

Decision Making at the Gabriola Commons

Introduction and Intent:

This document details the general process used for making decisions at the Gabriola Commons. 'Decisions' may include the creation and implementation of new policies or determinations to take action on a topic or activity. This document is not intended to guide consensus process but rather the process that leads up to the point of making a consensus decision.

Informed and effective decision making is possible even within a non-traditional organizational and governance structure such as practiced at the Gabriola Commons. This style of decision making is premised upon self-organization, and inspired by good information sharing and trust.

The following principles (*citation coming*) are kept in mind throughout the decision making process:

- Decentralized decision making is practiced at the most appropriate, practical and empowering level, and in such a way that it models the ability of natural systems to self-organize.
- Information about activities and plans is shared in ways which are playful, articulate, accessible and engaging and which enables people to feel enthused and empowered.
- Messages are non-directive, respecting the ability to make a response that is appropriate to a particular situation.

Commons Coordinating Council (Council):

A meeting held monthly, attended by representatives from teams and involved groups on the Commons and open to the public. Council acts as a mediating body where involved parties can discuss ideas, issues and current goings-on and initiate cooperation and collaboration. This is the main venue through which new information is passed from team to team and where new decisions are discussed in depth between Commons teams, groups, projects and individual participants before being finalized.

Teams, Projects and Groups:

Teams are groups of individuals who operate on the Commons with a specific mandate. All Commons affairs are attended to by one or more teams rather than being directed in a top-down manner. Teams function independently on the Commons while co-operating with each other to ensure the organization functions effectively. There are also project groups on the Commons which function as teams throughout the duration of a specific project. Additionally, there are several community groups that are active on the Commons property. Members of these groups are encouraged to attend Council so as to stay informed on current affairs.

Representative:

This is the person(s) who attends Council to represent their team, group, project, etc. It is the responsibility of this person to bring the information their team wants heard to Council and to circulate information from Council to their team and, when required, collect input on that information. This person is responsible for following up at Council with their team's input on issues from the previous Council.

The team representative is trusted to speak on behalf of their team when a time-sensitive decision is required to be made at Council when no time is available for team input.

Decision Making:

Decisions which do not affect those outside a single team are made within the team according to the team's mandate, plans and budget. For example: the farm team decides what to plant where within the existing gardens. It is crucial that teams, groups and projects consider the effects of their decisions so as to avoid making decisions that may affect others without going Council.

Decisions which affect multiple teams, groups, projects, etc. are ultimately made at Council, using input from all teams, groups, projects and with direction from the team(s), project(s) or group(s) most affected by the decision or most knowledgeable on the topic. This process is outlined below.

When an issue does not fall within the mandate of a specific team, group or project, or is important to many, representatives can 'draft' a recommendation or decision together at Council. Occasionally a short-term task force made up of members of various teams, projects, groups or interested individuals may form to research or examine the issue and bring forth recommendations to Council.

Decision Making Process

A team, person, group, project, etc. has an issue that requires a decision to be made that has repercussions outside their own sphere on the Commons:

The recommendation, or "draft", for a decision comes from the team(s), project(s) or group(s) whose mandate(s) the decision falls within as this is the group of people who are the most informed on the given topic and most able to provide an appropriate solution or plan. For example: following the decision making process outlined below, the Farm Team might initiate the placement of a new garden. The 'draft' decision process might involve the Trails and Green Spaces team as well.

A. Drafting a recommendation:

The information is brought to the Commons Council meeting by the representative for discussion. A recommendation for a policy, action, etc. may be brought instead of a question or issue. (skip to B in this case).

1. At Council the issue is discussed and it is determined if there are other teams, groups, projects or individuals that should be involved in ‘drafting’ a decision, policy, etc. (if the issue falls within their mandate or area of special interest).
2. The involved parties form a task force to work up a ‘draft’ plan of action, policy, etc. using their own knowledge and input from discussion at Council.
3. The involved parties, bring this ‘draft’ to the next Council meeting for discussion and circulation.

B. Circulating the recommendation:

Representatives circulate the draft recommendation to their team members and collect input. Because this is an inherently slow decision making process it is vital that team reps are doing this promptly, so that unreasonable delay is not created in decision making.

C. Making a decision:

At the following Council meeting representatives discuss input and the recommendation is either:

- Adopted and made final through consensus based on input as presented by the representatives.
- Amended and re-circulated for further discussion/input (back to B).
- Dropped if it is found to be unnecessary and/or unpopular.

A final decision is made based on a consensus model as outlined in the trustee handbook policy on consensus decision making.

D. Circulating the Decision and Follow up:

The decision and any pertinent information is circulated by representatives to their teams, groups, projects, and also through Council minutes, which may be sent out by representatives and are posted monthly on the Commons website.

Trustees are responsible for updating the Trustee Handbook with new policies or changes to existing policies.

Once a decision is given the “green light” it is imperative that reports and updates are regularly submitted to Council as the project or activity progresses. This communication allows members to be up to date with current goings on and to monitor any changes to the original decision.