Senior Cooperative Housing Conference registration opens

Preparation for the Future: Building on Our Legacy is the theme of the 2016 Senior Cooperative Housing Conference, May 11–12, 2016, at the Ramada Bloomington Hotel in Bloomington, Minnesota. More than 300 co-op directors, developers, and professionals are expected to attend the event, co-hosted by Cooperative Network and the Senior Cooperative Foundation. A few highlights this year:

Member Dialogue: Living in a Cooperative Community. In an interactive panel, senior cooperative housing members will discuss the importance of a cooperative community. They will address how to embrace individuality while encouraging healthy participation in cooperative living, and what it means and takes to keep the cooperative spirit alive now and into the future.

Developing Effective Communities and Boards. Co-op members and a member services coordinator will provide tips on defining board member and committee roles as well as ideas on mentoring and motivating others to run for the board. Presenters will also share creative ways to include members, communicate rules and responsibilities, and enhance education activities to foster a vibrant and healthy community.

Replacement Reserve Planning. The Senior Cooperative Foundation will discuss the results of a recent survey regarding replacement reserve and other important issues.

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WANTED: Silent auction items to fund scholarships, projects

The Senior Cooperative Foundation (SCF) annual silent auction fundraiser will again take place during the Senior Cooperative Housing Conference. Proceeds support conference scholarships and the foundation's projects for senior housing co-ops and their members. SCF is requesting donations with a minimum $10 value.

Each of the previous silent auctions at the conference have sold 30 or more donated items, including framed art, beautifully handmade items, garden baskets, wine baskets, restaurant gift cards, and Minnesota Twins autographed baseballs, to name a few. Items will be displayed in the vendor area, where attendees can bid throughout the conference. The highest bidders will receive their items at the end of the event. Cash and checks will be accepted.

To donate, contact Dennis Johnson at (651) 310-0235 or dennisj@seniorcoops.com by April 29. All items must be delivered to the conference registration table between 7:30–8:30 a.m. on May 11.
supplemental reserve planning. SCF Board Chair Dennis Johnson will discuss their specific purposes and uses, as well as how to plan for and monitor reserve needs and investment options.

**Sharing Our Stories After a Disaster.** Cooperatives that have faced disasters that significantly affected their structures and in some cases displaced residents will share how they prepared and responded, as well as lessons learned. Presenters will also address why it is critical for members to carry an H06 insurance policy.

**Minneapolis HUD Update.** A representative from the Minneapolis Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office will be back again to present an informational session, including the latest developments on operations, restructuring, and the status of projects returning to the Minneapolis HUD office.

**Financial Institutions: Serving Senior Housing Co-ops and Members.** Representatives from Shared Capital Cooperative, South Metro Federal Credit Union, and SPIRE Credit Union will detail products, services, and programs available for senior housing cooperatives and their members. Topics include deposit programs, investments, credit cards, payment options, share loans, bridge loans, and supplemental financing for smaller projects.

Kris Maser from Maser, Amundson, Boggio and Hendricks, P.A., will also return this year to discuss **Personal Legal Documents and Titling Certificates of Membership.** She will provide legal advice on member responsibility for titling certificates of membership and properly maintaining the personal documents required for disability and estate planning. Maser will then be joined by fellow attorneys for the **Co-op Counsellors’ Corner for Your Cooperative: Ask the Experts**, a popular question-and-answer panel.

Attendees will again have the opportunity to participate in a board officer and committee networking session, as well as a managers-only meeting. These open discussions offer participants the chance to share challenges and brainstorm solutions.

Limited scholarships are available for cooperatives with 50 or fewer units outside the Twin Cities metro area. Please contact Dennis Johnson, (651) 310-0235 or travisj@seniorcoops.com, for scholarship information.

Details on the conference and lodging are online at [bit.ly/SCHConf16](http://bit.ly/SCHConf16). Contact Cooperative Network’s Vicky Chaput, (651) 280-4900 or vicky.chaput@cooperativenetwork.coop, with program questions.
Robert's Decoder

Have you been in a meeting where things have gotten out of control?

They’ve taken sides and dug in. They come to the meeting loaded for bear. Everyone has an opinion; everyone wants to talk. They’re not civil. Nothing gets resolved; members go away upset. This may be an exaggeration—or not.

Is there any way to manage this kind of situation? Robert to the rescue! Even if no one else knows Robert’s Rules, if the chair knows some basics it can help manage a difficult situation, help everyone feel they’ve been heard, and maximize civility.

If the chair gives the group some basic rules for debate at the beginning of the meeting and speaks in a calm, confident manner, the meeting is starting out right. Here are some basic Robert’s Rules of debate.

1. No one speaks until called on by the chair.
2. Members address their remarks to the chair, not to each other.
3. Members do not interrupt each other.
4. Members speak about the issue, not about each other.
5. If a member feels compelled to refer to other members, use the third person (the previous speaker, my neighbor, etc.).
6. There is a speaking limit. If you haven’t established one, Robert allows members to speak twice up to 10 minutes each time.
7. Everyone has a chance to speak once before anyone gets a chance to speak again.
8. Alternate between speakers for and against the issue.

You should have these rules in writing, either in your rulebook or as a handout at the beginning of the meeting. If members know they will get a chance to speak and know the chair is being fair, it goes a long way toward defusing a tense situation.

Support the Senior Cooperative Foundation!

SCF requests survey participation on reserves, member shares

The Senior Cooperative Foundation (SCF) is requesting information from all senior housing cooperatives on replacement reserves and member share resales. Two separate surveys were mailed to the board president and manager of each senior housing cooperative in late February.

SCF will present information gathered from these surveys during two Thursday sessions at the Senior Cooperative Housing Conference, May 11–12, 2016, at the Ramada Bloomington Hotel: Replacement Reserve Planning at 10 a.m. (see article on page one) and Member Share Resales: Legal Documents at 12:30 p.m., which will address titling options, transfers on death (TOD), trusts, and ownership agreements.

SCF requests each cooperative complete the two surveys and return them to the foundation by April 1. Individual cooperative information will be kept confidential.

If your cooperative did not receive the surveys or if you have questions, please contact SCF’s Dennis Johnson at (651) 310-0235 or dennisj@seniorcoops.com.

Support the Senior Cooperative Foundation!

SENIOR COOPERATIVE HOUSING GOLF TOURNAMENT

GREENHAVEN GOLF COURSE
ANOKA, MINNESOTA
AUGUST 29, 2016

Contact Dennis Johnson, (651) 310-0235 or dennisj@seniorcoops.com, to sign up for the event.

Sandra Thompson is a member of the National Association of Parliamentarians. She resides at Gramercy Park Cooperative Inver Grove Heights.
Gramercy Park Cooperative teaches youth about cooperative living

Guest article by Shantelle Des Marais, Co-ops Yes! youth board member

On Feb. 23–24, six Minnesota and Wisconsin high school students from Cooperative Network’s Co-ops Yes! Youth Leadership Conference board toured Twin Cities cooperatives as part of their year-long leadership experience. The students visited The Wedge Community Co-op; Land O’Lakes, Inc.; Gramercy Park Cooperative of Inver Grove Heights; CHS; and SPIRE Credit Union.

As a part of our youth tour, we were able to visit a housing cooperative in Inver Grove Heights called Gramercy Park. It was really interesting for a multitude of reasons. The main thing for me, though, was that I didn’t know much about housing co-ops, so I was looking forward to learning.

We met with a panel of member-owners who explained how the co-op works and answered our questions. They explained that they have a lot of committees that head up different aspects of the co-op’s functions. It was really neat to see that they are able to make their voices heard through these committees.

They also have a community room where they hold events for the membership. These events are not mandatory but can be a great way to meet neighbors and make friends. Everyone can choose how much they want to be involved.

There is a sense of security living at a housing co-op. The stresses of daily household work like lawncare and snow removal are reduced because the members of the co-op are teaming together to hire professional lawncare services. Committees such as the floral and gardening committee make sure to keep the landscape looking lively and welcoming. If an appliance in your unit breaks, the co-op will replace it. There is also a security system on the property. All of these things combined really provide a sense of safety.

Another cool thing about the housing co-op was that it was very affordable. Some of the members testified that Gramercy Park gave them an opportunity for less expensive living. Because they are owners, they can get patronage back over time. It’s nice to know that there is the possibility of gaining money.

Not only is a housing co-op great from an economic and financial standpoint, but also from an emotional one. We saw right away how happy and lively the members were. They were very inviting and helpful. They also had a great sense of humor that kept us listening intently to what they had to say. Overall, the visit to Gramercy Park Cooperative was a really great experience.
How Minnesota’s open meeting law affects your cooperative

By Joe Nemo III and Mike Nemo, Attorneys at Law

We often receive questions regarding Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law and its implications for senior cooperative boards today. This issue’s Co-op Counsel’s Corner is designed to provide a refresher on the subject.

Historical development of Minnesota’s open meeting law

In 1957, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the State’s first open meeting law, which applies to state and local multimember governmental bodies, including boards, committees and subcommittees, and nonprofits created by political subdivisions. The Minnesota Supreme Court has outlined three purposes for the law: (1) to prohibit actions being taken at a secret meeting where it is impossible for the interested public to become fully informed about a public board’s decisions or to detect improper influences; (2) to ensure the public’s right to be informed; and (3) to afford the public an opportunity to present its views to the public body. In supporting these stated purposes, the court noted in Prior Lake American v. Mader that, “[t]hese purposes are deeply rooted in the fundamental proposition that a well-informed populace is essential to the vitality of our democratic form of government.”

Prior to the enactment of Minnesota’s common interest community (CIC) statute on June 1, 1994, there was no formalized open meeting law related to senior cooperatives. Senior cooperatives organized in Minnesota were largely governed by Minnesota’s cooperative statute, Chapter 308A, which governs all types of cooperatives including non-residential and non-senior cooperatives. Chapter 308A imposes no requirements for open board meetings on senior cooperatives. The only open board meeting requirements identified in that chapter apply to “electric cooperatives having more than 50,000 members.” Consequently, for Minnesota senior cooperatives formed prior to enactment of the CIC statute, there were no restrictions on closed board meetings.

In June 1994, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the CIC statute which, by its terms, applies to several types of common interest communities, including condominiums and residential cooperatives. Borrowing concepts from Minnesota’s open meeting law for governmental units and the open meeting law set forth for electric cooperatives having more than 50,000 members in Chapter 308A, the CIC statute created an open meeting law for residential cooperatives.

Open meeting requirements under the CIC statute

The CIC statute requires that meetings of the co-op’s board of directors be open to members unless one of the following three exceptions applies:

1. The board may conduct a closed meeting to discuss personnel matters.

In summary

By its terms, the common interest community (CIC) statute and its open meeting requirements apply to all Minnesota cooperatives created on or after June 1, 1994.

Although cooperatives formed prior to June 1, 1994, are not subject to the open meeting law requirements except by election, there are many benefits to open meeting structures.
2. The board may conduct a closed meeting to discuss pending or potential litigation, arbitration, or other potentially adversarial proceedings between unit owners, between the board and members, or other matters in which any member may have an adversarial interest. The board must demonstrate that closing the meeting is necessary to discuss strategy or to otherwise protect the position of the board, the cooperative, or the privacy of a member or occupant of a dwelling unit.

3. The board may conduct a closed meeting to discuss criminal activity arising within the cooperative if the board determines that the closed meeting is necessary to protect the privacy of the victim or that opening the meeting would jeopardize investigation of the activity.

The minutes of any part of a meeting that is closed under one of the exceptions may be kept confidential at the board’s discretion.

The board must, to the extent practicable, give reasonable notice to members of the date, time, and place of any open board meeting. However, notice is not required if the date, time, and place of meetings are provided in the cooperative’s CIC declaration, articles of incorporation, or bylaws, or if they were announced at a previous board meeting, posted in a designated location accessible to members, or in cases of emergency. Additionally, a technical failure to give proper notice of a meeting does not invalidate the board meeting or any action taken at the meeting. Nothing in the CIC statute imposes a duty on the board to provide special facilities for meetings.

Co-ops subject to CIC statute’s open meeting requirements

By its terms, the CIC statute and its open meeting requirements apply to all Minnesota cooperatives created on or after June 1, 1994. The CIC statute and, derivatively, its open meeting requirements, do not apply to cooperatives created before June 1, 1994, unless the cooperative elects to be subject to the CIC statute by signing and recording a CIC declaration and approving bylaws or amended bylaws that conform to the requirements of the CIC statute.

Best practices for all senior cooperatives

Although cooperatives formed prior to June 1, 1994, are not subject to the open meeting law requirements of the CIC statute absent an affirmative election, the same purposes identified by the Supreme Court above equally support open board meetings for all senior cooperatives: (1) prohibition of actions being taken at a secret meeting where it is impossible for the interested members to become fully informed about the board’s decisions or to detect improper influences; (2) supporting the members’ right to be informed; and (3) affording members an opportunity to present their views to the board. These purposes are rooted in the fundamental proposition that a well-informed membership is essential to the vitality and ultimate success of the cooperative.