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# Pioneer Valley Cohousing Handbook

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Pioneer Valley Cohousing is a close-knit neighborhood. Because we all live so close together, it is important to be mindful of your impact on your neighbors, and to take responsibility for not only your own actions, but also those of your guests and children, and make sure that everyone knows the expectation that the community has of residents and guests. To make life flow

smoothly, we have evolved certain agreements about how to live together. Many of these agreements are contained in this handbook. **If there is any discrepancy between what is written in this handbook and the Community Agreements and Bylaws document, the latter takes precedence.**

## Annex

The Annex consists of three spaces: the craft room, the workshop, and leased loft/storage spaces. Any community or associate member over 18 can use the craft room and workshop. Lease agreements for storage should be made with the Annex Committee (contact: Dan Nachbar) Non members and children need a community sponsor to ensure both safety and security . The sponsor is responsible for safety training, ensuring that the basic rules are followed, and possibly supervising use as necessary.

Basic rules:

- Turn off the power switch when done. This is an important safety precaution that cuts power to equipment when not in use.
- Turn the heat back down
- Do not use equipment that you are not familiar with (seek training as needed), and use all the safety precautions recommended (guards, eye protection, etc).
- Not all tools are available for general community use without permission by the owner (ask someone on the annex committee which are which).
- Leave it cleaner than you found it;
- Return all tools to where you found them.
- On-going projects may be left in the annex, but should allow for use of the space by others. Projects and temporarily stored materials should be labeled with the name of the responsible party.
- Long-term storage of projects and personal materials is not allowed. Unlabeled materials will be considered community property for anyone's use and/or disposal.
- Do not put toxics down the drain. There is a canister with used/reusable paint thinner near the sink for cleaning paint brushes (ask a regular user how to use this).
- Regular users of the annex craft room and workshop are expected to participate in the occasional workdays. Work days are scheduled as needed to clean and maintain the space.
- Lock the door when you leave

## Cars

- Parking:
  - Resident parking is in the north and south lots.
  - Visitor parking is in front of the office building and along the road behind the commonhouse.

- Residents can park for a short time behind the commonhouse (except in the handicapped space) but not long term.
- During snow storms, The plowing team will notify the community by phone tree when to move their cars out of the lots for plowing. TEMPORARY parking spaces are plowed onto the grass behind the commonhouse. These are for ONLY during the time that the lots are being plowed. As soon as the lots are plowed, cars should be moved back into them, and the temporary space blocked off. Do NOT tell your guests that it is ok to park there (destruction of grass, compaction of soil, pollution of garden). If you go away in the winter and leave your car, give a key to someone to move it. Tell Larry your license plate number so we can locate owners of cars.
- Driving on the loop: We discourage driving on the loop. We generally use carts to transport things to and from our cars.
  - It is OK to drive on the loop if you are carrying something or someone that you can't get up any other way without extreme difficulty.
  - In that case, the loop is one way clockwise, unless there is a specific reason (eg handicapped access) for going the other way. Please tell tradespeople (plumbers, etc) to park in the lots if possible and to go clockwise if it is necessary to drive.
  - Speed limit is walking speed.
  - Wheel chocks can be found near light posts, and must be under wheels of cars and trucks parked on the loop.
- Parking on the actual roadway of the loop should not exceed 1/2 hour. If it will be longer, pull off onto the grass.

## Carts

- Garden Way carts live in both the north and south parking lots, ideally evenly distributed.
- When you take one up to your house, return it to a lot.
- If you need the cart but are not using it right away, keep it close to your door.
- If you are not able to return the cart to the lot right away, put it near the loop so anyone looking for a cart knows it is available.
- Don't leave empty carts by the recycling or by the garden - bring them back to a lot so that tired person coming home with groceries or luggage can make use of them easily.
- Don't leave weeds, mulch, dirt etc overnight in the carts - the moisture will make them rot faster that way!
- If a cart needs fixing, bring the cart to the cartwright's (fixer fo carts) house, currently Jerry.

## Chickens

The egg layer chickens are privately owned by a group of residents. Because there are a limited number of eggs produced, the club is closed to new members. But from time to time

membership is opened, so if you are interested in joining let the coordinator of the chickens club know. Please do not feed the chickens, open any doors to their pens, or take eggs. You can, however give them vegetable scraps or bugs or green leafy weeds for their pecking pleasure. Chickens for meat are also raised here from time to time. This is also run as a private club and membership in the club is determined before each batch of chickens. If you are interested in joining, talk to any current owner.

## **Co-food Buying Club**

Cofood Buying Club provides an opportunity for members to pre-order food (generally in bulk) through Northeast Cooperatives. Orders are placed every four weeks, with deliveries coming a week later. Club membership is open to community and non-community members. To participate in the club you must: a) set up an account with the CoFood Coordinator (currently Lyons), b) put in an order via the internet website [www.unfi.com](http://www.unfi.com), c) give a check written to "CoFood Buying Club" to Lyons prior to the order deadline, and d) help in the work load (periodic breakdown of food, greeting the truck, and/or administering the club) To set up an account and learn more about the club, speak to and/or email Lyons at [lyons@cohousing.com](mailto:lyons@cohousing.com).

## **Common House**

The Common House is an extension of our houses and we try to treat it that way.

- Quiet is observed between 10 at night and 8 AM, especially when guestrooms are occupied. These quiet hours are observed for the rest of the community, too, in parking lots and on paths. Because of proximity to our houses, the common house is not an appropriate place for late night parties.
- Please turn off any light in the common house that you are not using, including the light over the stairs to the basement, lights in the hallways and bathrooms.
- Security: CH is locked from 11pm to 7am. Sauna, exercise room, and bicycle room are locked at all times. Keys or combination are available from Lyons on request
- No smoking in common buildings.
- Please do not store personal items in the commonhouse, except in your own cubby in the mailroom.
- Lost and Found: In the mailroom, under the mailboxes is the lost and found, where anything you leave will end up.
- The basement is not for personal storage.
- Pets are not allowed in the common house

## **Bicycle Room**

The bike room in the basement is available to everyone, but it is very full. Please do not leave bicycles there that you aren't going to use. Combination available from most anyone on request. Combination is not to be given out to anyone who does not have a bicycle in there.

## **Exercise room**

The exercise room in the basement of the common house is open for community members' use year-round. It is kept locked, but the key is hanging on the door trim outside of the room. There are a few guidelines for use of the room:

- Please ask for orientation from a community member before using equipment that you are unfamiliar with. There are a few pieces of privately owned equipment that are available for use with permission from the owner. Please check with a community member about these pieces (e.g. exercise bike, treadmill).
- Please clean up when you are done. Please do not leave trash lying around.
- Please take all towels or other clothing out of the room when you are done.
- Please keep the noise level to the minimum required for your exercise routine. The noise does carry into the rest of the basement.
- Please be sure the door is locked and the lights are off when you leave.

## **Guest Rooms**

Guest Rooms are available to family and friends of residents by reservation. Sylvia is currently in charge of scheduling guest rooms. Residents are responsible for making the bed and washing the sheets and towels of their guests as soon after their guests leave as possible.

## **Laundry**

The laundry room in the common house basement is available to Community and Associate Members. Renters can use the laundry room through agreement with their landlord who is ultimately responsible for their renters training and use. Extended family members, friends etc. need a community sponsor.

- Record your use of washers and dryers on the sheet provided. Landlords shall be responsible for setting up an account for and proper use by their tenants, and any unpaid bills.
- Users will be billed periodically for their use.
- Be considerate of those who will follow you: Please do not leave laundry sitting for long periods of time within machines, in baskets, or on the folding table.
- There are cards available for informing other users on the status of your laundry ("please place in drier", etc)
- Please help the community by moving kitchen laundry through the wash and dry cycles and ultimately moving it up to the great room for folding.
- Detergent should be labeled and stored neatly. Please remove any empty containers
- Please do not use perfumed products, or "bounce" as these are unpleasant and unhealthy to those with chemical sensitivities.
- When there are leaks or machines break down, contact the community people responsible (listed on signs on the machines).

## **Library**

- The library is erratically maintained, but has a fine collection of books, fiction and non-fiction.
- Don't take books out and then return them hoping someone else will put them back on the shelves--reshelve them yourself.
- Please don't donate any books to the library--there are more up there already than we have shelf space.
- TV, VCR and DVD player are available for anyone to use.

## **Masonry Heater**

The masonry heater in the great room is a little tricky to use--ask someone for a lesson before you try to start a fire yourself.

## **Milk System**

- Milk is delivered to the Common House basement refrigerator regularly by Mapleline Farm.
- Payment is made by check only to Mapleline Farm and deposited in the metal box to the right of the refrigerator.
- The price is written on the front of the refrigerator.
- To open an account, pay a \$5 non-refundable, one-time fee to cover milk bottle breakage
- Pre-pay for your milk, by check, in multiples of the price, and create your own record of payment (usually posted on the side of the refrigerator).
- When you take a milk bottle, check off (and DATE) your pre-payment sheet.
- It is your responsibility to keep a positive balance. This is a local farmer giving us fabulous service. We could lose this service if we are not diligent in our own bookkeeping.
- Rinse and return all glass bottles to the refrigerator area.

## **Sauna room/Shower**

The "Sauna Room/Shower" is also available year-round. There is a place to change your clothes and take a shower if you are using the sauna or the exercise room. There are a few guidelines for the use of the room:

- Feel free to use the clean towels that are there, and put them in the hamper. If you use them on a regular basis, please take them home and wash them. They are labeled "Sauna" to remind us all where they belong.
- Please ask a community member for orientation on turning the sauna on and use of water on the rocks, etc.

- Please do not bring glassware or food into the sauna.
- Please do not use alcohol or recreational drugs while using the sauna. Please be sure you are medically fit to withstand the high level of heat.
- Please lock the door and turn off the lights when you leave. Key is the same key as the exercise room.

### **Take It or Leave It (TIOLI)**

- The TIOLI is a place to offer good, usable things to the rest of the community.
- It is not a place to get rid of stuff you don't know what to do with, or don't have time to take to the dump.
- If you want to leave something in the TIOLI ask yourself how likely it is that someone here will really want it.
- Please don't leave books, furniture, toxic substances or sharp objects. Small children do get in there. Clean clothing, serviceable shoes, kitchen stuff, craft supplies, unbroken toys, etc are all OK.
- The TIOLI is completely cleaned out each spring and fall during the work day.

### **Use of Common House for Events**

- The Common House is available to all Residents and Associates for parties, meetings, workshops, etc (see Community Calendar for how to reserve space). fees and conditions

## **Common Meals**

### Regularly Scheduled Meals:

- Common Meals are typically served on Monday and Wednesday evenings at 6:00.
- Brunches are periodically scheduled for weekend mornings (approximately 6 per year).
- Additional Meals: Additional community and individual meals can be scheduled. If they are not paid for by the individual host, then they should follow the same payment systems as the regularly scheduled meals.
- Costs for meals:
  - Adult meals \$4
  - Children's meals \$2. Children over 13 years of age are considered adults for kitchen meals accounting.
  - The cost of meals includes approximately \$.50 and \$.25 per meal surcharge to pay for all of the kitchen's costs including stock items, bottled water, supplies, replacing dishes and equipment, and the like. Cooks are responsible to try and meet a maximum budget determined by multiplying the number of diners by the cost of each meal.
- Setting up a meals account:
  - Meals account can be established for resident member households, renters, and

- associate members. Meals for guests are charged to the account of their host.
- To establish a meals account you must pay a non-refundable, one-time fee of \$50 per adult and \$25 per child. See below for how to pay this.
  - Pre-payment for meals:
    - Diners are expected to pre-pay into their account as needed to maintain a positive balance.
    - Checks should be written to The Cohousing Kitchen and be deposited into the envelope next to the sign-up sheets outside the kitchen door.
    - Pre-payment is recorded by highlighting boxes on the pre-payment clipboard. Each box represents one adult meal (or two child meals). 10 boxes cost \$40.. Meals should be purchased in increments of 10 to facilitate bookkeeping. Highlighters can be found on the same bulletin board.
  - Signing up for a meal
    - Diners are expected to sign-up at least 3 days in advance of each meal. Cooks can cut off additions after this point at their discretion.
    - Menus are posted in advance on the meals bulletin board. There are three clipboards, one each for Monday, Wednesday, and Special Meals (brunch, events, etc.).
    - Menus usually have three options: 1) main option, 2) variation (usually vegetarian), and 3) generally a simple, child-friendly alternative.
    - Diners sign-up a) for the number of adults and children, and b) for the number of each menu option.
    - Diners can use the far right columns to record any special instructions to the cooks or sign up for dining within the Sun Room which is reserved for more quiet dining.
    - Once the cooks have used a highlighter to mark off the empty slots on the sign-up sheet, diners must check with the cooks before adding more people to the meal.
  - Meals eaten:
    - Cooks are responsible for marking off the meals actually purchased and eaten under each account. They do this by crossing off one pre-payment box per adult and 1/2 box per child. The diners are responsible for paying for the meals they sign up whether or not they eat them.
    - Diners who can't make a meal, or know they will be late, are encouraged to get someone to make a "late plate." Please do not ask the cooks to do this.
    - If cooks notice that a household is behind on pre-payment, they are encouraged to put a note in the community mailbox. Diners are responsible to promptly correct their balance if it falls behind.
  - Dining: Seating, eating, clearing
    - Diners can select seats at a table with "cards" that are located in baskets near the door. If you are coming down with your own meal, it is a good idea to make sure that there are additional place settings and then to select a card. Otherwise, please wait to see where space is left after paying diners are seated.

- Diners who have signed up for the Sunroom do not need “cards”
- There is generally a “circle time” at 6:00 for head cooks to thank their team of helpers and give details on the menu.
- Dinner is usually served family style, with bowls of food at the table. Alternative meals are often at the pass-thru.
- Diners should bus their own settings, or better yet, one person from each table can volunteer to clear the table. Please be respectful of dishwashers, by clearing your table within a reasonable time.
- Diners are expected to wash the table after it is cleared. Parents of young children are expected to sweep the floor under their child’s place and clean highchairs and boosters.
- Parents of older children are responsible to have their children learn to bus, clear, and clean their own table, whether or not they are sitting at the same table (eg. Teen table).
- Leftovers:
  - Leftovers can be taken from the pass-thru after the meal is cleared.
  - Diners determine by “honor system” if the leftovers should be paid for. It may help to ask the cook if the meal was expensive. There is a clip board hanging on the right side of the pass- thru for marking off payment for leftovers. Each box represents \$1.
- Meals teams
  - Meals are prepared, set up, and cleaned up by regularly scheduled teams of community members. The HUB sets the schedule for the year, so that everyone knows in advance when she/he is expected to work. If you can't fill your expected slot, it is your responsibility to find someone to take your job.
  - The meal team schedule is available on-line at [www.cohousing.com/kitchenschedule.pdf](http://www.cohousing.com/kitchenschedule.pdf).

## Community Calendar

We publish a monthly community calendar on the first of every month except during the summer when two or three months may be combined. The calendar is sent in pdf format to [connect@cohousing.com](mailto:connect@cohousing.com) and to people on the waiting list. Paper copies are put into everyone's box in the mailroom and posted on the bulletin board. There is also an online version of the calendar that is continually updated as calendar entries come in. The address is <http://my.calendars.net/pvcoho> and is password-protected. Contact the communication team for the username and password.

- When scheduling an event:
  - First check the wall calendar on the bulletin board near the entrance to the Great Room at the Common House.
  - If the date, time and space are free, write your event on the wall calendar and then fill out an event slip. Event slips are in a plastic holder just below the wall

calendar. Be sure to fill out everything on the event slip.

- If the event requires a fee (see Common house use for events above) check the box and leave a check made out to CHCA in the red folder in the mailroom (same place as condo fees).
- Return the completed event slip to the communication team. This is the only way your event will make it on the Community Calendar. Writing the event on the wall calendar is not sufficient to get it posted on the monthly community calendar.

## Community Email

Email Listservs We use a variety of email listservs as one way of communicating around the community.

- The most widely used listserv is [connect@cohousing.com](mailto:connect@cohousing.com), which reaches almost everyone living in the community plus associates and some waiting list members.
- Other listservs are for committees or teams (e.g., [steering@cohousing.com](mailto:steering@cohousing.com) for the steering committee and [mowing@cohousing.com](mailto:mowing@cohousing.com) for the mowing team) and groups with common interests (e.g., [humor@cohousing.com](mailto:humor@cohousing.com) and [politics@cohousing.com](mailto:politics@cohousing.com)).
- To join or leave a listserv, contact someone on the communication team (currently Rebecca and Michael). Any community member can join any list, so it's not advisable to send confidential information to a list. All community members can send messages to any list.
- Some general guidelines for using email listservs:
  - Do not assume that, because you sent an email to a listserv, everyone on the list will have read your message.
  - When responding to the sender of message, use Reply to answer the sender only. Do not use Reply All unless you specifically want all the members of the list to see your reply.
  - We discourage use of email for extensive discussion of issues under consideration by the community, especially if there is a significant emotional aspect to the issue. Email can be a good way to surface ideas and sometimes get constructive feedback, but it is a poor substitute for face-to-face dialogue between individuals or in group settings. And when emotions are running high, heated email exchanges can be quite destructive.
  - When sending a message to a larger group that includes a community listserv among the recipients, it's advisable to put the listserv address in the "To:" or "cc:" pane rather than the "bcc:" pane. If the listserv address is in "bcc:" the email server will hold the message for approval by one of the list administrators (several people in the community are list administrators); this is to prevent spam but will delay delivery of your message to the listserv.
- Cohousing.com email addresses Any community member can get a [cohousing.com](mailto:cohousing.com) email address. Contact Amy Freed for options and to set up an address.

## Condo Fees

- Condo fees are determined each year when the budget is approved.
- Fees are due by 4:00 PM on the 15th of every month or on the first Monday afterward if the 15th occurs on a weekend.
- Checks should be made out to CHCA and placed in the red folder in the mailroom.
- A late fee of \$5.00 is charged if payment is not received by the deadline.

## Governance and Decision-Making

- Our community's organizational structure is centered on four main working groups known as "Circles." These are: the Buildings & Grounds Circle, Common House Circle, Community Life Circle, and PALS (Plants, Animals, & Land Stewards) Circle. Each Circle has a defined membership, purpose and set of responsibilities and has related sub-circles that attend to more specific tasks (see the table "General Attributes of Circles").
- Each Circle selects its own operational leader, facilitator, secretary, and representative. The leaders and representatives of these four main Circles comprise the membership of the overall management Circle known as the OAFs (overall facilitators), similar to a steering committee or coordinating committee.
- In addition to the four Work Circle and the OAFs, there is the Full Circle, which is comprised of all members of the community. The Full Circle meets from time to time to make certain major decisions, such as approving the annual budget. The whole community is also invited to attend "Community Conversations" for the purpose of generating input that will help a Work Circle make a decision. Community Conversations are focused on exploration, dialogue and understanding and are not decision making meetings.
- Membership in a Circle is open to any community member willing to make an ongoing commitment attend meetings and contribute to the work of the Circle; membership is a mutual decision between the individual and the Circle. All Circle meetings are open and participation by non-Circle members is determined by the needs of the Circle. To explore joining a Circle, one can talk to any member of that Circle and attend one of its meetings.
- Decisions within each Circle is made on the basis of consent, meaning no Circle member has an objection to the proposal in question. Objections are based on concerns that approving the proposal would in some way interfere with the Circles ability to accomplish its purpose. Consent decision making is a variation of consensus: no member's voice can be ignored.
- The community's Circle structure and consent decision making process are adaptations of a form of governance known as Sociocracy or Dynamic Governance (for more information on sociocracy, Google that term or ask any member of the community to direct you to those who have been trained in that approach).
- The organizational structure and formal policies adopted by the community on

governance and decision making are found in the Agreements and Policies folder in the PV Coho Google Drive accessible through the members-only section of the community website or by requesting a printed copy from the secretary of the Membership Circle.

## Gardens

- The community garden (the north garden, surrounded by a fence) is maintained by the garden committee. Any person in the community may pick from this garden. It is important to pay attention to information put out by the garden committee about what is available to pick and the quantities available so that the produce can be fairly shared. If you have any doubt about how to pick a crop, have any other questions, or want to help in the garden, contact someone on the garden circle.. The south garden area is primarily individual plots. If you want to have an individual plot there, also contact the garden committee.
- Compost: Please use the community compost pile next to the north garden for your food waste. We use it on the garden and it saves us buying more manure. Put it into the bin marked "open". No meat scraps, egg, cheese. Garden waste (thicker, woody) goes in a pile behind the North garden toward the field.

## Mail Room

- In the mailroom are the PO Boxes, the community mailboxes and the community cubbies. These are assigned to new members and residents by the Common House Circle or someone appointed to this task. (Currently Jerry)
- Community mailboxes (on the wall straight ahead as you come in) are for any internal communications. You will receive the calendar, decision proposals, invitations and many other things.
- Cubbies are the boxes on the wall and are the only place in the common house where you can store anything you want for as long as you want.

## Mowing

We take care of all of our own lawn care. There are designated areas that get mowed and we have a regular team that takes responsibility for certain areas. We try not to mow more often than is necessary, so occasionally an area might get to be looking a little unkempt. Our overall goal is to have areas mowed for active and passive recreation, as well as keeping a relatively attractive traditional landscape look to the property. We leave some areas unmowed for wildlife. We mow most of these once a year for maintenance. We encourage additional area to be planted with materials other than grass, and any suggestions for this should go to the Landscape Committee. If you are interested in getting involved with lawn care, please contact someone on the HUB and they will put you in contact with the mowing team (part of Buildings

and Grounds committee).

## **Pets**

Dogs and cats are welcome, and their owners agree to be responsible for their actions, noises and droppings, and to always keep in mind the comfort of their neighbors. This includes pets owned by children or tenants.

Dogs:

- Dogs should be on a leash at all times except that they are allowed to run free on the west side of the road behind the commonhouse if their owner is present and in charge the entire time, and no one who objects is over there.
- Dog owners should immediately pick up after their dogs, even in the orchard, fields, and on paths where others walk. The exception to this is the strip of grass that runs from the road to the swingset, between the garden and the playing field.
- Dogs should not be left alone while their owners are away for an extended period, even with visiting caretakers
- Owners are responsible to keep barking at a minimum.

Cats:

- Cats should be spayed or neutered, wear a bell, and be kept indoors as much as possible.

Other pets:

- Indoor pets are the business of their owners, as long as they are not dangerous and don't disturb the neighbors.

## **Recycling**

- Lyons currently takes the recycling, which is collected in the trailer under the octagon, to the transfer station. He sends out an email to connect telling us when he will be recycling containers or paper.
- This usually happens on Thursdays, so put your recycling in the trailer by Wednesday evening. Paper and Containers are each taken on alternate weeks.
- Please do your part to keep the trailer recycling area neat and tidy.
- Please put bins directly in the trailer, stacked three (3) across.
- All cardboard boxes must be broken down and flattened. Cardboard should go into bins, or if large, directly into the back end of the trailer.
- Paper goes into paper bags and then into bins to recycle it, or directly in bins. There
- usually are extra paper shopping bags in a box under the octagon, and this is a good place to re-use extras you have at your house. please put stray paper bags in bins. If you shred your paper please put it into paper bags to recycle it, NOT PLASTIC...plastic bags and copious amount of plastic tape are not recyclable as paper
- Egg cartons and Styrofoam are NOT recyclable, they are trash.
- You can get empty recycling bins at the trailer.

- Recycling bins can be found throughout the commonhouse. The common house recycling will generally be emptied by common house cleaning crews or kitchen crews, but if you see one that is overflowing, it would be kind of you to take it to the trailer and replace the bins with empty ones.

## **Tenants**

If you rent out a room or an apartment in your house, it is your responsibility to inform the community that you are doing this, to educate your tenant about the expectations of the community and give them a copy of this handbook, and to post a notice on "connect" and the front foyer bulletin board including their picture and a little about them. Your tenants are your responsibility.

## **Work**

- Every resident adult is expected to do 6.5 hours of community work each month, or the equivalent spread out over a year.
- Each non-resident member, or associate member, is expected to do 4 hours per month.
- Part of a member's work commitment can be met through committee work. An individual can count up to 2 hours per month for committee meetings.
- Each member is expected to take part in work days in addition to the expected community work commitment. B & G and landscape committees schedule 3 work days per year, one in the spring and two in the fall. The garden committee generally schedules one day in the spring and the annex and kitchen committees generally schedule one work day per year.
- The work HUB coordinates the work of the community and can assist members in finding work compatible with their interests and schedule. The HUB schedules the rotating meals teams every year. See the section on meals for details.