

# Amberglen Good Works

Organization, Principles, and Guidelines

Revision 1.00

Feb. 13, 2024

## We believe...

- ... that kindness begets kindness.
- ... that generosity is its own reward.
- ... that volunteering is a noble act.
- ... that kindness, generosity, and volunteerism are the foundations of a good community.

## We pledge...

- ... to be inclusive to everyone in our community, honoring our diversity as human beings.
- ... to be civil in our discourse and always respectful of others.
- ... to be generous and helpful to anyone who is in need.
- ... to be organizationally neutral with respect to religion and politics.
- ... to be mindful of finding common ground as we work together to build a unified community.

## ORGANIZATION

Our organization is known as Amberglen Good Works, or AGW. We develop projects that benefit our neighborhood and community.

**Mission statement.** Our beliefs and goals are summarized in our mission statement: “We believe that we grow by reaching out in kindness to others. Our mission is to support our neighbors by collaborating to do good works that benefit our neighborhood as well as our greater community.”

**Guidelines.** We accomplish our objectives by developing and promoting Good Works Projects<sup>1</sup> that benefit residents and charitable organizations in Amberglen and Clark County. While doing so, we try to nurture a sense of community among our neighbors in Amberglen, and to build a relationship of good will with our surrounding Clark County neighbors.

## MEMBERS

All Amberglen residents, including both property owners and renters, are de facto members of Amberglen Good Works.

**Principles.** Membership in AGW is guided by the following principles:

1. All residents have the right to attend any of our general meetings and to participate in our projects to the extent that they are interested.
2. There is no obligation for any resident to participate in any of our activities.

## STEERING COMMITTEE

Our organization is directed by a committee of members called the AGW Steering Committee (AGWSC). It is responsible for making all decisions on matters related to our organization and its Good Works Projects.

**Principles.** Our steering committee is guided by the following principles:

1. Any AGW member may join the steering committee.
2. The steering committee has no hierarchy; to the extent possible, everyone on the committee participates equally in every decision.

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<sup>1</sup>A “Good Works Project” is any project, event, or cause that is adopted, developed, and promoted by AGW for the benefit of Amberglen or the greater Clark County community.

3. Steering committee decisions are made by consensus, not by majority vote. See Appendix A for more information about consensus decision-making.
4. Steering committee members prioritize the good of AGW over their own preferences and will not obstructively impede the progress of the committee.

**Steering committee membership.** Our steering committee is composed of AGW members who commit to the principles listed above and promise

- to attend all general meetings to the best of their ability, and
- to be responsive to AGWSC communications via text messages (for decisions that need to be made outside of general meetings).

An AGW member serves on the steering committee by nominating themselves at a general meeting, verbally committing to the principles and promises listed above, and then being unanimously approved by all steering committee members, according to the standard AGW consensus decision-making (CDM) process (see Appendix A).

Steering committee members serve for an indefinite period of time, but may resign their position by announcing it at any general meeting<sup>2</sup>. They may also be removed by a consensus vote of the rest of the steering committee.

There is no limit, other than practicality, to the number of members on the steering committee.

## **PROJECTS**

A “Good Works Project” is any project, event, or cause that is adopted, developed, and promoted by AGW for the benefit of Amberglen or the greater Clark County community.

**Principles.** Good Works Projects (referred to throughout this document as simply “projects”) are guided by the following principles:

1. A project always involves the Amberglen neighborhood, either by benefitting it directly or by relying on neighborhood resources to benefit others.
2. A project is an undertaking of AGW as a whole, and always involves a team of volunteers. Every effort is made to include anybody who wants to join the team.

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<sup>2</sup> A general meeting is a public meeting that is held for the purpose of conducting AGW business.

**Project elements.** Each Good Works Project includes the following:

**Project committee.** (Also referred to as “project team.”) The project committee is a team of AGW members who work together to develop the project. Any AGW member may volunteer to be a member of a project committee.

**Project coordinator.** The project coordinator is appointed by the steering committee when the project is created, and has the following responsibilities:

- Manage recruitment of members for the committee.
- Schedule meetings of the project committee.
- Guide the project committee in development of the project.
- Maintain the project worksheet<sup>3</sup>.
- Report to the steering committee.

**Project worksheet.** A project worksheet documents the development of a project. It includes the description of the project, its target event date, financial information related to the project, a list of its project committee members, and all notes compiled during the life of the project. The intent of the document is to serve as a future resource in the development of similar projects, as well as to provide all AGW members with the project’s latest status on the AGW website.

**Creating a project.** Good Works Projects are created by the steering committee as follows:

- The idea for the project is discussed at a general meeting of AGW members.
- A proposal for the project is made and accepted unanimously by the steering committee.
- A coordinator for the project is selected by the steering committee.
- A project worksheet is created and turned over to the project coordinator.

## **COMMITTEES**

Committees perform the work of the organization and take their membership from AGW volunteers. Every committee also has a coordinator who is appointed by the steering committee.

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<sup>3</sup> See the document “AGW Project Worksheet” for an example of a blank worksheet.

**Principles.** AGW committees are guided by the following principles:

1. All meaningful work in AGW is performed by committees.
2. Anybody who wants to serve on a committee is allowed to do so unless precluded by the nature of the committee.

**Coordinator.** A committee's coordinator is appointed by the steering committee and has the following responsibilities:

- Recruit members for the committee.
- Schedule meetings of the committee.
- Guide the committee in pursuing its objectives.
- Report to the steering committee.

**Standing committees.** Standing committees are those which continue indefinitely and pursue objectives that are ongoing.

**Outreach standing committee.** The outreach standing committee meets as necessary to develop and manage relationships with Clark County communities and organizations whose values and objectives are consistent with those of AGW.

**Special committees.** Special committees are those which are created to solve a specific problem. They disband after completion of their task.

## **STAFF**

The AGW staff are steering committee members who perform specific tasks for our organization on an ongoing basis. They are nominated and appointed by the steering committee at general meetings whenever the need arises, and serve for an indefinite period of time.

- **Cashier.** The cashier manages all funds of the organization, including receipt and disbursement of funds, banking (deposits, withdrawals, writing checks), and monthly reports to the steering committee. The cashier also serves as coordinator of the budget standing committee.
- **Historian.** The historian records the activities of the organization on the AGW website and maintains both digital and paper archives of Meeting Notes<sup>4</sup>, Project Worksheets, budgets, and the annual calendar. Among the

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<sup>4</sup> See the document "AGW Meeting Notes" for a template.

activities recorded are the proceedings of all steering committee meetings. Notes are taken using the standard Meeting Notes form. Soon after the meeting, and following approval by the steering committee, the notes are published and archived. If the historian cannot attend a meeting, the facilitator temporarily appoints one.

- **Facilitator.** The facilitator directs the proceedings of all steering committee meetings according to the AGW CDM guidelines. Prior to the meeting, he/she prepares an agenda, which may be modified by consensus as the first item of business at the meeting. If the facilitator is unable to attend a meeting, he/she temporarily appoints one.

## MEETINGS

Our organization holds both private and public meetings. Private meetings are those that are only open to specific committee members; public meetings are open to anyone.

**General meeting.** Public meetings that are used to conduct the normal business of the organization are called general meetings. Monthly planning meetings are an example of general meetings.

**Annual planning meeting.** The first meeting of the year is always a private meeting attended by steering committee members. It is held to discuss plans for the coming year and to set the calendar for regular annual projects. The goals of the meeting are

- a) to provide a list of objectives for the year,
- b) to provide proposals for the year's projects,
- c) to provide a proposal for the year's calendar of events, and
- d) to draft initial project worksheets for all regular annual projects.

The list of objectives, project proposals, and calendar of events are presented for approval at the next general meeting as a report from the steering committee.

**Annual budgeting meeting.** The steering committee meets again after the annual planning meeting, but before the first general meeting, to establish an overall budget for the year, as well as budgets for each of the regular annual project. The budgets are presented for approval at the next general meeting as a report from the steering committee.

**Monthly planning meeting.** Planning meetings are open to anyone and are held monthly in a public location, usually preceded by a social event that encourages interaction. Planning meeting agendas take the following form:

- 1. Opening comments**
- 2. Agenda review**
- 3. Staffing changes**
- 4. Cashier's report**
- 5. Historian's report**
- 6. Steering committee reports**
- 7. Standing committee reports**
- 8. Special committee reports**
- 9. Project committee reports**
- 10. Old business**
  - A. ...
- 11. New business**
  - A. ...
- 12. Closing comments**
- 13. Adjournment**

**Committee meetings.** The meetings of a specific committee may be public or private, according to the decision of the committee's coordinator. They are scheduled and directed by the committee's coordinator in order to pursue the objectives of the committee. The AGW CDM process may be used at the coordinator's discretion; but regardless of whether it is used, committee meetings are always guided by the principle of inclusivity.

## **FINANCES**

**Principles.** The finances of the the organization are guided by the following principles:

1. AGW does not maintain a cash balance over \$1000.
2. The organization never directly solicits funds for itself. Operating expenses always come from projects that otherwise benefit the community.



3. The organization does not maintain any capital assets.

**Budgets.** Budgets are critical to our organization's finances, and we use two types: Individual budgets for each project and an AGW annual budget. Both types of budget are created and managed by the steering committee, with input provided by project coordinators. Any budget may be modified by the steering committee at any time during the year.

To facilitate future planning, project budgets must include all expenses, including those paid for by personal donation (the donation should appear as income on the project budget).

**Banking.** The organization's cash balance is maintained in a checking account held in the name of the cashier and at least one other non-related steering committee member. If any owner of the account resigns or is otherwise removed from the steering committee, the checking account will be closed and a new one will be opened.

**Rules for cash disbursement.** The cashier is authorized to make funds available by check whenever a request is presented by a project's coordinator against its budget. The cashier will not disburse funds for any amount that will exceed a project's budget without modification of the budget by the steering committee. Any reimbursement for non-budgeted project expenses must have the approval of the steering committee.

Requests for disbursement that are not project-related must be approved by the steering committee.

## **APPENDIX A: CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING<sup>5</sup>**

**TL;DR:** Consensus decision-making, as practiced by AGW, requires unanimous agreement on proposals, with participants prioritizing the good of the organization rather than what their own personal preference might be. Open discussion and well-intentioned negotiation are the tools that are used to achieve unanimity.

**The principles of consensus decision-making.** Consensus decision making is a process used by groups seeking to generate widespread levels of participation and agreement. There are variations among different groups regarding the degree of agreement necessary to finalize a group decision. The process of group deliberation, however, has many common elements that are definitive of consensus decision making. These include:

- **Inclusive:** As many stakeholders as possible are involved in group discussions.
- **Participatory:** All participants are allowed a chance to contribute to the discussion.
- **Collaborative:** The group constructs proposals with input from all interested group members. Any individual authorship of a proposal is subsumed as the group modifies it to include the concerns of all group members.
- **Agreement seeking:** The goal is to generate as much agreement as possible. Regardless of how much agreement is required to finalize a decision, a group using a consensus process makes a concerted attempt to reach full agreement.
- **Cooperative:** Consensus participants are encouraged to keep the good of the whole group in mind. Each individual's preferences should be voiced so that the group can incorporate all concerns into an emerging consensus proposal. Individual preferences should not, however, obstructively impede the progress of the group.

**An alternative to common decision making practices.** Consensus decision making is an alternative to commonly practiced non-collaborative decision making processes. Robert's Rule of Order, for instance, is a process used by many organizations. The goal of Robert's Rules is to structure the debate and passage of proposals that win approval through majority vote. This process does not emphasize the goal of full agreement (as consensus does). Nor does it foster

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<sup>5</sup> A large portion of this appendix is excerpted from "The Basics of Consensus Decision-Making," by Tim Hartnett, PhD. See <https://www.consensusdecisionmaking.org>.

whole group collaboration and the inclusion of minority concerns in resulting proposals. Critics of Robert's Rules believe that the process can involve adversarial debate and the formation of competing factions. These dynamics may harm group member relationships and undermine the ability of a group to cooperatively implement a contentious decision.

Consensus decision making is also an alternative to “top-down” decision making, commonly practiced in hierarchical groups. Top-down decision making occurs when leaders of a group make decisions in a way that does not include the participation of all interested stakeholders. The leaders may (or may not) gather input, but they do not open the deliberation process to the whole group. Proposals are not collaboratively developed, and consensus is not a primary objective. Critics of top-down decision making believe the process fosters incidence of either complacency or rebellion among disempowered group members. Additionally, the resulting decisions may overlook important concerns of those directly affected. Poor group relationship dynamics and decision implementation problems may result.

Consensus decision making addresses the problems of both Robert's Rules of Order and top-down models. The goals of the consensus process include:

- Better decisions: Through including the input of all stakeholders, the resulting proposals can best address all potential concerns.
- Better implementation: A process that includes and respects all parties, and generates as much agreement as possible sets the stage for greater cooperation in implementing the resulting decisions.
- Better group relationships: A cooperative, collaborative group atmosphere fosters greater group cohesion and interpersonal connection.

**The process of consensus decision making.** There are multiple stepwise models of how to make decisions by consensus. They vary in the amount of detail the steps describe. They also vary depending on how decisions are finalized. The basic model involves collaboratively generating a proposal, identifying unsatisfied concerns, and then modifying the proposal to generate as much agreement as possible.

**Finalizing a decision.** The level of agreement necessary to finalize a decision is known as a decision rule. The range of possible decision rules varies within the following range:

- Unanimous agreement

- Unanimity minus one vote
- Unanimity minus two votes
- Super majority thresholds (90%, 80%, 75%, two-thirds, and 60% are common).
- Simple majority
- Executive committee decides
- Person-in-charge decides

Some groups require unanimous consent (unanimity) to approve group decisions. If any participant objects, he can block consensus according to the guidelines described below. These groups use the term consensus to denote both the discussion process and the decision rule. Other groups use a consensus process to generate as much agreement as possible, but allow decisions to be finalized with a decision rule that does not require unanimity.

**Blocking.** Groups that require unanimity allow individual participants the option of blocking a group decision. This provision motivates a group to make sure that all group members consent to any new proposal before it is adopted. Proper guidelines for the use of this option, however, are important. The ethics of using a block encourage participants to place the good of the whole group above their own individual preferences. When there is potential for a group decision to be blocked, both the group and any dissenters in the group are encouraged to collaborate until agreement can be reached. Simply vetoing a decision is not considered a responsible use of blocking. Some common guidelines for the use of blocking include:

- Limiting the option to block to issues that are fundamental to the group's mission or potentially disastrous to the group.
- Providing an option for those who do not support a proposal to "stand aside" rather than block.
- Requiring two or more people to block for a proposal to be put aside.
- Require the blocking party to supply an alternative proposal or a process for generating one.
- Limiting each person's option to block to a handful of times in one's life.

**Agreement vs. consent.** Unanimity is achieved when the full group consents to a decision. Giving consent does not necessarily mean that the proposal being considered is one's first choice. Group members can vote their consent to a proposal because they choose to cooperate with the direction of the group, rather than insist on their personal preference. Sometimes the vote on a proposal is framed, "Is this proposal something you can live with?" This relaxed threshold for a yes vote can help make unanimity more easily achievable. Alternatively, a group member can choose to stand aside. Standing aside communicates that while a participant does not necessarily support a group decision, he does not wish to block it.

**Debate over decision rules.** Critics of "blocking" object to empowering individuals to block otherwise popular proposals. They believe this can result in a group experience of widespread disagreement, the opposite of a consensus process's primary goal. Further, they believe group decision making may become stagnated by the high threshold of unanimity. Important decisions may take too long to make, or the status quo may become virtually impossible to change. The resulting tension may undermine group functionality and harm relationships between group members.

Defenders of blocking believe that decision rules short of unanimity do not ensure a rigorous search for full agreement before finalizing decisions. They value the commitment to reaching unanimity and the full collaborative effort this goal requires. They believe that under the right conditions unanimous consent is achievable and the process of getting there strengthens group relationships.

**Conditions that favor unanimity.** The goals of requiring unanimity are only fully realized when a group is successful in reaching it. Thus, it is important to consider what conditions make full agreement more likely. Here are some of the most important factors that improve the chances of successfully reaching unanimity:

- Small group size
- Clear common purpose
- High levels of trust
- Participants well trained in consensus process
- Participants willing to put the best interest of the group before their own

- Participants willing to spend sufficient time in meetings
- Skillful facilitation and agenda preparation

**AGW consensus decision-making guidelines.** The decision rule currently in practice at AGW is “unanimous agreement.” In other words, discussion of a topic continues until consensus is reached (acceptance) or someone blocks the proposal (rejection). Voting is always framed as something like, “Is this proposal something you can live with?” rather than “Those in favor, say ‘aye,’” to help make unanimity more achievable.

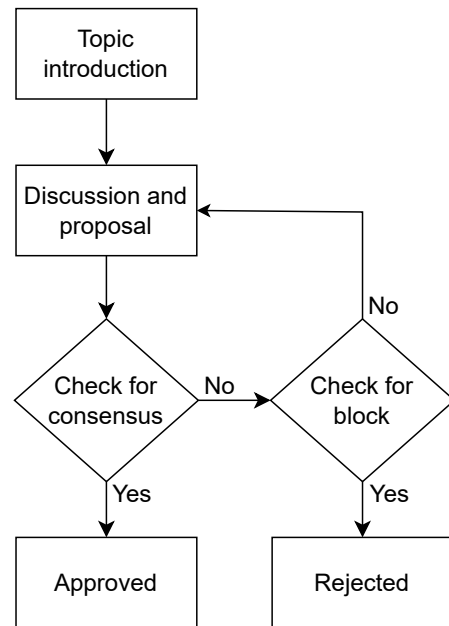
These are the discussion/decision-making steps that we employ:

**Topic introduction.** The facilitator announces the next topic. This is often the next agenda item, but may also be a topic introduced as new business. (The facilitator guides the proceedings, but participates just like any other member in discussions, proposal-making, and voting.)

**Discussion and proposal.** Discussion proceeds until a proposal is made. Any proposal related to the topic is allowed — even to abandon or postpone consideration of the topic.

**Check for consensus.** After the notetaker writes down the proposal and states it aloud, the facilitator asks each voting participant, “Can you accept this proposal?” Voters may answer “Yes,” “No,” or “Stand aside,” with a stand-aside vote meaning that the voter doesn’t completely agree with the proposal, but doesn’t object to its acceptance. The notetaker records the votes. If there are not any “No” votes, the proposal is accepted and the facilitator closes the topic.

**Check for block.** To each person who voted “No,” the facilitator asks: “May we continue our discussion?” If anyone responds with “No. I’d like to block this topic,” the topic is abandoned. Otherwise, discussion of the topic resumes until a new proposal is made.



It is crucial to our decision-making process that everyone places the good of the group above their own preferences, blocking only when further discussion cannot make a difference.