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# KALAMAZOO COLLECTIVE HOUSING

**MEMBER HANDBOOK  
2021-2022 Contract Year**



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## **WELCOME FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Dear KCH Member,

Welcome to Kalamazoo Collective Housing! We are excited for you to be joining our community for the 2021-2022 Contract Year.

The Board of Directors is committed to serving the membership of KCH. As part of this commitment, the Board of Directors has prepared this Member Handbook to better acquaint you with the basic structure, policies, and operations of KCH. We hope you will find this document helpful in navigating the various aspects of the organization. This document is not policy, but should be used as a guide.

As a cooperative, KCH is owned and governed by its members through the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors holds regular monthly meetings, which are open to all members of KCH.

We would like to invite you to share your time and talents with the KCH community. As a collective, we have the power to shape our organization to fit our desires and needs. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about KCH please feel free to reach out to any Board Member. We look forward to you joining and contributing to our community.

In cooperation,  
Your Board of Directors



## **WELCOME FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Dear KCH member,

I am beyond excited to work alongside you this year. Together we can create something incredible - permanently affordable housing that is actually controlled by the residents! How does that work?

Well, it all starts with you and your fellow co-op members. You're your own landlord, which is a big responsibility, but you've got good company. Your co-op has existed in the Vine Neighborhood since 2006, when it was formed by people a lot like you. We (yes, I was a founding member back then!) had all experienced terrible rentals that were either unsafe, trashed, extremely expensive, or all three. We borrowed an idea from student cooperatives around the country, and started our own co-op.

Fast forward to this year: we've got room for 46 members, nine houses, a barn, two staff people, an expert board of directors, an annual budget of about \$160,000, and big plans. We're still small, but we've learned that cooperation can be a powerful tool for dismantling systems that are designed to create barriers to access to affordable housing, something that I believe is a basic human right.

As you'll learn, KCH's greatest strength is its members' commitment to each other and to our communities. As your staff person, I'm here to help support in whatever way I can. So dream big, and don't forget to reach out to me and to each other when you need more hands, brains, and hearts to make it happen.

In cooperation,  
Chris Moore,  
Executive Director



## REFERENCE MATERIALS AND IMPORTANT DATES

Tons of valuable information is available on the member section of the website ([www.kalamazoo.coop](http://www.kalamazoo.coop)).

*[kalamazoo.coop/calendar](http://kalamazoo.coop/calendar)*

Dates and times for all meetings of the Board of Directors, Conflict Resolution Committee, all other KCH committees, and any trainings or KCH-wide events.

*[kalamazoo.coop/resources](http://kalamazoo.coop/resources)*

Here you'll find KCH founding documents, board policies, this member handbook, the maintenance handbook, and information on tenant and landlord law. We'll add more as it comes!

*[kalamazoo.coop/conflict-resolution](http://kalamazoo.coop/conflict-resolution)*

Here you'll find information on becoming a Conflict Resolution Committee member and our current grievance process.

## GOVERNANCE

### *HOW ARE WE STRUCTURED?*

As a cooperative (i.e., a member-owned organization), all decisions about KCH as an organization are made by our two member-elected bodies, the Board of Directors and the Conflict Resolution Committee (CRC).

The Board of Directors has several permanent committees, which focus on various aspects of KCH operations. These include the Cultural, Finance, Maintenance, Membership, and Secretarial committees. Each collective is responsible for appointing someone to serve on each of these committees. We encourage all members to participate on one committee. If you are interested, contact your BOD Liaison.

The CRC is brand new this year, and is a radical development in how we work through conflict and the restoration of relationships between our members. Like the Board, CRC members are elected each year and they are in charge of all things related to conflict. The CRC oversees policy and is responsible for all aspects of our conflict resolution processes.



### *WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS?*

The Board of Directors is the governing body of KCH, constituted and elected by KCH Members. The Board works on behalf of members to set policy, oversee operations, and set the Annual Budget and work towards future goals. Any member of KCH may nominate themselves to serve on the Board.

### *WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMITTEE?*

Like the Board, CRC members are elected each year by the membership. The CRC governs all elements of anything related to mediation of conflict between members, and official grievances. The CRC oversees all policy related to conflict, and is responsible for all aspects of our conflict resolution processes.

### *HOW LONG ARE BOARD OF DIRECTOR TERMS?*

The Board of Directors is made up of a mix of KCH Members, who serve 2-year terms, and Community Trustees, who serve 3-year terms. Board Members are elected by the Membership each year during the annual meeting. The Board may appoint a KCH member to the board in the case of a board vacancy (e.g., when a member moves out early).

### *HOW LONG ARE CRC TERMS?*

The Conflict Resolution Committee is made up of 4-5 KCH Members and 1-2 Community Trustees. All Conflict Resolution Committee Members serve 1 year terms, and no CRC Member can serve on the committee for more than 3 consecutive years. CRC Members are elected at the annual meeting by the same procedure as BOD Members.

### *WHAT DOES THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DO?*

The Executive Director (ED) is a KCH staff person, and work on everything that the Board of Directors delegates. In practice, this means that the ED performs most of the administrative work of KCH, including contract signing, rent collection, paying the bills, fundraising, attending Collective, Committee, and Board meetings, and lots of other things.



## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

### *THERE'S A CONFLICT HAPPENING AT MY CO-OP. WHAT CAN I DO?*

We believe that not only is interpersonal conflict inevitable, it's actually a healthy part of any community. Disagreements are common, and how we respond to conflict is what determines if relationships are harmed or strengthened as a result of conflict.

KCH has a robust system to support you and your co-op mates in times of conflict. This approach is based in Restorative Justice, and each year we train members to learn how to facilitate restorative practices within their co-ops. These practices are meant to help members restore their relationships with each other in the face of conflict.

For intractable conflicts or in the event that the safety of a member or member's property are at risk, members can file a formal grievance, which will initiate a process of investigation and determination of consequences as a result of breaking lease terms, co-op norms, or laws.

The entire process is available on the KCH website in detail, and the newly-formed Conflict Resolution Committee is actively improving how we support members through conflict.

Visit [www.kalamazoo.coop/conflict-resolution](http://www.kalamazoo.coop/conflict-resolution) for all the details.





## **FINANCE**

### *WHEN IS MY RENT DUE?*

Your rent is due on the 1st of each month. You will receive an invoice via email each month.

### *WHO DO I GIVE MY RENT PAYMENT TO?*

You can leave your rent payment in the rent collective box at your Collective. You can also pay online through an Invoice which will be emailed to you. If you do not see the invoice in your email, check your Spam filter.

### *HOW IS MY RENT MONEY DISTRIBUTED?*

Your rent consists of two charges: the Member Charge and the Collective Charge. The Member Charge is set by the KCH BOD and contributes to the operation of KCH. The Collective Charge is set by your individual collective, and is returned to the Collective every month for items such as supplies, groceries, and utilities. Currently, Meristem, Nimblewill, and Fletcher both apply a Collective Charge to their members. Perennial Cohousing does not apply a Collective Charge.

### *WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT PAY MY RENT ON TIME?*

KCH does not charge penalties for late payment, however after 7 days the Executive Director will contact you to discuss your non-payment of rent. After 30 days, you will be required to establish a written payment plan for any balance above \$50 with the Executive Director. Failure to set up a payment plan may result in additional actions up to, and including, eviction. You can have up to two active payment plans at a time.

### *I AM GOING TO BE AWAY, CAN I PAY A REDUCED RENT DURING MY ABSENCE?*

Each Collective may establish their own policies about extended absences and may reduce the amount a Member pays in Collective Charges. Any reductions in Collective Charges must be approved by the Collective. Member Charges will not be reduced during extended absences.



## **FINANCIAL AID AND MONEY FOR CO-OP PROJECTS**

### *I'M HAVING FINANCIAL TROUBLE, CAN KCH HELP?*

Yes! We have a member financial aid fund that all KCH members have access to. Any member can apply for financial aid online, and a committee of KCH members will review each request.

You can learn more and apply at [www.kalamazoo.coop/financial-aid](http://www.kalamazoo.coop/financial-aid).

### *HOW CAN MY CO-OP REQUEST MONEY FROM OUR AMENITIES FUND?*

KCH contributes money to a fund for each co-op that can be drawn from to purchase amenities for their community. Amenities are anything that will improve the quality of life for co-op members, and all amenities requests should be decided by the co-op in a meeting.

Amenities can't be anything consumable, like food, toilet paper, etc. Amenities should last long enough to be enjoyed by future members. Think grills, furniture, printers or computers, etc.

Requests to use your co-op's amenities money should be emailed to the Executive Director.

### *HOW CAN MY CO-OP REQUEST MONEY FROM THE GROUNDS FUND?*

Grounds funds can be requested for any project on the outside of your house, like for gardening supplies or tools, landscaping, or things like that. You can request grounds funds from the maintenance committee by first decided as a co-op what you'd like to buy, and then emailing the Maintenance Committee with your request at [maintenance.committee@kalamazoo.coop](mailto:maintenance.committee@kalamazoo.coop).



## MAINTENANCE

### *WHAT DOES THE KCH MAINTENANCE STAFF PERSON DO?*

The Maintenance Coordinator is KCH staff, and coordinates and performs maintenance work on our houses. They work together with the ED to create and improve maintenance systems, and work alongside KCH volunteers to make repairs to our co-ops.

### *WHO IS MY MAINTENANCE COORDINATOR?*

Each Collective will appoint a Maintenance Coordinator at their first meeting. The Maintenance Coordinator is responsible for reporting non-emergency maintenance issues and will also regularly attend Maintenance Committee meetings.

### *WHO DO I CONTACT IF SOMETHING NEEDS REPAIR AT MY COLLECTIVE?*

Every repair request should be submitted via our online form at [www.kalamazoo.coop/maintenance](http://www.kalamazoo.coop/maintenance). You can also talk to your Collective's Maintenance Officer to report any maintenance needs, who will then complete the form online. Your Maintenance Officer will be determined by your collective. **In case of emergency (fire, break-in, etc.) call 911. For water or gas leaks, call Chris Moore at (269) 330-1010 immediately, and also complete the online maintenance request form.**

### *I WANT TO REPAINT, WILL I BE REIMBURSED FOR MY EXPENSES?*

Any reimbursements to members should be pre-approved by the Maintenance Committee. More information about reimbursements is available in the KCH Maintenance Handbook.

### *OUR COLLECTIVE IS INTERESTED IN A HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECT. WHO DO WE TALK TO?*

The Maintenance Committee is responsible for overseeing and budgeting for large home improvement projects. Talk to your Maintenance Coordinator about bringing this up to the Maintenance Committee.



*I AM NOT A MAINTENANCE COORDINATOR, CAN I PARTICIPATE ON THE  
MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE?*

Yes, the Maintenance Committee may appoint additional members to the committee. Contact the Maintenance Committee chair if you are interested in joining the committee, or talk to your Maintenance Officer.



## **MEMBERSHIP**

### *WHO IS MY MEMBERSHIP OFFICER?*

The Membership Officer is selected by the Collective at a Collective Meeting. They take the lead in contacting potential members for interviews and notifying them when they are accepted.

### *AM I REQUIRED TO ATTEND INTERVIEWS?*

At Meristem, Fletcher, and Nimblewill, members are required to attend interviews at their Collectives when they happen. Voting is consensus based. If you are not able to attend, let your Membership Officer know.

At Perennial, the Perennial members have decided to have the Board's Membership Committee conduct Perennial interviews. All Perennial members are invited to join the Membership Committee when they interview potential members for Perennial.

### *HOW FAR IN ADVANCE SHOULD I LET MY COLLECTIVE KNOW WHEN I WANT TO MOVE OUT?*

KCH members sign year long contracts. If you move out before the end of your contract, you will be responsible for the remainder of your contract until a new member is found to fill your room.

### *I WANT TO MOVE OUT, CAN I HAVE SOMEONE SUBLEASE MY ROOM?*

You cannot sublease your room. You will need to work with your Membership Officer to find someone to take over your contract. You will be responsible for the rent payment until the room is filled. Potential candidates will need to interview as a new member.

### *WHAT DO I DO WHEN I WANT TO CHANGE ROOMS?*

If there is an open room, discuss this at your Collective. The Collective must approve the room change. The Membership Coordinator and Executive Director will work with you to sign a lease for the new room.



*I AM NOT A MEMBERSHIP OFFICER, CAN I PARTICIPATE ON THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE?*

Yes, the Membership Committee may appoint additional members to the committee. Contact your Membership Committee Chair if you are interested, or talk to your Membership Officer.



## **COLLECTIVES**

### *WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF COLLECTIVE MEETINGS?*

Collective meetings are designed to build community. They are where you make decisions as a group to improve your living environment, discuss house issues, resolve conflict, set norms, and distribute the workload.

### *HOW OFTEN ARE MEETINGS HELD?*

Meristem, Nimblewill, and Fletcher currently have weekly meetings, and Perennial meets monthly.

### *HOW IS WORK DISTRIBUTED?*

Each Collective determines what tasks members will take on, and distributes them according to their own process.

### *ARE MEETINGS REQUIRED?*

According to your Membership Contract, membership meetings are required. Your Collective will determine the day and time the meetings are held.