

Who makes which decisions? A prioritization tool from the wonderful Ronaye Matthew of Canadian Cohousing Development Consulting that helps determine which decisions are made by the whole group vs. individuals or committees. Written for cohousing communities under development, this approach could be adapted to other situations.

Guidelines for Prioritizing Decisions

This is a tool for assessing the level of participation required for any decision and for determining whether a decision is important enough to be made by the group as a whole, or whether it can be made by individuals or committees.

Assumptions

- ♦ That all decisions are made with the intention of having the best interests of the community in mind and will be well thought out and researched prior to implementation.
- ♦ That the membership at large will be informed about the decisions that are made outside of the larger group process through minutes of committee meetings, announcements at business meeting or reports from professionals.
- ♦ If there is any “fuzziness” regarding what level the decision needs to be made at, then it will pass up one level (individual > committee > whole group).
- ♦ An individual or committee can choose to bring a decision to the group as a whole if they believe there is value in including the larger group in the discussion, even though an individual or committee has authority to make the decision.
- ♦ That if any member has concerns about how decisions are being made, they will bring their concerns forward to the group to allow for an open and honest discussion of the issues.

Process

Prior to making a decision, an individual or committee would assess two criteria:

- 1) Does the decision have short or long term **effects**?
- 2) Does the decision have a low, moderate or high **impact**?

Based on the assessment, the decision would receive a weighted score. Add the values together to determine the total. This score provides the guideline for the level of participation required.

Definitions

Short Term Effects (Value = 2): Results of the decision end with the completed development.

Long Term Effects (Value = 4): Results of the decision continue with the completed community.

High Impact (Value = 5):

- ♦ Decisions about the overall site layout.
- ♦ “Big Picture” decisions about individual unit and common house design.
- ♦ Decisions that impact the general direction of the project.

- ◆ Where additional costs are “discretionary” in that they add quality, but are not in the budget.
- ◆ Decisions that impact governance of the community and are legally binding.

Examples:

- ◆ Location of parking, access to roads, how units are clustered, unit sizes and general layout, common house size and layout.
- ◆ Total number of units.
- ◆ Emphasis on green building.
- ◆ Standards for material selection for finishing.
- ◆ Strata Bylaws.

Moderate Impact (Value = 3):

- ◆ Where there is an opportunity to choose between options that are within budget, but the decision will have an impact on the final built environment.
- ◆ Decisions that impact governance of the community however could be easily changed (are not legally binding).

Examples:

- ◆ Colour selection for the common house finishing.
- ◆ Plant choices for landscaping.
- ◆ Committee and organizational structures.
- ◆ Decision making protocols.

Low Impact (Value = 1):

- ◆ Decisions related to ongoing management.
- ◆ Decisions that will increase revenue and will in no way negatively impact existing members.
- ◆ Decisions that will reduce costs and still maintain quality.
- ◆ Where the regulatory authorities have defined the requirement.
- ◆ Where additional costs cannot be avoided.

In some instances, the actual impact might be moderate to high, but if it is a decision that has no real choice associated with it then it is considered Low Impact for these purposes.

Examples:

- ◆ Which institutions to negotiate with for the development loan.
- ◆ Selecting and hiring secondary professionals (appraiser, geotechnical engineer, surveyor, traffic engineer, etc).
- ◆ A traffic impact study is required, even though the cost has not been budgeted for and it is a requirement that cannot be avoided.
- ◆ Blasting is required to install services and was not included in the budget.
- ◆ Baseboard heaters were missed on the construction drawings and were not included in the budget, but need to be installed to meet code.

Authority

- ♦ The Project Manager, or other individuals authorized by the group, can make decisions that have a score of 5 or less.
- ♦ A committee can make decisions that have a score of 7 or less.
- ♦ The whole group will be involved in decisions that have a score of 9.