

Federation Services and COVID-19



Special Update

Advice to Members Re: Co-op Business

Every business and community in Ontario is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and housing co-ops are no exception. PHCHF has cancelled all meetings and events. We are encouraging our members to do the same. Co-ops have contacted PHCHF concerned about what cancelling meetings and what that means for their audit, board elections and general co-op business.

Here are answers to some of your questions:

Annual General Meetings

The Co-op Act says we have to hold an AGM within six months after the end of our fiscal year and no more than fifteen months after our last AGM. Can we postpone the AGM during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Answer: Yes, co-ops can postpone their AGM past the requirement period stated in The Co-op Act. The Ontario government has declared a state of emergency. The government is prohibiting public events with 50 or more people. If you are unable to hold your AGM in order to renew or elect new board members due to expiring terms, your current board will remain in office until your next AGM.

We believe it's within a board of directors' general authority to postpone the meeting in the current circumstances as a measure to promote the health and safety of members and staff.

Our housing co-op has to submit an annual filing which includes audited financial statements approved by the board, but my board has suspended all meetings due to the COVID-19, what should we do?

Answer: For housing co-ops submitting annual filings, returns or similar to regulators, proceed to submit these and contact your regulators to advise them if you have been unable to hold board meetings due to COVID-19.

When do we appoint the auditor?

Answer: At your next AGM you can include the appointment of the auditor on the agenda.

Board Meetings

Answer: While board meetings typically involve fewer people than members' meetings, we offer the same advice. Consider postponing all non-essential business to reinforce your commitment to social distancing.

You can also more easily use Zoom, Skype, GoToMeeting etc. for board meetings if every director has access to a computer and an internet connection. Remember that email exchanges and other means of polling directors individually do not meet the test of a meeting under the Act, so you will need to take care that you are conducting business properly.

Safety Protocols for Staff and Housing Charges

My housing co-op has received inquiries and we know of members who have suffered income loss as a result of either lay-offs, reduced work hours or illness as a result of COVID-19. Do you have any advice on how we deal with members who can't pay their housing charges or how to offer support to our members suffering financial difficulties due to COVID-19?

Answer: The federal government has and continues to make announcements regarding support available to all Canadians impacted by COVID-19, including financial support for those whose jobs have been affected. You can find information on these and other measures [here](#).

It may take time for people to access any relief. Check your by-laws and regulations about housing charge assistance to members, and where it is allowed and available, provide additional assistance to those who qualify.

It is also important to balance and make decisions in the best interests of the co-operative, and not jeopardize the financial viability of the co-op. We do not advise housing co-ops to waive housing charges. We will continue to update this information.

Tips:

- Please continue to collect housing charges, but be flexible and understanding should a member have challenges paying, please accept this is their current situation
- Provide the option to exit pre-authorized payments
- Ensure that no NSF (insufficient funds) charges will be incurred
- Track all arrears so that payment plans can be developed once this situation passes or financial support is provided by the Government
- Late payment fees cannot be applied
- No eviction proceedings at this time

- **Sample letter to members re: procedures of collection of housing charges and COVID-19** [here](#). Please note: in order to reduce the risk of transmission, access to the debit machine has been temporarily suspended by this co-op. (A good practice for all co-ops.) Members have been provided with other options to pay their housing charges. Courtesy of Glen Oaks Co-op, Oakville.
- **COVID-19 Sample Housing Charge Letter** (adapted) courtesy of the Region of Peel [here](#).

Should my housing co-op introduce measures for staff managing the co-op? What are our employer obligations?

Answer: Your board of directors should have discussions with staff or your property management firm regarding limiting contact when collecting housing charges, limiting maintenance and other work in member units to support social distancing. Boards should also consider limiting maintenance requests to urgent or health and safety concerns.

In addition to your usual obligations as an employer, there are a number of additional steps that need to be taken in accordance with public health advice. [Here](#) is a resource explaining what employers should know during a pandemic

Should the housing co-op or management firm restrict or avoid maintenance and other work in member units, or with members, due to COVID-19?

Answer: Yes, maintenance work should be restricted to emergency repairs only until the guidance on social distancing has been lifted. Co-ops should not reduce cleaning services. Cleaning with disinfectants should be increased for high touch surfaces such as elevators and door handles.

Can we offer more RGI subsidies to help members pay their housing charges?

Answer: Housing co-ops under federal subsidy programs such as Section 95 and ILM may be able to offer assistance using available subsidy funds on hand. These housing co-ops can talk to the Agency or other regulatory body about additional assistance that may be or become available. If you are under a provincial, territorial or municipal (Ontario Service Manager) government program, contact your regulator to find out what they can offer. PHCHF in partnership with CHF Canada will continue to monitor and update you with specific information as it becomes available.

Mortgage Relief

Is our housing co-op eligible for mortgage relief?

Answer: PHCHF in partnership with CHF Canada are seeking information on any relief offered and applicable to housing co-ops. Current information and support seems to be related to homeowners. For housing co-ops who have operating agreements administered by CMHC (through the Agency), CMHC has said they are looking at relief such as loan payment deferrals, special payment arrangements, advancing funds and would work with co-ops on an individual basis to help. We are actively seeking clarity and will update you soon.

Tips:

What else should we do to keep co-op members safe and healthy in our community?

Answer: The Public Health Agency of Canada gives good direction on how to keep people safe during COVID-19. Let your members know what your co-op is doing, such as increased cleaning, housing charge assistance, social distancing reminders and signage. If you have put in place a safe program to check on your neighbours, especially those who are elderly, vulnerable or have physical disabilities, let members know. Maybe offer to pick up groceries or other needed items for them. Each housing co-op will have different needs and levels of comfort to implement COVID-19 measures. You have to do what is right for your housing co-op.

Helpful Links:

- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association](#)
- [Landlord and Tenant Board](#)
- Landlord and Tenant Board - COVID-19 Policy – [Postponing Hearings](#)
- COVID-19 self-assessment - [click here](#) for more information
- The Original Free Canadian Conference Call is a free service. [Click here](#) and find out more

We are working with our sector partners to bring you the most up to date information to assist co-ops through this challenging time.

Regards,

Sophie

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