



Information meetings and town halls

A housing co-op's governing documents, which include provincial legislation as well as its own internal by-laws or rules, dictate certain requirements for a member meeting. These include when and how notice of the meeting must be given, quorum that must be reached for the meeting to take place, and voting majorities for different types of motions to pass.

With restrictions on physical gatherings in place, housing co-ops are looking at whether, and if so how, they might **move their member meetings online**. Though this is possible in many jurisdictions, there are various important considerations to ensure that the meeting is legally constituted, and this is a challenging task when you consider that all members must be given the opportunity to attend, that elections might need to be held, that secret ballots may be required and that formal minutes must be taken.

Housing co-ops can hold other types of meetings that are not a formal 'member meeting'. These meetings, often called **'information meetings' or 'town halls'** are not subject to the same legal requirements, and no binding motions are passed.

These meetings can be very useful to provide information to members (the Information Meeting), or to seek input from members and give them an opportunity for informal exchange (the Town Hall Meeting). Without the requirements of a formal member meeting, these meetings can be more easily accommodated online.

Examples:

- an information meeting for the co-op manager to inform members of changes to operations, and to take questions.
- a town hall to gauge members' views about holding the AGM online.
- an information meeting with a guest speaker presenting renovation or redevelopment opportunities.
- a town hall that presents options for the community gardens and playground, followed by a discussion and 'straw poll' on the options presented.
- an information meeting to present a new proposed smoking policy, following by concerns or questions.

Information meetings and town halls support the formal member meeting, because through this informal exchange the board of directors can save time in members' meetings because they create a better targeted, more informed agenda for the formal member meeting (for example knowing what smoking policy the members might be willing to adopt, before formally putting it before them).

The **polling** function that is available on various online meeting platforms can be very effectively used to quickly gauge members' views on an issue or a proposal. Information meetings and town halls still need to be carefully planned including inviting guest speakers where appropriate. They need to be open to all members (and perhaps other non-member residents too), and careful attention needs to be paid to facilitation ensuring that, whether it is in-person or online, it is a comfortable space for members to express their opinions and be heard.