



## Bartimaeus Cohousing

### Founding Principles

### Spiritual Vitality

### Building by Consensus

### Vision FAQs

### Cohousing Basics

### Who was Bartimaeus?

### General Cohousing Information

## Building Community by Consensus

Working together on something as significant as home and community is often a daunting prospect. Differences of opinion are inevitable. At Bartimaeus Cohousing Community, in order to give full voice to those differences, the decision-making process is based on consensus. Each household has a voice and a vote, and no immediate action is taken if there is dissent on the issue under consideration. While this can sometimes mean longer meetings, it also means that the opinions of each member are respected and healthy boundaries are honored.



The Bartimaeus Cohousing Community approach to consensus has been developed over the three year period we have been planning the project. Each meeting has a facilitator – usually a different one for each meeting – as well as a note taker. The agenda is worked out in advance, usually by an exchange of emails, and non-agenda items can be added at the start of the meeting. Individuals are asked to raise hands and be called on by the facilitator. (We’re still working on that one!) After a full discussion, and when a decision is needed, the facilitator summarizes the group’s conclusion, and asks if everyone is in agreement. If any member is not in agreement, his or her position is respected and given credence.

The idea of a consensus-driven process comes from many sources, both spiritual and secular. At Bartimaeus Cohousing Community, we learned a lot of the “nuts and bolts” of the process from successful cohousing efforts (see below). However, the consensus approach is more than just a good way to conduct meetings. It is also a valuable means of addressing authority issues – which is the subject of a [FAQ response](#) elsewhere on this site.

We have been blessed with a diverse group of men and women, who not only have strong opinions (a common trait among cohousing advocates!) but also a strong desire to understand and support one another. As we have learned to become friends, we’ve also discovered the value of a sense of humor – of which we have an abundant supply! While our views on many things differ, often widely, we have found that actively seeking consensus reveals the things we have in common, and teaches us the *practical* aspects of how to love one another.



To better explain the benefits of the consensus model, we have reprinted, with permission, an excellent article from [Cohousing](#) magazine, by Rob Sandelin, a nationally-recognized cohousing advocate and member of [Sharingwood Cohousing](#) in Snohomish, Washington.



### Why Use Consensus?

by Rob Sandelin

When people choose to live in community, they hold a commitment to a relationship with each other. The value of this relationship - and the energy that goes into maintaining it - is what creates community. People choose this lifestyle expressly to create and experience a sense of belonging to the group. This is the fundamental reason why almost all cohousing communities use consensus, and why it works as well as it does.

Consensus works well when people extend their relationships to each other through talking and listening. Consensus takes time and effort, honest communication and a willingness to trust the relationship. The process can become lengthy (and sometimes intense) as community members test their individual desires and boundaries against the community's best interests.

#### **Consensus supports the greater good**

Each individual's commitment to honor the best interests of the group is the key element for making consensus work. Reaching consensus means that everyone present has given permission for a decision or action. If you honor your relationship to the group, you're likely to respect and follow any agreements you make. Agreements made by consensus are self-enforced and rarely require anything more than reminders to ensure compliance. If you don't follow through with your agreements, you risk jeopardizing your relationships and sense of community.

Consensus would become meaningless if people in a group were to say, "The h\*\*\* with the group and its rules; I'm going to do what I want." Maintaining a positive sense of community would not be possible because members would lose trust that everyone will do what's best for the group.

#### **Consensus inspires more creativity and better solutions than majority voting**

Consensus requires more creativity than majority voting, often resulting in better solutions. With majority voting, your task is to create a solution that meets the needs of the required majority. Once the majority of voters have gained the necessary number of votes, they don't need or want further discussion or new ideas. Advocates of a particular issue often lobby group members ahead of time and know the outcome prior to the vote, so there is little point in coming to the process with a better idea.

With consensus, group members often rework an idea several times from different angles until they find the right solution. For example, let's say that a member has a problem with children's toys being left on the walkway. She might propose a rule that allows no toys on the walkway after 5 pm. With majority voting, the group would adopt her proposal if more than half of the members favor it. In a consensus process, group members propose and discuss new ideas after three parents find the first proposal unacceptable. The group ultimately accepts a proposal for the children to form a pickup brigade with one child as the leader, a responsibility that rotates among the kids once a week. This solution meets the needs of those who want the toys picked up and also is acceptable to the parents because it gives kids a sense of ownership and responsibility. Since everyone's needs are met, the whole community works together to implement the solution. In the majority voting scenario, would the parents who objected to the original proposal follow the rules that were imposed on them?

#### **Consensus helps cement community agreements with the strongest available glue**

The purpose of making major group policy decisions by consensus is to cement community agreements with the strongest available glue: the will and desire for community relationship. Once everyone gives permission to the decision, even if it's barely tolerable, the community-building process has succeeded and relationships are strengthened. Since enforcement of decisions relies on mutual goodwill and desire for community relationship, consensus is the best way to ensure a decision will be honored.

