

How to form a Community Association

Suggestions for forming a community group are outlined the below, (some of this will be painfully obvious, but I have included everything I could think of that might help).

Decide on the major issues you want to address. Ours are: Streets and traffic re safety. Planning and zoning issues re housing. By-law enforcement re property upkeep, untidy lots, garbage issues, parking standards etc. By-law infractions re noise (our Police dept deals with these, but in Hamilton they are dealt with by the by-law officers).

Define the aims and purpose of your group.

We were formed in 1972 to try and prevent some fabulous open space from being developed. This was an early success and we now have a lovely park which goes alongside our river. We have also had other battles, to save our school and library, which were unsuccessful as the neighbourhood had changed so much in the intervening years, but we peg away at preventing over-building etc. We also work closely with the University administration on several issues relating to the presence of so many students in our midst. (43% of the houses in our small neighbourhood of approx 500 houses are now owned by absentee landlords). We also work with the Students' Council to try and make the kids aware of the importance of having consideration for their neighbours when they are living in the community.

Will your group have a social function? Our group has organized community picnics on Canada Day for several years, plus a winter pot-luck supper and skating party. This creates goodwill and allows neighbours to get to know each other. Other groups here organize fireworks for Canada day etc etc This also ensures that when your group is low on "issues" it will still be maintained in a low key form so that you have contacts etc for when you need to "activate" again.

Define your geographic boundaries. What do you consider your neighbourhood to be? Is it a well-defined area with natural boundaries or well known at City Hall in this way? You need to state your boundaries for your membership.

Form a steering committee. Gather a small group of people who are willing to work together and stay committed for at least two to three years on the various aspects of the organization. You will need a Chair or President, if possible a Vice-chair who will work towards replacing the Chair in a couple of year's time, a Secretary to take minutes of each meeting and to take care of any correspondence that is generated by the group, a Treasurer to keep financial records, take care of your bank account, deposit revenue etc. a Membership secretary to deal with subscriptions, keep a list of names and addresses of your members etc. It is always a good idea to have a couple of members-at-large who may be willing to chair a sub-committee if the need arises. This group will form the basis for your first executive committee.

Decide on a name for your organization. Be aware that if you ever intend to become incorporated, you cannot use the name *Association*, so it is probably better to call yourselves **The * * * * Neighbourhood** “*Organization*”, or “*Alliance*” or “*Group*”. This name should be confirmed by those in attendance at your first public meeting.

Once you have your committee worked out you can call a neighbourhood meeting.

Select a date. Be aware of conflicts in the area that might draw people away from your meeting.

Find a meeting place. We meet in our local Anglican Church’s Parish Hall, which is in the centre of our neighbourhood. Maybe you have a library or some other space that is central and does not charge too much for an evening rental. Even better is a free location!

Create a flyer describing, what the issues you are addressing are, what you plan to do, and list a contact name and phone number. If you are concerned about security, do not give a full name out with the phone number, however, no one will take you seriously unless you state on the flyer who you are and provide a means for people to contact someone in your group. This is true of everything that you mail out. You could also put a membership form on this flyer so that people can join without coming to the meeting. For return mail you can always just put “Membership Secretary” and a postal address without giving their name. (This is not something I have ever worried about, but we live in a much smaller town and I know these are concerns for some people these days). The meeting should discuss and confirm your yearly membership fee. Ours is set at \$10.00 per person and we hope that each member of a household will join, (seniors pay \$8.00). Fees go towards paying for flyers, room rental, mailing costs, etc.

The flyer should be delivered to every household with long-term residents in your neighbourhood. We make an exception for all the student houses, and we have a clause in our constitution that defines who can be a member. Delivering to apartment buildings is difficult and you need to contact a superintendent for help if you want to include apartment dwellers in your invitation to join your group. We have six large high-rises in our neighbourhood and it has been hard to try and reach those apartment dwellers and get them to feel part of the neighbourhood.

Create an agenda for your meeting. Have copies on hand for attendees to read as they wait for the meeting to begin. This helps you to stay focussed and lets people attending know what to expect. We usually have a welcome then have our guest speaker speak very early then go on to the business part of the meeting. In the future, your annual meeting should have a financial report prepared by the Treasurer detailing the year’s income and expenses and there should be budget prepared for the members to vote on.

Hold an election, (you need to be elected so that you can honestly state in all your dealing with Government that you actually represent someone)! At some point in the meeting you will have to hold an election to get your committee elected. Ask someone you know who is not going to be on the committee to conduct the election, and remember that you should be willing to accept

nominations from the floor. It is a good idea to have someone on your committee or in your group who understands *Roberts Rules of Order* for conducting proper meetings.

Perhaps you could invite a guest speaker such as your local councillor or a member of the local police force to come and address the meeting on some of your major issues.

We usually serve coffee, tea, and cookies and so people stay on after the meeting to chat with neighbours.

After the meeting. Your Executive Committee's first job will be to set out the terms of reference for your group, and perhaps eventually come up with a constitution, when you are well established and have enough members to make this necessary. You will need to get these in writing for presentation to your members at the next meeting.

Start lobbying. You will probably be thinking of getting in touch with your local city council at some point and it is important, once you have formed your group, to speak to your city councillors as soon as possible and get them on side. You will also want to talk to your local police dept and the Administration of your university.

Once your group is formed officially then you can start to attend City Hall planning meetings on a regular basis, and speak on behalf of your group when something comes up that affects your area. You will need to get your group on the Planning Dept mailing list for planning notices. This is really why you need to get elected and so on, to give your group credibility.

I do so hope that this is useful for you.

If you have any more questions please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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