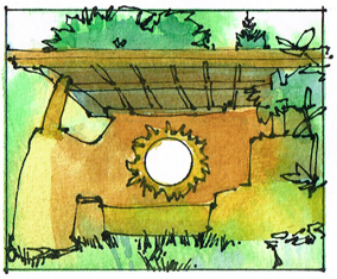
Introduction to the

GABRIOLA
COMMONS
• where land and people meet •



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OVERVIEW of the GABRIOLA COMMONS

The Gabriola Commons respectfully acknowledges that it is on land that is part of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. We are grateful for their traditional care and stewardship of this land since time immemorial.

Gabriola Commons Description & Charter

The Gabriola Commons is 26 acres on Gabriola Island, managed as a community commons for agriculture, ecological protection and community benefit. It is intended as a source of ecological and community well-being and exists in perpetuity for the benefit of the people of Gabriola Island and the land on which the Commons is situated.

As a source of well-being, the Gabriola Commons contributes to our sense of community, of belonging, and of our bonds to one another and to the land. It draws the community in and brings the people of the community closer to each other. It is a space of creativity and justice, for art and learning, and for fairness and openness.

The Gabriola Commons demonstrates ways to enhance sustainability, to preserve ecosystems and biodiversity, and to promote equity both on this island and in the world. The land includes significant natural gifts and community amenities in one contiguous property: rich wildlife habitats; a pond and wetland area; open vistas and meadows; cedar groves and forests; pathways linking neighbourhoods; a rural agricultural heritage and landscape for growing organic food; gathering places for community celebrations and events, solitude and sanctuary, performance and festivity.

The Gabriola Commons is a gift from earlier generations that we in turn must pass on, undiminished and enriched, to those who follow us.

Guiding Principles

1. *Public Trust:* The Gabriola Commons exists in perpetuity for the benefit of the land and the people of Gabriola including future generations not favouring one generation over another.
2. *Ecological Sustainability:* The assets and the land of the Gabriola Commons are used and valued only in ways that respect its ecology.
3. *Social Sustainability:* The Gabriola Commons sustains and nourishes the fabric of the community for generations yet to come.
4. *Local Democracy:* The Gabriola Commons stewardship is democratic, equitable and local.

5. *Community Engagement:* The Gabriola Commons is a community legacy, involving the community in the broadest and deepest sense.

Climate Crisis/Emergency

In this time of climate collapse and ecological crises, community commons hold a space for communities to work within ecosystems and to reconnect with an ethic of stewardship based on a respect for nature, sufficiency, interdependence, shared responsibility, and fairness. A commons framework of green governance helps to realize the human right to a clean, healthy, biodiverse and sustainable environment.

Gabriola Commons Zoning

Islands Trust: Official Community Plan (OCP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB)
Gabriola Commons Comprehensive Zone

The Land is recognized as a unique and distinct property on Gabriola Island. Re-zoning of the land was approved in 2010, enshrining the vision and spirit of a community commons in zoning language. It is the first time in BC, perhaps in Canada, where the term "community commons" has been protected in land-use language, zoning and regulatory bylaws.

The OCP definition of a "community commons" is: land or facilities or uses that serve community needs and provide the community with agricultural, environmental, recreational and social benefits, but excludes for-profit commercial enterprises.

The new Zoning permits two principal uses:
- Commons Agriculture: community based agricultural uses.
- Commons Institutional: facilities, services, and uses which are offered by non-profit or not-for profit enterprises.

Further, a number of accessory uses were approved:
- Commons accessory commercial
- Commons accessory food depot
- Commons accessory public assembly
- Commons accessory office and storage

The Land Use Bylaw (#259) for the Land regulates uses, buildings and structures, siting requirements, coverage and maximum floor area for the principal and accessory uses. This can be viewed or downloaded at https://gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OCP-By-law-259.pdf

The Official Community Plan (OCP) of Gabriola recognizes that the Commons exists in perpetuity as a legacy for the community. It is in the public interest to protect, preserve and steward the Land as a community commons. See OCP Bylaw # 258 at https://gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OCP-Bylaw-258.pdf

Of Special Note: The Land is also designated Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), which is a British Columbia provincial zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are restricted.

Covenant

A draft Covenant, the purpose of which is to protect in perpetuity the Gabriola Commons Land and Amenities for the people of Gabriola, will be legally attached to the property Title. Formal application to the BC Land Title & Survey Office will be made once (a) Covenant Holder(s) has/have been obtained. This is the work the Board of Trustees Covenant Team.

The Gabriola Commons Covenant is an agreement that will protect the unique balance between the ecology of the Land, its agricultural value within the Agricultural Land Reserve, and its multi-purpose use of space and facilities. Further, it will assure the protection, preservation and stewardship of the Land and its Amenities as a community commons in perpetuity. It will restrict any occupation or use of the Commons that might impair or interfere with its baseline ecology and agriculture, including any for-profit or commercial uses. The people of Gabriola, and the land itself, are the beneficiaries.

The 2023 version of the draft Covenant and its two major attachments (a *Baseline Report* and a *Stewardship Agreement and Plan*) are available at www.gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Commons-Covenant-Amended-to-ALC-2023-05-24.pdf

Stewardship Plan

Every commons is defined within the parameters of a specific site and historic cultural background. The Gabriola Commons, a community commons, is a unique balance between the ecology and agricultural value within the Agricultural Land Reserve and its social and cultural significance.

The stewardship of the Community Commons involves balancing ecological protection, a working agricultural landscape and multi-purpose community use. The draft Stewardship Plan pays attention to the right of public access to the land for stewardship activities. Public restrictions apply to ecologically sensitive areas and areas off limits from time to time due to restoration or enhancement work.

The stewardship of the Commons' shared resources and assets is open, equitable and transparent, and is guided by a set of principles, focused on land uses: ecological, agricultural, institutional. The built environment is mindfully and carefully planned using best building practices. Design elements and patterns achieve a visually pleasing, beautifully integrated public space. The full draft Stewardship Agreement and Plan may be found at https://gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Stewardship-Agreement-Watermark-2018-10-17-1.pdf

Brief History of the Gabriola Commons

1970 to 2005 – Islanders dream of acquiring the Goat Farm, owned by the Jean & Jim Brown family, as a community space. Located in the Agricultural Land Reserve, it was zoned as a single-family residence and farm commercially producing goat cheese. The pond was dug during this time.

1995 Property goes on the market. A Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) study identifies the property as an ideal location for a community centre because of proximity to Gabriola Elementary School, Rollo Seniors' Centre, and the developing nearby commercial area. No purchasers came forward.

1997 Gabriola Official Community Plan (General Land Use Policy H): "Since the Village Centre is surrounded by land in the Agricultural Land Reserve, considerations respecting any expansion of the Village Centre into the Agricultural Land Reserve should only be given to community-minded non-commercial uses, subject to the intended use not degrading the future agricultural capability of the land."

2004 Property goes back on the market.

2005 Amazing Grace Ecological Society (AGES: Heide Brown, Shelagh Huston & Chris Mussell, administering Jay Mussell's estate) purchases the land parcel for $665,00 and makes a sizable down payment on the land and commits to covering the mortgage until December 2007 to give the community time to take possession.
From Dream to Design workshop, attended by 100 people, forms the basis of submission to Islands Trust zoning application in March 2007.

2005-2007 Steering Committee of community volunteers meets biweekly to deal with existing and potential land-use bylaws, agricultural and other uses, ownership and governance, and protection of the land in perpetuity.

2006 North Allotment Gardens are established.
A rezoning application is submitted to the Islands Trust to allow non-agricultural, multi-purpose use of the land.

2007 Agricultural Land Commission approves limited non-agricultural uses of the land.
Incorporation of Gabriola Commons Society (without charitable status).

A monthly donor drive is initiated and by the beginning of 2008, more than 200 Gabriolans become contributors to the monthly mortgage payments.

2008 The Commons Coordinating Council is established and meets at 7 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month and has ever since.
The Gabriola Commons Foundation is registered as a non-profit society and receives ~~c~~haritable status.

2009 South Allotment Gardens are established.

2010 Islands Trust approves rezoning the property as the "Gabriola Commons Comprehensive Zone" and creates the first Community Commons zoning in Canada.
Land Title to the property is transferred from AGES to the Gabriola Commons Foundation and a $400,000 mortgage is assumed.
Vision to Voices workshop is held at the Haven and attracts 80 attendants.
Timber frame building is donated and is moved onto the property.

2011 Work begins on the Community Kitchen, the former cheese creamery.

2011/14 Substantial anonymous donations are received, contributing to large mortgage paydowns.

2012 Allotment Gardens established at Namaste Farm, 2100 South Road.

2015 Community Kitchen opens.
27 solar panels are installed on roofs of the Farmhouse and new equipment shed; these supplement Commons electricity. A solar hot water system heats water for the Community Kitchen.
Baseline report is prepared prior to application to attach a conservation covenant to the Title of the property.

2018 Mortgage is paid off.

2020 COVID restrictions implemented; indoor rooms closed; use of outdoor spaces increases.
25,000 gallon concrete reservoir is built, its top becoming an outdoor stage

2021 All underground piping is redone; pump house is rebuilt.
A Gabriola Arts Council grant funds a removable tent cover for the Reservoir Stage.
Relaxed COVID restrictions allow for modified use of indoor spaces.

2023 Timberframe substantially renovated.
3 Heat pumps installed.

2025 Poetry Gabriola Yurt gifted to the Commons

Over the years, the Gabriola Commons has offered a rich and diverse use of the land and amenities for community benefit and enjoyment:

Agricultural/Community Fairs	Concerts	
Boardwalk	Poetry Yurt	Indoor & outdoor meeting spaces
Community Feasts	Music jams	Dance & music groups

Trails & pathways	Allotment gardens	Labyrinth
Solar panel array	Festivals & celebrations	Orchard & blueberry patch
Mid-week Farmers Market	Weekly workbees	Community Kitchen
Bio-mapping project	School field trips	
Marshlands & pond	Potlucks	
Creek & riparian areas	Coastal Douglas Fir forest	

The Commons continues to meet community needs as they arise and to hold space for future initiatives.

GOVERNANCE

Organizational Structure

Governance of Gabriola Commons is by participation in teams and monthly Coordinating Council meetings. *Principles and guidance of Peer Governance on the Gabriola Commons* was adopted in early 2024 and is attached as Appendix A.

Commons Co-ordinating Council

The Commons Coordinating Council (CCC) is the heart of the organization and governance of the Gabriola Commons. It meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm in the Farmhouse. It is the place where teams, groups and community members share ideas and information and ensure the health and well-being of the Commons. Discussions are facilitated and minutes are recorded and are sent out to all teams via their representatives. Past CCC Minutes/ Notes are posted monthly on the Commons website: www.gabriolacommons.ca/resources.

Council format includes reports about Commons activities and its interactions with the Gabriola community. A template for brief team reports can be found at: https://www.gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Team-Report-Template-2023-11-14.pdf

Although Council is not primarily a decision-making body, decisions may be made by consensus on matters that cross teams or involve the Commons as a whole. Any decisions are recorded in the Council Notes.

The Council Stewardship Team supports the functioning of the Commons Coordinating Council by:

- Ensuring the smooth functioning of Commons Coordinating Council meetings.

- Assisting teams and individuals on effective ways to report to Council orally and in writing.
- Illustrating the values related to Commons agriculture, ecology and community.
- Initiating updating the *Introduction to the Commons* document as required.

Teams, Projects and Work Groups

Teams are groups that operate on the Commons, each with a specific mandate. All Commons affairs are attended to by one or more teams rather than being "managed" in a top-down manner. Teams function independently while co-operating with each other to ensure the Commons functions effectively. There are also **project or work groups** on the Commons which function as teams for the duration of a specific project.

Team

A permanent entity that is concerned with a one or more related aspects of the ongoing functioning and/or development of the Gabriola Commons; has a well-defined mandate and objectives; see www.gabriolacommons.ca/volunteer/ under each team. Teams are generally autonomous in their decisions, according to their own mandates and budgets. It is important that teams consider how their decision on any matter will affect other teams or the overall Commons and that they bring their activities forward in team reports at Council.

When a project or work group is ready to become a Commons team, it develops a mandate statement with objectives and strategies to fulfil the objectives. This is vetted at Council and subsequently added to the Participate page of the Commons website. Mandates should be dated and revisited every two years and revised if necessary. There is a template for team mandates at:
https://www.gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Mandate-Template-2018.pdf

Project/Work Group

These groups are established to work on specific projects for a limited time period. They usually create or renovate some infrastructure or oversee a limited process and are monitored through several stages by the Sharing the Commons Team. These have well-defined purposes vetted at Council and sometimes evolve into permanent teams.

Community Group

There are several community groups that are active on the Commons property through formal agreements, such as leases or Memoranda of Understanding. Members of these groups are encouraged to attend Council to foster communication about current or pending activities.

Team Representative

This is the person(s) who serves as a team contact and assures that a team member attends Council to represent their team, group, or project. This person is responsible for bringing the information from their team to Council and for circulating information from Council back to their team. On occasion, 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

Informed and effective decision-making is possible when inspired by good information sharing and trust. The Gabriola Commons embraces a consensus approach to decision-making. Consensus "focuses on taking into account all perspectives, and finding a perspective that integrates as many of these perspectives as possible" (Chinn, 2008, p. 74). Consensus is not compromise or group-think; it is coming to a shared perspective by exploring information together in the spirit of generosity, collaboration and mutual respect. Reaching consensus may take more time but its benefits are mutual understanding and cohesiveness in moving forward to action on the decision.

Teams make their own decisions according to their team's mandate, plans and budget. When a decision is likely to affect another team or the Commons overall, teams will seek and use input from others and then recommend a combined decision. That recommendation is then taken to Council for discussion and final decision if appropriate. Occasionally a short-term, ad hoc group may be formed to research or examine the issue and bring a recommendation(s) to Council.

Decision Making Process

Decisions are made thoughtfully and deliberately. Here is a sample guideline:

- Pose the central question or issue.
- Explore the principles and facts pertinent to the required decision.
- Brainstorm as many different options or perspectives as possible.
- Identify the benefits and drawbacks of various options and perspectives.
- Gain as much information as possible to inform the decision.
- Weigh the most viable options.
- Prioritize the best decision for the current context. If none seem fully adequate, shift to considering other ways to move forward.

For more in-depth guidance and for those decisions that need to go to the Commons Coordinating Council, please refer to Appendix B: *Consensus Decision-Making at Commons Coordinating Council.*

For an in-depth guide to ways that differences and conflict are dealt with on the Commons, see Appendix C: *Dealing with Disagreements and Conflict: The Gabriola Commons' Guide to Conflict Management and Respectful Relationship*.

GABRIOLA COMMONS FOUNDATION

Definition

The Gabriola Commons Foundation (GCF), a registered non-profit society (#S-53431), was established in March**,** 2008 with the purpose of holding the land in trust for the community as legal owner. Charitable status was obtained in June 2008, enabling receipt and acknowledgements of various forms of donations that are essential to the day-to-day maintenance and administration of the Commons, eg, "keeping the lights on", special projects, and so on.

Legally, the purposes of the GCF as stated in the Constitution are:

a. To hold, protect and steward the property on Gabriola Island known as the "Gabriola Commons" as a public amenity, with green spaces, hiking trails, and public exhibition, performance and meeting spaces for the use and enjoyment of the public in perpetuity.
b. To preserve the ecological qualities of the Gabriola Commons.
c. To promote sustainable agricultural practices.

The Gabriola Commons Constitution and Bylaws can be found at:
www.gabriolacommons.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-GCF-Constitution-and-Bylaws.pdf

Membership

It is not necessary to become a member of the Commons to enjoy its benefits. There is no initial fee nor annual renewal fee for membership. Being a member does include, however: voting at the Annual General Meeting, eligibility to serve as a Trustee through an election process, stewarding the legal & financial process in the creation of a uniquely zoned and recognized community commons. To become a member of the Gabriola Commons Foundation, fill out the form at www.gabriolacommons.ca/membership/

Legalities

Legal and financial matters of the Foundation are stewarded by the Trustee Team; its mandate can be found at www.gabriolacommons.ca/volunteer/ under Board of Trustees.

Responsibilities of Trustee Team

In general, the Trustees function like any other team on the Commons, having a mandate specific to all legal and financial matters. Therefore, the team is:

- The legal Landowner
- Responsible for all situations that could have legal significance
- Oversees all Commons financial matters, including fundraising and grant writing
- Keeps transparent financial records
- Ensures all charitable, non-profit society requirements are met
- Oversees of the conservation Covenant, including its Stewardship Agreement & Plan and Baseline Report
- Convenor of the Annual General Meeting
- Meets regularly and keeps clear minutes.

SUMMARY

Thanks for reading! This introductory document about the Gabriola Commons has briefly set out what the Commons is and how it works. It has presented important historical and developmental information to enhance the reader's understanding of the relatively complex structure and workings of our community commons, unique in Canada. This document is always a work in progress and any suggestions for improvements or clarifications can be taken to the Commons Coordinating Council at any time, either through a team or as an individual. You can contact the Council Stewards at council@gabriolacommons.ca.

APPENDIX A

Gabriola Commons Peer Governance Document
July 5, 2024

This Peer Governance document articulates a guide to the principles and agreements that promote caring for the land and the people: ecology, agriculture, those who steward it directly as well as the Gabriola community which benefits from the green spaces and places to gather.

Definition
Peer Governance is distributed leadership or self-management in a horizontal network. Bollier and Helfrich say that it is "that part of Commoning by which people make decisions, set boundaries, enforce rules, and deal with conflicts" (2019, p. 85). It is governing *with* each other rather than governing *for* (or over) each other.

This document is a work in progress; input is always welcome to the Coordinating Council Stewardship Team: council@gabriolacommons.ca.

1. Background

The Gabriola Commons is:
• on the traditional, unceded territory of the Snuneymeux First Nations.

• "a unique and distinct property on Gabriola Island. Managed as a community commons by a community-based, volunteer association; it is a place where sustainability, community and agriculture meet. The Commons is intended to exist in perpetuity for the benefit of the community, a community legacy serving community needs" (GI LTC Bylaw No. 258 – Gabriola Official Community Plan).

• a 26 acre property located in the village centre containing mature forest, wetland, diverse ecosystems, agricultural spaces and structures, facilities and green spaces for community benefit. It was established in 2005 for the benefit of all Gabriola Islanders.

• part of the Global Commons, a broad set of resources, natural and cultural, that are shared by many people.

2. Principles

Participation on the Commons assumes that all:

- Contribute freely; individual participation depends first and foremost on what people can give.
- Value diversity, drawing upon everyone's experiences and motivations.
- Respect the individuality of members' diversity.
- Cultivate shared purpose and values through traditions, celebrations and participation in all kinds of activities.
- Practice gentle reciprocity and fairness.
- Participate in decision making and open active discussion.
- Preserve relationships in a spirit of respect and concern for all the people involved.
- Celebrate successes and acknowledge failures.
- Trust the deep wisdom of situated knowledge.
- Observe and interact with the land to creatively respond to change.

3. Peer Governance

- articulates the relationships and interconnectedness of ecological sustainability, agricultural practices and the people who gather on the Commons.
- has clear organizational form and function.
- articulates structures and processes of shared decision-making.
- includes clear statements about ethics, values and agreements.
- outlines how to care for the land, the people and the environment.
- establishes boundaries for work, behaviour and relationships.
- defines shared intentions, eg, organic food production, control of invasive species, etc.
- has a process for naming and resolving s and accountability for conflict resolution and redress of grievances.
- has a process of monitoring and evaluating the stewardship of the land.
- maintains flexibility within structures

4. Peer Governance Structures on Gabriola Commons

- Gabriola Commons Foundation: Constitution and Bylaws
- Teams (mandates)
- Commons Coordinating Council
- Islands Trust Gabriola Community Plan Zoning
- Agricultural Land Reserve Designation

Supporting Documents

- *An Introduction to the Gabriola Commons 2024/2026*

APPENDIX B

Policy: Consensus Decision Making (2024)

Development dates: Jan 2009, June 2011, August 2013, February 2014, August 2024
Policy adopted at Commons Coordinating Council for use at all Commons meetings except where otherwise legally required.

Policy Statement
Consensus decision making as outlined in this policy and the *Introduction to the Gabriola Commons 2024* (pp. 6-7) is used at all Gabriola Commons meetings except where other forms of decision making are legally required (eg, AGMs and other extraordinary Society meetings). Although an ideal approach to making decisions, consensus is not the only approach, nor can it be perfect. "Disagreement is a reality of human existence. And even when consensus can be achieved it is not the same as unanimity" (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019, p. 137).

Introduction and Intent
This document details the general process used for making decisions at the Gabriola Commons. Decisions vary widely in scope and may range from determinations to take quick action on a topic in the moment to making or implementing a new policy. This document guides the process for making a decision by consensus and for how to circulate the final outcome.

Informed and effective decision making is possible within any non-traditional organizational or governance structure. This style of decision making is premised upon self-organization and is inspired by good information sharing and trust.

The following principles are kept in mind throughout the decision-making process:

- The process is collaborative.
- Decentralized decision making is practiced at the most appropriate, practical and empowering level.
- Information about activities and plans is shared in ways which are articulate, accessible and engaging and which enable people to feel enthused and empowered.
- Messages are non-directive, respecting the ability to make a response that is appropriate to a particular situation.
- Good process results in the best possible decision, and not necessarily complete agreement by everyone. Giving consent to a proposal does not necessarily mean it's an individual's first choice, but that the person can live with it.

Procedure

1. Introduce the proposal.
2. Clarify questions and call for concerns.
3. Amend and modify the proposal through discussion or withdraw if support is lacking.
4. Once a draft proposal has been formulated, the facilitator of the meeting asks for any further changes, reservations, or objections. The following options are ways to indicate a lack of support for a proposal or decision:
    - Non-support – I don't see the need for this, but I will go along with it.
    - Reservations – I think this may be a mistake, but I can live with it.
    - Standing aside – I personally can't support this, but I won't stop others.
    - Blocking – I cannot support this or allow the group to support this.
5. If there are no further amendments or objections, the decision is accepted through head nodding, a round of statements from each participant (who may pass if they wish).
6. If a proposal is blocked, the decision-making process is suspended until a resolution process is activated.
7. Resolution possibilities:
    - Blockers are given the opportunity to present reasons for blocking which must be clearly stated and recorded.
    - Reasons for blocking must meet criteria that demonstrate the decision would: jeopardize the legal existence of the Commons; place the Commons in an untenable financial position; create irreversible impacts on the land and the environment (Do No Harm), constitute unethical or imprudent behaviour.
    - After an agreed upon time frame to consider the blocking in light of the criteria, the issue is re-introduced for a decision. If the new information does not persuade other members to change the decision, the decision goes ahead.
    - If the block does not meet the criteria but raises some concerns, the group should consider moving forward cautiously with the decision and action.
    - The nature of the block and the blockers will go on record along with the decision.

Decision Making at Commons Coordinating Council

Decisions pertinent to a team's mandate, objectives and budget are made within that team, eg, the Farm Team decides what to plant where within the existing gardens. It is crucial that teams and project groups consider the effects that their decisions might have for other teams or the Commons as a whole, in which case, a proposal is taken to Council.

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

When an issue does not fall within the mandate of a specific team or group, or is important to many, representatives draft a recommendation or decision together. Occasionally a short-term work group made up interested individuals may research or examine the issue and bring forth recommendations to Commons Coordinating Council (CCC).

Discussion at Council

A. Recommended Decision Draft

Information is brought to the Commons Council meeting by the representative(s) for discussion. A recommendation for a policy, action, etc. may be brought instead of a question or issue.

1. Please inform the Council Facilitator in advance when a recommendation for a Council decision is to be brought to the next Council meeting so that adequate time for discussion can be allocated.
2. At Council, the issue is discussed and it is determined if there are additional teams, groups, or individuals that should be involved in refining the draft recommendation.
3. Identified parties form an ad hoc work group to draft a plan of action using their own knowledge and input from the discussion at Council.

B. Circulating the recommendation

1. All Team Representatives circulate the draft recommendation to their team members and collect input. Because this is an inherently slow process, it is vital that team reps do this promptly and that teams discuss it at their next convenient meetings or by other methods, so that unreasonable delay is not created in decision making.
2. Team Reps provide their teams' feedback to the group working on the decision.
3. The work group brings a revised draft to the next Council meeting for discussion.

C. Making the Decision

The work group presents the revised draft at the subsequent Council meeting. One of the following options will apply; the decision is:

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

D. Circulating the Decision and Follow up

The decision and any pertinent information are circulated by Representatives to their teams or project group and also through Council minutes (which are regularly posted to teams and the Commons website).

Once a decision is given the "green light" at Council, 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.

Reference

Bollier, D & Helfrich, S. (2019. *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons.* Gabriola, BC: New Society Publishers.

Appendix C

Dealing with Disagreements and Conflict:
The Gabriola Commons' Guide to Conflict Management and Respectful Relationships

Introduction

Disagreements and *conflict* are inevitable in any relationship, and volunteer organizations are no exception. Constructive disagreement and diversity of opinions are extremely valuable in exposing the Commons and its teams to different viewpoints, new ideas, and new ways of being, and should not be avoided. In addition, respectfully embracing differences among people empowers learning and relearning. While differences in ideology, worldviews, or beliefs between Commons *volunteers* and *participants* may be unavoidable, there are positive ways to prevent disagreements from becoming conflicts and constructively manage those that do.

Application:

This guide applies to all participants and volunteers at the Commons. It is intended to be read and used along with the *Gabriola Commons Agreement* (Appendix A), the Gabriola Commons' Guide to Conflict Management Glossary of Terms (Appendix B), and the Commons' consensus decision-making document (Ref A). Words in this guide defined in the Glossary are highlighted in *italics* the first time that they appear in the text.

Purpose:

The purpose of this guide is to outline the roles and *responsibilities,* protocols, and procedures available for volunteers and participants to access should they wish to address any conflict or *adverse behaviour* personally experienced during their volunteerism/participation in the Commons. The goal is to address conflict proactively and resolve or manage differences in a positive, consensus-focused way such that people are respected, perspectives are considered and the legitimate needs of everyone involved are valued. Well-managed conflict can strengthen relationships, build teamwork, and enhance the Commons' reputation as a safe, inclusive and enjoyable place to volunteer and participate.

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1. Roles and Responsibilities

Individuals

Conflict is a fact of life and can arise at any time. Knowing this enables volunteers and participants to take steps to effective conflict management. Approaching conflict as a normal occurrence helps to turn potential disagreements into clear communication and improved processes. This means that everyone in the Commons has a role to play in preventing conflict and a shared responsibility to manage their disagreements proactively and early using a consensus approach so that difficult issues can be addressed before they escalate into conflict and harm to those involved and or the Commons.

Although there is personal responsibility on the individual Commons volunteer/participant, certain entities within the Commons have other roles and responsibilities.

The Trustees

The Commons Trustees (Directors) are responsible for the legal oversight of the Commons, and under the BC Societies Act, are "responsible to manage or supervise the management of the activities and internal affairs of the Society (Ref B). The "Society" is the Commons. In addition, directors in BC must "exercise the care, diligence, and skill of a reasonable person in the circumstances" and may be held responsible if a human rights complaint of *discrimination* is brought forward. Although the first step in resolving conflict does not generally reside with the Trustees, it appears that legally there is a duty to ensure a *harassment*-free environment even though the Trustees' published mandate does not include any oversight in conflict management including addressing harassment or *bullying*.

The Process Team

The Process Team is a group of Commons volunteers mandated to work "…collaboratively with teams, groups and individuals to support healthy interpersonal relationships, clear communication, compassionate understanding and successful conflict resolution" (Ref C). The Process Team supports the Trustees and all volunteers/participants in promoting positive relationships and assisting individuals in addressing conflict and disagreements experienced while participating in the Commons. They offer a safe, neutral, and confidential space for individuals to voluntarily explore how to restore damaged

relationships, and what options may be available to do that. The Process Team can be contacted at process@gabriolacommons.ca

Commons Council

The Commons Council meets monthly to share information amongst the team representatives, volunteers and any persons present e.g. tenants and community members. The Council has a role in disagreement and conflict management through role-modelling respectful meeting behaviour and promptly and respectfully addressing any adverse behaviour observed during meetings, particularly when diverse opinions/ideas or controversial topics are discussed.

Team Representatives

Team representatives are informal peer leaders who voluntarily speak on behalf of their team at Council and other events/activities and may have assumed additional coordination/facilitation and project responsibilities in carrying out their team's mandate. Although all team members have an individual responsibility according to the Gabriola Commons Agreement, the team representative (if willing) may be seen as a trusted person to provide guidance to team member(s) experiencing conflict and who may wish to talk to someone. Similar to the Commons Council, team representatives have a shared responsibility to role model respectful behaviour while participating with their peer team members.

2. Confidentiality and Privacy

Sometimes in conflict situations, the involved people are not concerned about *confidentiality.* In many conflict situations, however, confidentiality is crucial. Information released about a situation could result in profound consequences including worsened personal and work relationships, damage to reputations, loss of volunteer opportunities, concerns about violence, and more. Because of the possible risks, when a conflict situation is discussed with others, it is important to have an open dialogue about expectations of confidentiality. Below are some questions that may help think through the confidentiality of a situation (Ref D):

- Is this a sensitive issue?
- Who needs to know about the issue and details to assist or manage the situation?
- Are others already aware of this situation?
- Could talking openly about the conflict make matters worse? If so, in what ways?
- If this situation is discussed with another person, might they have to report it? For example, in BC, if one suspects a child or youth under the age of 19 is being abused or neglected, there is a legal duty to report this to a child protection worker.

Commons volunteers/participants involved in a conflict situation should expect that their personal and sensitive information will be kept confidential by all others involved unless there is a legal reporting requirement on the part of the Trustee Foundation. Only those individuals who need to know should be privy to their confidential data. If there is a risk of a breach of confidentiality, then all persons potentially impacted should be advised of that risk, the degree of harm, and their consent to release information obtained.

Tips to ensure confidentiality (Ref E)

- Discuss the *dispute* in a private location.
- Discourage gossip.
- Do not assume anything. Maintain neutrality by coming into a situation with an open mind and an objective sense of judgment.
- Be careful with email communications and who is copied on emails. An email can be quickly distributed to those not involved in the issue by accident.

3. Timelines & Communications

Timing is a key factor in conflict management but knowing when the right time is to approach someone in a conflict situation is not easy. Too soon and heightened emotions can get in the way, but take too long, and people can emotionally disconnect themselves from the relationship, no longer feel it is worthwhile to engage, no longer feel any *accountability* or their perspectives have become entrenched and resistant to change. Ideally, the best time is once emotions have cooled down and within the month at the latest (Ref F). Nonetheless, it is better to attempt conflict management at any time rather than to avoid dealing with it.

Once conflict management procedures are underway, communication is required between the various people involved. Often these are emails sharing what has happened, meetings to set up for discussions, summary notes of agreements made …the list goes on. What has happened is usually especially important to those involved, therefore, timely responses help build confidence in the process, and trust in the Commons that it is truly interested in restoring good relations with people. There are no specific guidelines on timelines, but a suggestion is to follow basic business email etiquette for emails. For example, responding within 1-2 days of receiving an email, acknowledging receipt of an email. Letting people know when they can expect a more fulsome response is also reassuring. Communication (means of communication, who communicates with whom, number of email/text communications, what to communicate and when, etc.) and timelines should be discussed at the onset of entering into the conflict management process so that expectations are managed.

4. Preventing Conflict – Maintaining Respectful Relations

The best way to successfully manage conflict is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. The Commons functions and thrives through respectful and caring relations between volunteers/participants. This includes treating the Commons' land and facilities with extreme care and respect (modified from the Gabriola Commons Agreement Appendix A). How volunteers and participants choose to communicate and interact with each other during meetings, informal discussions, and volunteer activities (for example work bees, helping with Commons events like the Fall Fair, Big Garage Sale etc.) goes a long way in creating a respectful environment and culture for all. Volunteers or participants whose behaviour is problematic, who do not seem to get along with others, and whose manner seems inflammatory, negative, or bullying, make it challenging for everyone else to stay focused, positive and engaged. These are toxic volunteers who need appropriate guidance to align their behaviour to what is expected of a Commons volunteer/participant, or if the adverse behaviour is ongoing and serious, to have relations broken off with them or other *sanctions* imposed.

Tips for respectful relations

- Respect that people may have diverse ways of being including different communication styles and temperaments.
- Use neutral, respectful tones, words, and body language when interacting and communicating with others.
- Listen with humility to other people's ideas and seek to understand what is being said.
- Be curious about others' opinions and feelings and listen without judgment before asking respectful questions or seeking clarification.
- Share airtime in discussions, meetings, and other encounters and ensure that others have an opportunity to speak or participate should they choose.
- Use positive language when providing feedback about another person's ideas/projects or disagreeing with their perspectives.
- Keep confidential matters confidential in that personal matters discussed or shared at a meeting remain within the group.
- Never use discriminatory, harassing, bullying, or otherwise offensive language in any situation and by any communication means including virtual meetings, email, or social media.
- Be aware of one's default style with respect to conflict and disagreements (for example – collaborative, competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising) and emotions when faced with conflict (irritation, anger, frustration, dismissive etc.) and how these may impact one's ability to address conflict or disagreements.

5. Managing Conflict

Commons volunteers, participants and Trustees are encouraged to contact the Process Team with any questions regarding conflict management or for guidance.

For an Individual

Suggested General Steps to Effective Conflict Management (Adapted from Ref G)

1. *Be proactive.* Early resolution is the most effective. When an issue arises, listen and reflect on what is happening. Consider how difficult issues can be addressed before they escalate to conflict.
2. *Seek to understand all sides of the issue.* There is always more than one way to interpret a situation. Reflect on what the issues may mean to everyone involved, and what is at stake.
3. *Initiate dialogue with the other person (Self-resolution - negotiation).* Do this by listening and asking questions of the other person to help gain a greater understanding and help better address the central issue.
4. *Know when to ask for help.* Enlisting the help of a neutral third party such as a team representative or another trusted volunteer or consulting with others, like the Process Team, can prevent conflict escalation and provide emotional support.
5. *Assess the available options.* There are several ways to handle conflict such as negotiation, (with the assistance of a neutral third party as above), *conflict coaching*, and *facilitated discussion*. Consulting with the Process Team can help with exploring the options to decide the best possible way to manage the situation.
6. *Take action.* This means using your knowledge and resources to take action and could including developing conflict management skills through conflict coaching, taking time to prepare for a difficult meeting or preparing for a facilitated discussion.
7. *Reflect on the situation.* What has been learned? What has the situation shown about yourself, others? What can you change in the future to prevent similar situations?
8. *Work to rebuild damaged relationships (when ready and possible).* Addressing conflict does not have to be about identifying a winner or a loser. Instead, it can be about being open to exploring differences and solutions for working together. At the very least, work to maintain a respectful manner with everyone involved.

For the Organization

Suggested General Steps to Address a Toxic Volunteer who is a Commons Member

Dismissing a volunteer should be a last resort, and alternatives should be sought before doing so. However, the Commons Constitution and Bylaws do provide a process to expel a Commons member. Bylaw Part 2 para (9) states that Commons *members* can be

expelled by a special resolution passed by the members at a general meeting. The special resolution must state the reasons for expulsion and the member given an opportunity to be heard before the vote is taken (Ref H). The Bylaws are silent on dismissing volunteers who are non-members. Below is a suggested process to consider following if a volunteer is deemed problematic for the Commons:

1. *Seek guidance early.* Consult with other trusted volunteers who have had experiences with the person (volunteer), the Process Team, Conflict Management experts, and/or Trustees as required. There should be an agreed-upon course of action or plan and designated person (s) to address the problematic behaviour.
2. *Assess what is the problem?* Is their behaviour as result of a lack of competency, training, skills, knowledge, a lack of understanding of what is expected of the volunteer? Are they long-time volunteers who need a break? Look for alternatives to dismissing the volunteer.
3. *Communicate the behaviour to the person.* If any of the above is accurate, communicate the behaviour to the person and offer remedial training, review expectations, offer another volunteer position, or recommend that they take a break (e.g. re-train, re-assign, re-vitalize). Give the person a chance to improve. Document the discussion.
4. *If the harmful behaviour continues,* have a face-to-face communication with the volunteer. Consider the involvement of another volunteer, the Process Team or an external facilitator who has the trust of all involved. Document the discussion but not the details of any conflict management meetings except the outcomes.
5. *If the harmful behaviour is still continuing*, consider whether dismissing the volunteer is the most appropriate action. Consult with the Trustees before taking action to dismiss the volunteer as organizational support is critical. There could be legal ramifications. Trustee approval by consensus must be obtained to dismiss a volunteer member before a special resolution to expel the volunteer member is submitted at a general meeting. According to Bylaw Part 3 para (13) only the Trustees or the Coordinating Council can call a general meeting.
6. *If the consensus decision is to dismiss the volunteer,* provide written notice to expel the volunteer with justification to the person and the Commons members, and invite the person to speak.
7. *Hold a general meeting*, consider the special resolution and the volunteer's presentation, hold a vote by the members.
8. *Provide the outcome of the vote* to the volunteer and the Commons members in writing.

6. Addressing Refusal to Engage in Conflict Management

Individuals involved in conflict management must want to be engaged and give their consent to do so. *Stonewalling* is when one or more of the people involved in the conflict refuse to engage in the conflict management process. This shows disrespect to the others involved and allows the underlying conflict to grow. Stonewalling solves nothing. Instead, it creates negative feelings and damages relationships (Ref I).

Commons volunteers/participants in conflict situations are expected to engage to resolve/manage differences and conflict. Trying to understand why a person is stonewalling may help to get them engaged. But at the end of the day, a person can only change themselves and cannot make the other person, who is unwilling to engage, to care or disclose.

Continued stonewalling may be a reason for the Commons to *break off relations* with the person and impose a sanction. This type of volunteer/participant can be harmful to the Commons because their adverse behaviour generally continues along with its negative impact on the Commons' reputation/mandate, and volunteer retention, satisfaction, and participation. See section 8 for more information on breaking off relations and sanctions.

7. Restorative Action

Restorative action involves working together to identify the harm that has occurred as a result of conflict and establish a way that everyone agrees with to repair the harm. Harm includes relational, emotional, social, or physical and can include a situation where relations have been broken off between the Commons and the individual(s) involved in the conflict (Ref J).

Implementing restorative action

Restorative action can be initiated by any person involved in a conflict. However, for it to be successful, all those involved in the conflict need to be engaged and work together on a solution. This must be made clear to all persons involved and the process can take time to work through.

Suggested steps to implement restorative action – The Restorative Questions (Ref K)

1. Ask what has actually happened? And how does each person in the conflict see what has happened. These are the facts presented in a neutral manner from everyone involved.
2. Ask each person involved who has been harmed? And in what way? What type of harm? Note that other people not directly involved in a conflict but who have been witnesses can also be harmed.
3. Ask who is responsible for what? There is usually responsibility and accountability on all parties.
4. Ask how can we fix it?

These are called the restorative questions and are usually posed as part of a facilitated discussion but can take place between two engaged individuals. As these questions are

worked through, and if all individuals are honest about their responsibility, then the solutions to address the harm can become clear.

Appropriate ways to repair harm through a restorative approach depend on the nature of the issue, its severity, who is involved, and their capacity to be engaged. It could include ways such as:

1. Further discussions (storytelling – hearing each person's story of what happened).
2. Self-reflection and listening to each other.
3. An apology.
4. Forgiveness.

8. Breaking Off Relations & Sanctions

Volunteers and participants are deemed to have broken off their relationship with the Commons if they do not abide by the Gabriola Commons Agreement and:

1. No attempts to address the conflict or adverse behaviour have been made on either side; or
2. If conflict management efforts are unsuccessful in restoring relationships and repairing harm (the conflict or the adverse behaviour continues); or
3. The situation involved is so dire that immediate release of the person from the Commons is warranted (for example a volunteer is doing something illegal – suspicious handling of money/valuables, threatening or assaulting another person etc.)

Breaking off relations can mean different things to different people. Also, volunteers and participants may be unaware of the impact of their actions/behaviour and that relations are deemed broken. If this situation should happen, then the person(s) exhibiting the adverse behaviour should be informed. If no restorative action is taken, then the person should be informed whether they could continue participating in the Commons, and if so, how. Implementation of breaking relations can take the form of a sanction (a condition) that is imposed on the person. Sanctions are an important way of deterring anti-social behaviors, and therefore must be part of any robust peer governance scheme (Ref L). Sanctions can be graduated depending on the nature of the situation, its impact and the individual(s) involved. It can be a significant decision, therefore, the final decision to impose a sanction and what it should look like, should come following consultation with the Trustees given their legal responsibility for the management of the internal affairs of the Commons, and be communicated to the person involved in writing along with suggestions for restorative action.

<u>Examples of sanctions</u>

- A condition is placed on their continued participation. For example, apologizing to the harmed person before resuming volunteer activities.

- Limitations placed on their participation. For example, the person is not scheduled to work alongside another person.
- Restricted participation. For example, they may participate in general work bees but not as a member of a specific team or involved as a volunteer in a specific event or activity.
- Complete dismissal of a volunteer/participant from further participation as a volunteer or involvement in any Commons activities or events.

9. Evaluation of the Guide and Suggestions for Improvement

Conflict management is a continually developing field, therefore, the guide should be reviewed by the Process Team at least every 5 years, and necessary updates completed. Any suggestions for improving this guide are welcome and can be forwarded any time to the Process Team at process@gabriolacommons.ca The guide is considered Commons policy, and any updates to the guide completed by the Process Team follow the Commons consensus decision-making approach but ultimately are the responsibility of the Trustees Foundation as they have the legal responsibility as per the BC Societies Act for all the internal affairs of the Commons.

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Appendix A – <u>The Gabriola Commons Agreement</u>

The people and the land of the Gabriola Commons function and thrive through respectful and caring relations. Anyone participating in the Commons or coming onto the land agrees:

- To welcome a diversity of people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and opinions.
- To model respectful behaviour. This means no discriminatory, harassing, bullying, or otherwise offensive words or actions.
- To try to respectfully address any experienced or observed adverse behaviour.
- To treat the Commons' land and facilities with extreme care and respect, including following the Commons' no fire, no drugs/alcohol, no smoking, no littering, no camping policies.

Anyone who does not abide by this agreement is understood to be breaking off relations with the Commons unless restorative action is taken.

Appendix B - Glossary of Terms

A consistent, shared vocabulary helps us share experiences and knowledge with others. These definitions have been developed specifically for conflict management purposes in the context of the Gabriola Commons.

Adverse behaviour: is any intentional action by a person or a group of people that has the potential to cause harm to the organization, a group, the person, or another person (modified from Griffin and Lopez, 2005). Adverse behaviour can be seen on a continuum, ranging from incivility (rudeness) to harassment, bullying, physical violence or sexual assault. In the Commons context, this intentional action may also cause harm to the environment, Commons land, or facilities.

Accountability: having the obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

Breaking off relations: means a volunteer or a Commons participant has ended their relationship with the Gabriola Commons. This could mean that they are no longer considered a Commons volunteer, a Commons team member, or welcome to participate in events or activities taking place on the Commons.

Bullying: is any intentional behaviour or comment by a person towards another person that the first person knew or reasonably ought to have known to cause the other person to feel humiliated or intimidated. Bullying is where the person is targeted over a period of time. Not every unpleasant interaction, instance of disrespectful behaviour or interpersonal conflict is considered bullying. Examples of behaviours that may not be considered bullying if undertaken appropriately are: expressing differences of opinion, offering guidance, advice or constructive feedback about another person's behaviour or volunteer work, making a legitimate complaint about someone's behaviour through established procedures (modified from WorkSafeBC How to Recognize Workplace Bullying and Harassment | WorkSafeBC accessed September 2, 2024).

Bystander: is an individual who observes or witnesses a situation of discrimination, violence or offensive behaviour committed by one person towards another person and has the opportunity to either condone, intervene or do nothing.

Confidentiality: means that private and personal information disclosed by an individual to another person by any means will not be disclosed to a third party without the individual's consent.

Conflict: an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles. Usually, this is a serious disagreement or argument and lasts a long time, often longer than expected or typical. Usually there is a strong emotional component to a conflict.

Conflict coaching: is one on one support to help an individual deal with a conflict situation. It is a voluntary and confidential process intended to help someone manage or resolve a disagreement or prevent one from escalating. An example is planning for a difficult conversation with a member of the Commons Process Team.

Disagreement: a situation where one or more people have differing opinions on a topic or subject.

Dispute (noun): another word for a disagreement.

Discrimination: is when a volunteer or a Commons participant is badly treated because of a personal characteristic. In British Columbia, persons are protected by the BC Human Rights Code if that personal characteristic is one of the personal characteristics covered by the Code. These include sex, sexual orientation, mental/physical disability, race, ancestry, colour, place of origin, age (modified from Human Rights Protection in British Columbia fact sheet (gov.bc.ca) accessed September 2, 2024).

Facilitated discussion: is an informal process where the participants can talk to each other in the presence of an objective third party who guides them in reaching an acceptable solution. It is not an investigation or mediation or a legal process and does not determine right and wrong.

Harassment: There are many definitions of harassment and types of harassment. Harassment is a form of discrimination. It can be words or actions that offend or humiliate a volunteer or a Commons participant. It is harassment when someone repeatedly says or does things to a person that are insulting and offensive. Harassment includes unwelcome sexual suggestions/requests, unwelcome touching or physical contact, staring or making unwelcome comments about someone's body, jokes based on gender, sexual orientation, or racial stereotypes, comments that make fun or insult people because of their sex, pregnancy, race or physical or mental disability (modified from Human Rights Protection in British Columbia fact sheet (gov.bc.ca) accessed September 2, 2024).

Member: is a Gabriola resident who is a registered member of the Gabriola Commons Foundation (Society). The Gabriola Commons Foundation is the BC registered society which has legal and financial oversight of the Commons in accordance with the Commons Constitution and Bylaws 2019-GCF-Constitution-and-Bylaws.pdf accessed October 22, 2024).

Negotiation: a discussion between two or more parties with the aim of reaching an agreement on matters of mutual interest. The agreement may benefit all or some of the parties.

Participant: any person who takes part in or becomes involved in a Commons activity or an event/activity organized by another person/organization on the Commons property. This also includes persons/organizations who rent Commons facilities on a short or long-term basis.

Responsibility: the fact of having the duty or the job to deal with something.

Restorative action: is means taken to repair the harm done by adverse behaviour and to rebuild the relationship between the person, group or Commons community harmed, and the person/persons who have committed the harm. It is intended to offer education, encourage self-reflection and accountability and deter further adverse behaviour. It should include all people involved in the situation (if the person who has been harmed is willing), connected to the violation, and tailored to the capacity of the individuals involved. It also could include action to protect the environment should the Commons land be harmed.

Restorative mediation: is a process to resolve conflict between two people that is mutual with harm on both sides. Not used for bullying or harassment situations or power imbalance situations. It focuses on met/unmet needs, how both were impacted, collaboration, and repairing harm and restoring relationships. It is led by a facilitator who asks the restorative questions.

Sanction: is a penalty imposed on an individual for the purposes of deterring adverse behaviour. If a volunteer, the sanction must be agreed upon by the individual's team, or if the adverse behaviour is serious, or if the volunteer is not currently engaged in a team, then by the Commons Trustees. Sanctions must be consistent with the nature of the adverse behaviour and the degree of harm caused.

Stonewalling: is an avoidant behaviour pattern by which a person withdraws and shuts down when faced with a conflict discussion. It can look like dismissing or ignoring the other person, walking away from a discussion, being too busy to talk about the issue, or giving the silent treatment.

***The Commons Agreement*:** is the document that outlines how volunteers and other participants on or using the Commons facilities/ land are expected to relate to each other and the land. It is the framework on which the Commons conflict management protocols are based.

The right to privacy: means that a person has the right to keep confidential any personal information which on its own or in combination with other pieces of information can identify the person as an individual.

Volunteer: any person who gives freely of their time, energy and skills for the benefit of the Commons, without monetary or other compensation. All volunteers are participants, but not all participants are volunteers. (modified from Volunteer_Canada_Canadian_Code_for_Volunteer_Involvement_2017.pdf accessed September 2, 2024)