



Proposal Quick Guide

A proposal is a written statement that suggests a change or changes to the status quo of Wasatch Commons. It proposes a modification to our physical space, cultural practices, or other adjustments to our shared systems (which are not currently under the purview of an existing functioning committee).

Once the proposal is consensed, it becomes part of our process.

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HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A PROPOSAL

Proposals are a way of asking permission to do something that impacts the community. A proposal for a specific change in the status quo at Wasatch Commons can come from anyone living at Wasatch Commons. Whether arising from a committee, a group of friends talking, or a person who woke up inspired, it all starts with an idea for a change.



Best practices include discussion of the idea with other community members and use of discernment in deciding who should write the proposal. If the idea falls within the scope of an existing committee, the idea should be shared with that committee. The committee may be able to execute the idea without fanfare. If the committee recognizes that the idea might be of interest to the greater community, they may prefer to formalize the idea as a proposal.



If the idea is outside of the scope of existing functioning committees, the preliminary discussion might be informally held at cafe, pot luck, or other gatherings. Listen to what others think of the idea. Try to hear from as many people as possible. This strategy is suitable for early stages of development; however, at some point, there should be an opportunity for the wider community to weigh in. It is preferable that this discussion take place before the proposal is introduced, but it is not mandatory.



If the idea directly affects specific community members, it is recommended that those people be included in the preliminary informal discussions. More formal discussions about the idea might take place at the regularly scheduled ACM (contact the Agenda Setting Team to allot time at the ACM) or a topic discussion meeting, prior to the introduction of a proposal. This step is helpful and strongly recommended, but not mandatory, in formulating the proposal.

REMEMBER

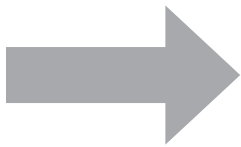
part of living in community is to support one another in a productive way. The purpose of a proposal is to make community life better. It should not be used to exert unnecessary control.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A PROPOSAL

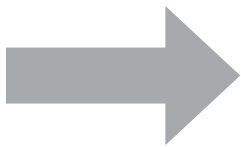
In order to make sure everyone in the community has a good understanding of what is being proposed and why, the proposal should include the following elements (*strongly recommended, but not strictly enforced*):



Statement of proposed change This is a quick (one or two sentence) description of the change you are recommending. It makes it easy to see, at a glance, the topic of the discussion.



Summary of the current situation, and why it is a problem A paragraph or two describing how things currently stand. This section can include historical information as well (why it was done this way, other ideas that have been tried, etc.).



How this proposal intends to address the issue What is the desired outcome if this plan is implemented. Include any details that would be useful to someone reading the proposal for the first time.



Pros and cons List of all the potential benefits and pitfalls of the change and how it impacts the community. Try to include the feedback you were able to gather on the front end. By exploring all of the cons in this stage, you will also have the ability to address them, if necessary.

It is the responsibility of each community member to educate themselves (read the proposal, ask questions, etc.)

REMEMBER

the proposal should not leave out any important details, or gloss over the potential drawbacks. It should be an honest attempt to show all the potential risks and benefits, not an attempt to sneak something by members of the community.

REQUIREMENTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR PROPOSALS (CHECKLIST)

The list of requirements* for a proposal are limited to the bare minimum. This is intentional, as proposals can range from simple to complex, and not all proposals require intensive care to be proposed and passed.

*Unless otherwise stated, the steps below have been officially approved by the community and are required



REQUIRED proposal distribution to all community members

A proposal must be distributed to everyone in the community. Keep in mind that email does not reach everyone, and some members may need a printed copy of the proposal.

REQUIRED Seven-day advanced notice In order to qualify for consensus, a proposal must be distributed to everyone in the community at least seven days before an ACM. A proposal discussion can take place even without the seven-day requirement, but a call for consensus cannot take place. In cases of emergency, the seven-day rule may be waived.

REQUIRED inclusion on the ACM agenda A proposal must be included on the ACM agenda for discussion, possible consensus. A proposal can not be passed outside of a regularly scheduled ACM without an emergency situation that requires one. In that case, an emergency ACM must be called.



Strongly Recommended Before starting a proposal, talk to everyone who is affected or likely care about the issue, either informally, or at a committee meeting or ACM.



Strongly Recommended Discussion about the proposed idea prior to creating a proposal is, in some (but not all) cases, desirable to having no discussion. This step helps ensure that when a proposal is formally introduced, some of the early objections have been addressed and will therefore not impede the consensus process. This should not be used tactically to delay a proposal.



Strongly Recommended Consult with Procedures Committee prior to introducing the proposal to the community. Procedures Committee can help identify weaknesses and make recommendations to help ensure the best outcome.

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FROM PROPOSAL TO CONSENSED PROPOSAL

Consensed proposals become part of our Rules & Regulations*, the third-tier of our legal governing documents. A consensed proposal was passed by everyone in the community at the ACM (assuming all other criteria were met). Here is the process:

READING OF THE PROPOSAL This ensures that everyone in attendance is on the same page, *then*

CLARIFYING QUESTIONS These are questions regarding some aspect of the proposal that is still unclear, and needs further explanation, *then*

OPEN DISCUSSION All of the various aspects of the proposed idea are hashed out. Community members should come with an open mind. Pros and cons can be discussed more fully, and additional pros and cons may surface during the discussion. Potential amendments may be discussed as well, *and finally*

CALL FOR CONSENSUS When the facilitator senses the discussion has tapered off, they may call for consensus. Everyone in the room signals with their thumb (see below) how they “vote”. If there is uncertainty whether the room is ready, the facilitator might choose to call for a straw poll to see where everyone stands at that moment. This allows for a more focused discussion about the issues that might still be causing challenges.



YES (thumbs up)

This can be an enthusiastic “Yes!” to “I can live with it”

This is used to signal an acceptance of the proposal. You do not have to be enthusiastic about the proposal to give a thumbs up.



STAND ASIDE (sideways thumb)

“I have a problem with this”
to “I hate this”

Sometimes a proposal just doesn’t sit right with you, and you want to go on the record about it. A stand aside does not stop a proposal, but records your opposition to it, and why. (You can say “I told you so” later.)



BLOCK (thumbs down)

“This will harm the community” to
“this goes against our values”

A block will stop a proposal dead in its tracks, and therefore should be used rarely and with care. Be prepared to explain your block. The group can accept or reject your block, based on the validity of your claim or other factors. Unlike the stand aside, a block cannot be based on personal preference.

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*proposals requesting special permissions do not become part of our Rules and Regulations.

PROPOSAL FAQ

Can anyone bring a proposal to the community? Yes, but it is important to be considerate of other community members. Ask yourself “Is there a committee that handles this? Has there been enough discussion to determine if there is any support? Does this step on any toes?”

Do committees bring proposals to the community to carry out the work they have been tasked with completing? No, although if there is something that is controversial, or if the committee is unsure of its authority or just wants feedback or buy-in, it is fine to bring a proposal to the community.

Is it necessary to have a topic discussion about every proposal? No. Although there has been much discussion about the pros and cons of these discussions, there has not been a consensed proposal regarding making these mandatory. Opportunities for discussion can range from informal chats, the discussion portion during the proposal process, or more extensive conversations about the topic, which may or may not include a topic discussion.

Can a proposal be passed, even if it has not been released to the community seven days in advance?
Only in case of emergency.

What is the fastest a non-emergency proposal can be passed? Seven days. If a proposal is on the agenda, the proposal may be passed at that ACM.

Is there a minimum number of WaCoHo residents that must be present to pass a proposal? No. The community has agreed that, for most decisions, whoever is present at the ACM constitutes a quorum. Decisions with legal or financial repercussions are excepted.

What is the minimum number of meetings/ACMs before a proposal can be passed?
One. The proposal can potentially be passed at the ACM where it is introduced.

Can you give input to the consensus process by proxy? You can request that your thoughts regarding the proposal be conveyed, but you cannot block by proxy.

If you cannot attend a meeting where a proposal will be discussed and possibly consensed, what are your options? You can give your thoughts to someone else to convey at the meeting, attend the meeting via videoconferencing, or if the particular proposal is extremely important to you, you can explain why, and request that the proposal be delayed until the following ACM.

If a proposal is meeting resistance, is there anything that can be done to move forward? A trial period may be used to overcome objections, with the caveat that the proposal be revisited at the end of the trial period and consensed for permanent approval or another trial period.

Can an existing consensed proposal be overturned? With a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of all community members in favor, it can be reconsidered. The proposal that replaces whatever was in place goes through the proposal process.

Can additional steps be added to the proposal process? Not without a consensed proposal.

If this is the proposal you’ve created, must you be at the ACM where it will be discussed? No but it is a good idea to have someone who can answer the questions that may arise.

I’ve heard “once a proposal comes to the community, it belongs to the community”. What does that mean?
This is a way of describing the collaborative process. Usually the person who introduced a proposal has an interest in the proposal, but because it affects everyone in the community, once proposed it is the community’s to make changes as we, collectively, see fit. It is customary for the group or individual to remain the steward of the proposal as it undergoes changes to reflect the community feedback, unless that person or group chooses to pass this responsibility on to someone else or another group.

What options do I have if I don’t like a proposal for reasons that don’t justify a block? You may persuade others to your point of view, or you may stand aside.

As a community member, what is expected of me regarding a proposal that I did not craft/help craft? If you wish to participate in the decision-making process, it’s up to you to read the proposal, understand the issue at hand, and share insights you may have that will help the group. If you cannot attend the discussions or meetings, but wish to participate, you can use modern technology to join in. If the proposal is particularly important to you, you may request a postponement, however, it may not be feasible to postpone. You may have to trust the community to make a decision without you, if you are not available.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACM Acronym for All-Community Meeting, a plenary meeting of all residents and owners, held twice monthly.

Agenda Setting Committee A committee tasked with creating an agenda for each ACM, including what form discussion will take.

Amendment A change to a proposal. Suggestions for amendments come during the discussion portion of the proposal review and can be accepted or challenged during discussion.

Block Stop a proposal on the grounds that it will harm the community or is in violation of the community Values Statement. You must be present at the ACM to block. You must state the reasons for the block.

Café An informal community gathering, sponsored by a resident, usually weekly on Saturday mornings.

Committee A formal group of 3 or more, tasked with carrying out the specific responsibilities which fall under their jurisdiction, as defined by the community. Committees are responsible for executing their tasks, creating a plan for the following year and requesting a budget to help them accomplish the plan.

Community All residents and owners at Wasatch Commons. Alternately, “community” can mean the connectivity we are purposefully trying to create through cooperation, trust, and a shared set of values.

Consensus Agreement of all present (thumbs up or thumbs sideways) regarding any decision or proposal. If a block takes place, consensus has not been reached. A call for consensus is essentially a call to “vote” with your thumb.

Potluck Regularly-scheduled meal (Wednesday afternoon, Sunday evening) where community members bring food to share and dine together.

Procedures Committee A committee tasked with overseeing the community’s decision-making processes, proposing improvements as deemed necessary, and arranging training for residents in consensus and communication skills.

Proposal A formal written suggestion for a change to community policy and procedures or to the community’s physical space and its usage, to be decided by consensus at an ACM.

Stand Aside To abstain from (not participate in) a decision, either for personal reasons or because you have unresolved concerns that are not strong enough to justify blocking.

Topic Discussion A gathering to discuss a particular topic or issue. This gathering cannot make binding decisions.

WaCoHo (or wacoho) A nickname for the community, short for Wasatch Co-Housing, which was the name of the group that planned the community and became the name of the development corporation which built the community.



This document was created by the Procedures Committee to help educate new members about the proposal procedure. It is based on history, practices from other intentional communities and our consensed past decisions. As with any of our practices at Wasatch Commons Cohousing, these can be altered or amended with a consensed proposal.

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