in reaching agreement.
- A real consensus comes only after open expression of any differences and a look at all alternatives.
- Give an opportunity for quiet participants to speak; discourage monopolizing.
- Stay focused on the specific task at hand by following the process steps.
- Call attention to strong disagreements. These often lead to creative solutions.
- Make sure you hear and understand what everyone is saying and that they understand you.
- Be suspicious of agreements reached too easily. Did everyone really participate?
- Acknowledge each other’s contributions and the group’s progress.
- State tentative consensus in concrete question form. Assure that you have agreement, and don’t take silence for an answer.

IF YOU REACH A STALEMATE

- Don’t go back to “Majority rules.” Stick with “What can you live with?” and a compromise approach.
- State points of agreement along the way: this helps group morale and may lead to agreement on principle.
- Try humor, taking a break, silence, changing seats, screaming together, stretching.
- Postpone the decision. Send to committee for more study. In the meantime more information can be gathered and tempers can cool. Everyone has time to reflect on options.
- There are likely to be times in the development process when a group is unable to rely on consensus because of time and economic pressures. You can always resort to voting when consensus can not be reached and a decision is needed immediately, but this option should be saved as a last resort. If people are forced into decisions they do not agree with, they are less likely to stick with the group and support the decision.