

# Adopting Sociocracy in an Established Community

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# Why do communities struggle?

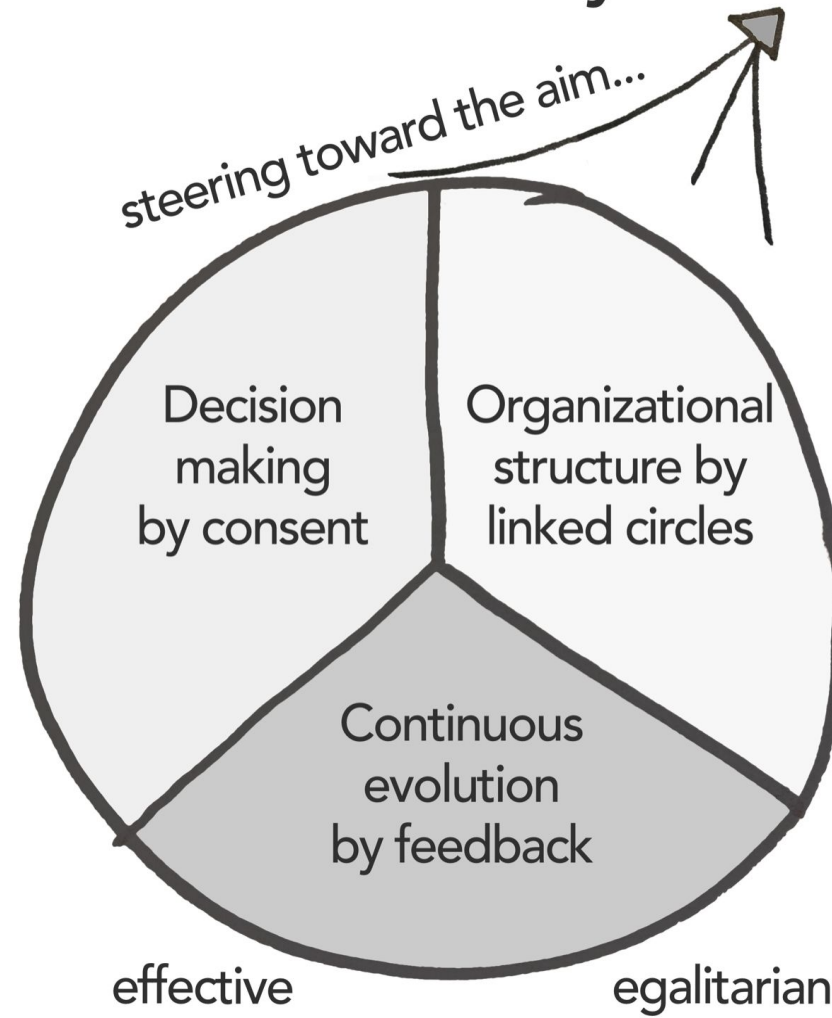


# Why do communities struggle?

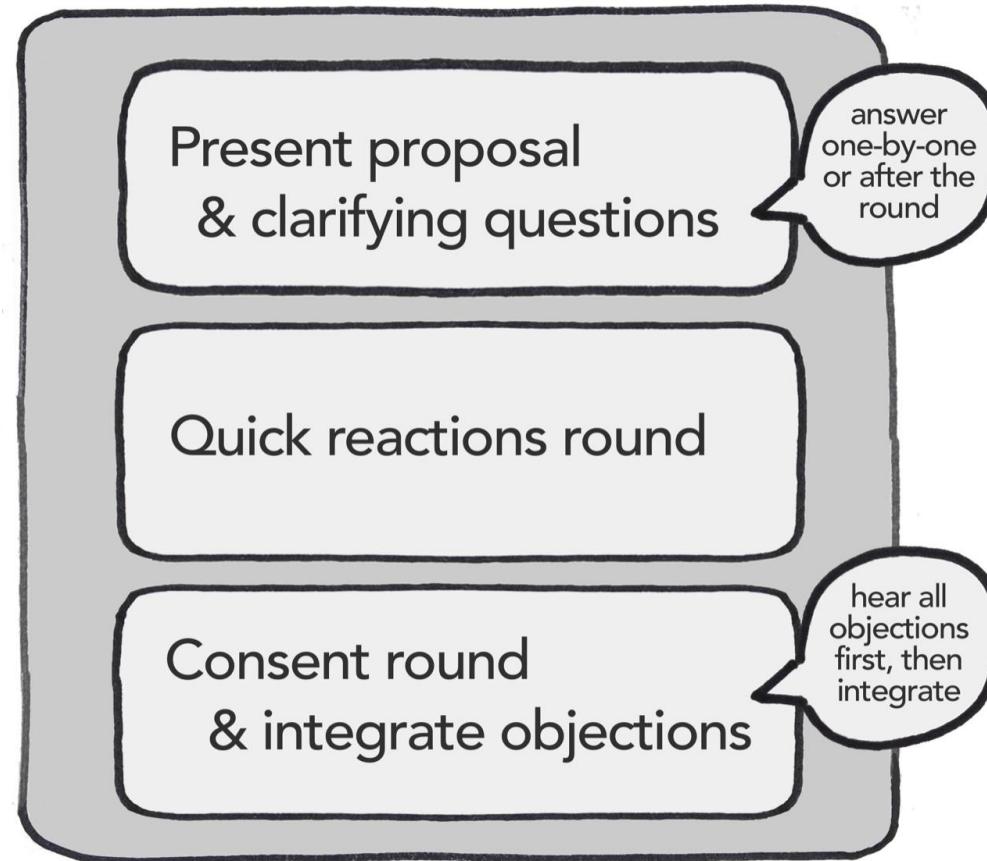
- consensus takes too long
- everybody has to decide everything
- anyone can block
- do-ers burn out; hard to bring proposals to conclusion
- fear and historical pain of power-over
- some people have a disproportionately strong/weak voice
- standing aside can imply lack of shared responsibility (“I told you so”)
- community is focused on decision making rather than building community



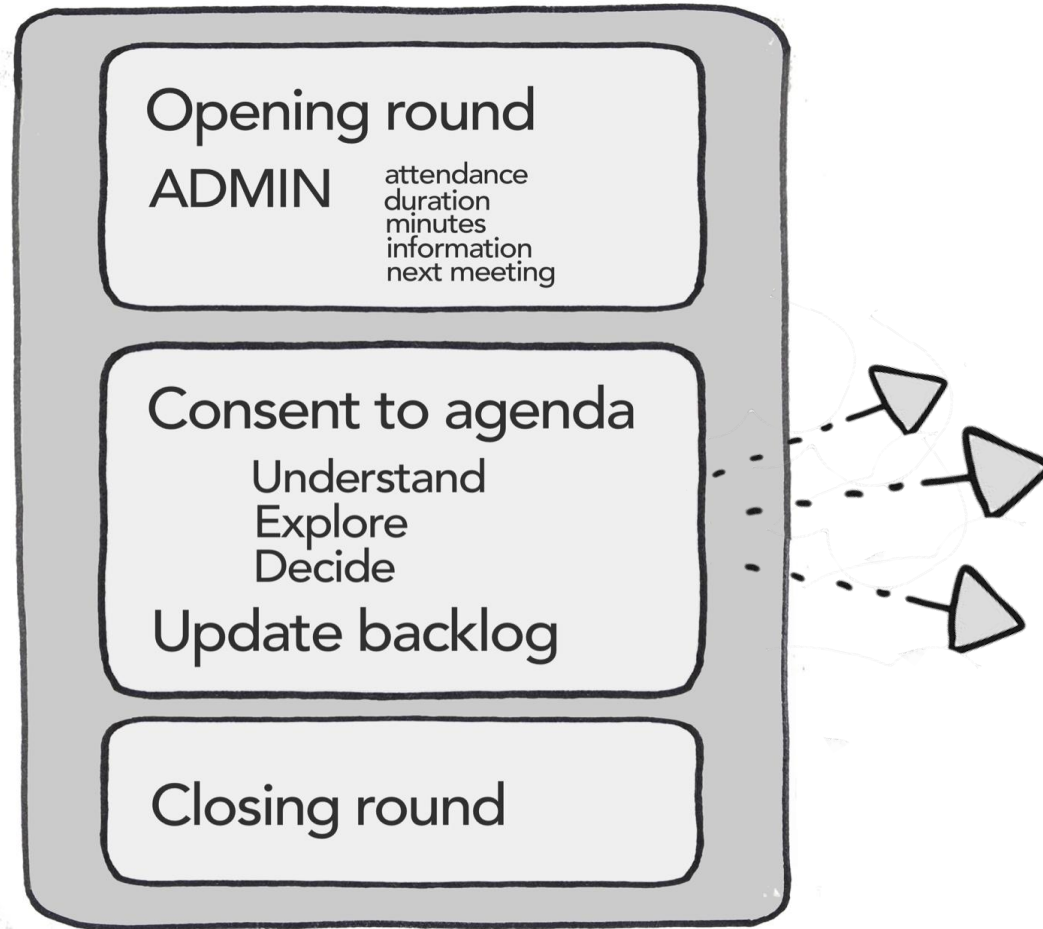
# Sociocracy



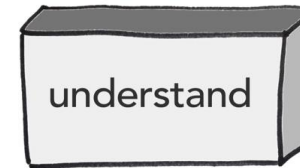
# Consent process



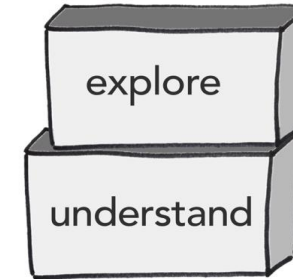
# Sociocratic meeting format



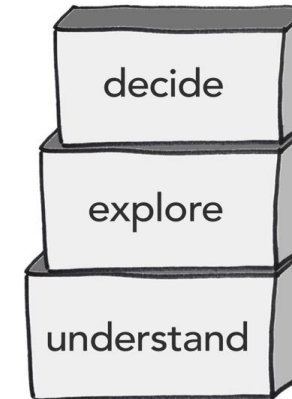
understanding  
a report



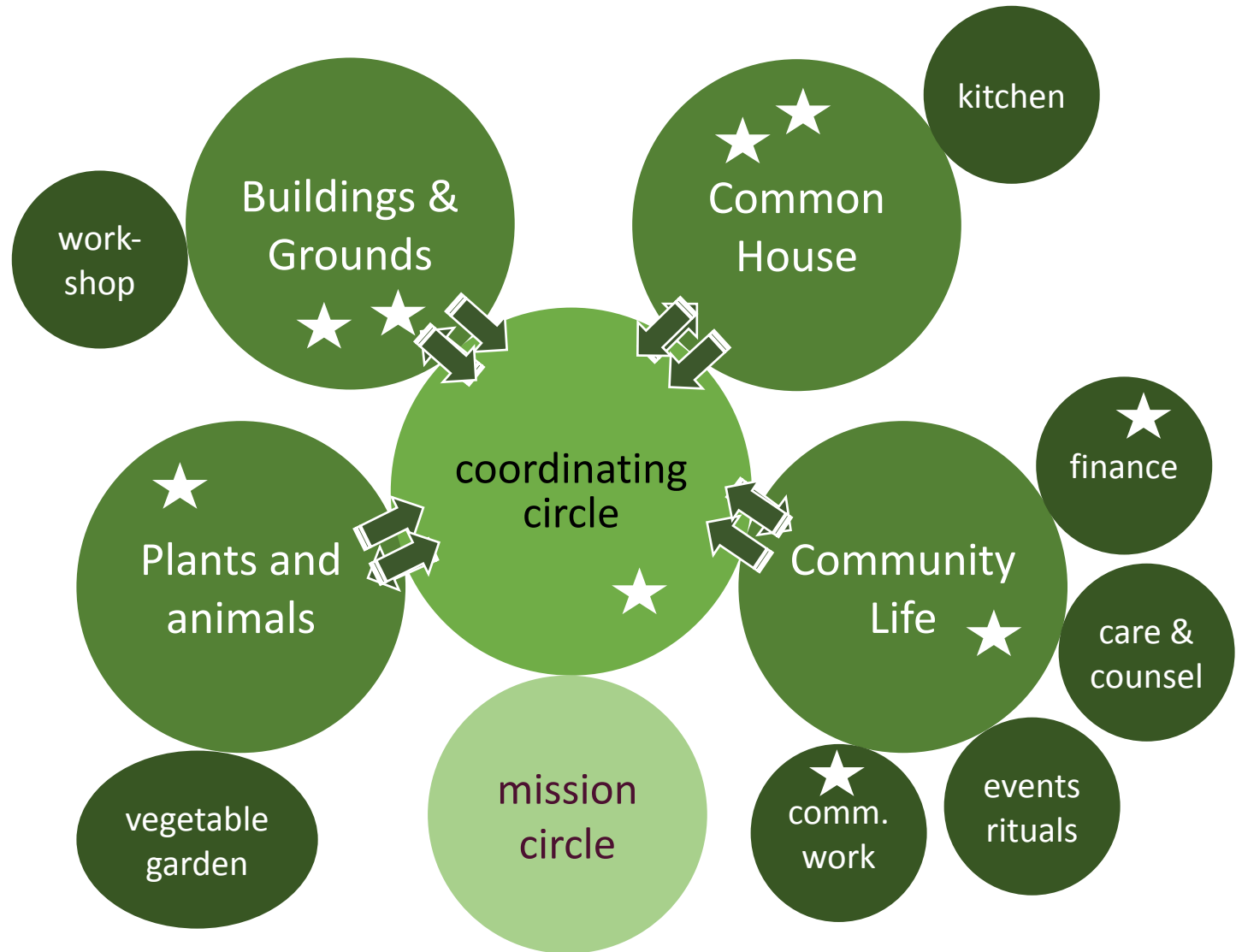
exploring an issue



making a  
decision



# Circle structure (a sample)



## Role of Coordinating Circle

- Sense of the whole
- Policies affecting more than one circle
- Assigning topics to circles
- Deciding what core circles can't
- Longer term planning
- Often, supporting Full Circle





## Role of Full Circle (Plenary)

- Occasional decision making
- Feedback
- Education
- Community building



# Sociocracy in community

- Whole → small group (delegation/distributed authority)
- Rounds: everyone's voice matters
- Feedback informs decisions
- Policies and roles have terms - evolve with feedback
- Everyone understands the standard meeting format and decision making process



# Challenges

- decisions without input
- culture change/regression to the mean
- role of Board
- decisions in Full Circle





# Lessons Learned: Transitioning from Consensus to Sociocracy

Norma  
Wassel May  
6, 2021

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## Background

- Developmental Stages
- Challenges in Implementation
- What didn't work?
- What worked?
- Discussion





# What is Cohousing?

“Cohousing is community designed to foster connection. Physical spaces allow neighbors to easily interact with others just outside private homes. Common areas including kitchen, dining space and gardens bring people together.

**Collaborative decision-making builds relationships.”**

from the Cohousing Association of America





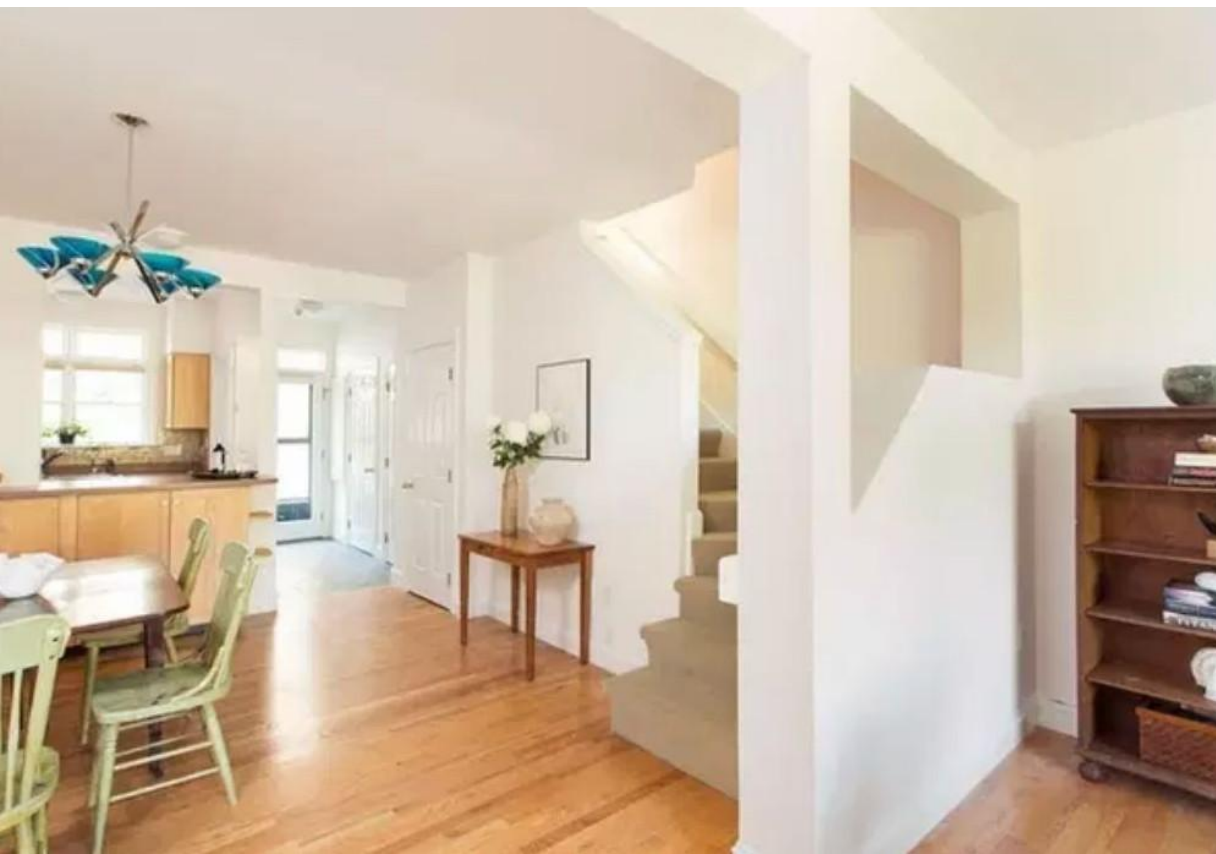
# Cambridge Cohousing Community

Massachusetts, USA

- 41 units with 65 residents
- Shared indoor and outdoor common space
- Green features



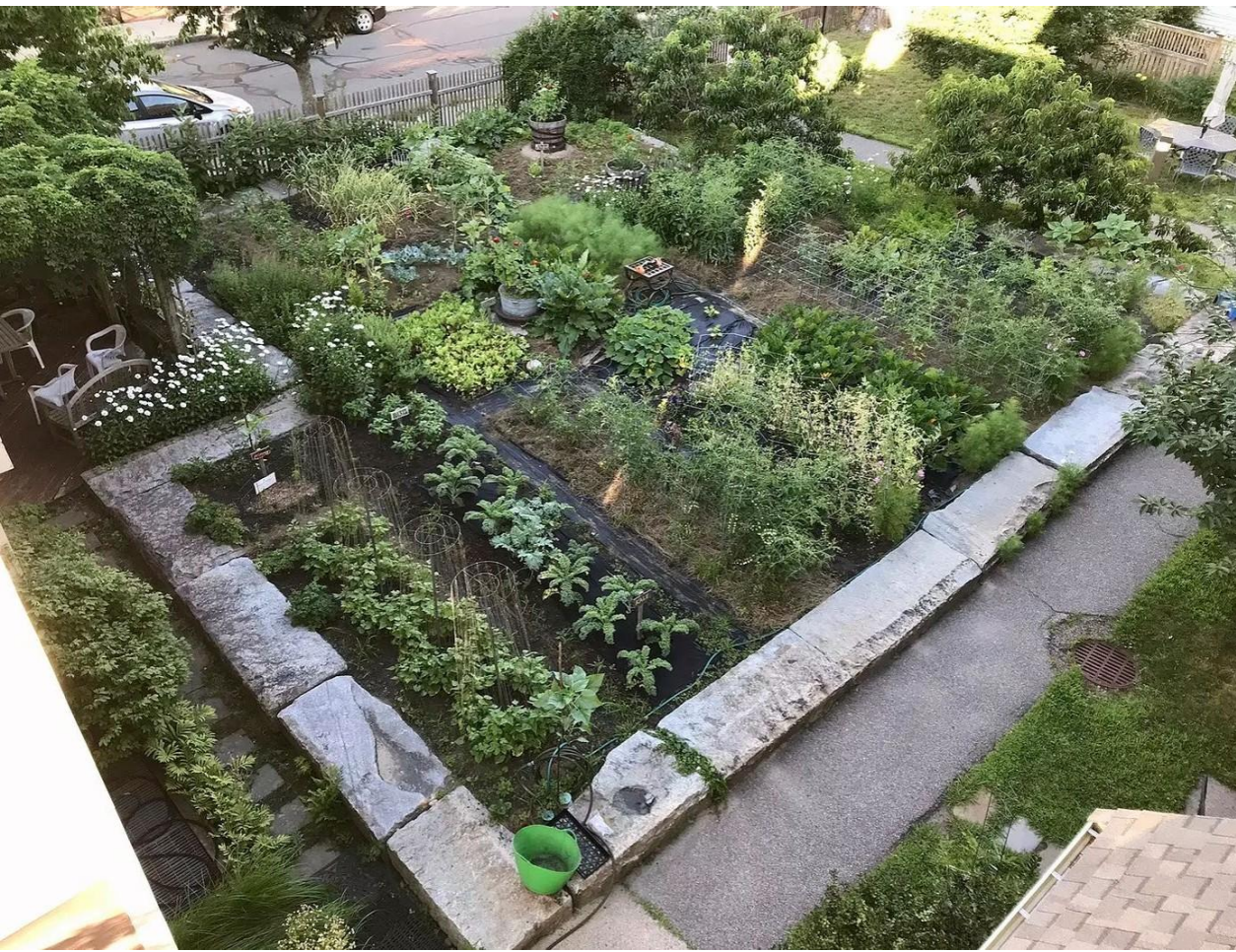














## **Consensus defined as general agreement & unanimity**

- Used throughout the first stage of group formation, land purchase, design and building of houses
- Written into bylaws that decisions will be made by consensus; voting for financial decisions, if consensus is not reached after three attempts



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## **continued as primary decision-making process 1998- 2018**

- General guidelines with committee structure with open membership
- Use of “red card” by only one member could stop decision
- Personal preference allowed – “I feel”, “I think”



# Major limitations with consensus

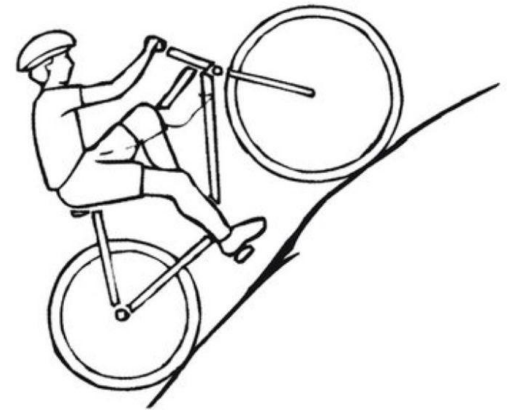
- Member who was not involved with a proposal could stop it from going forward
- Many discussions often did not have a focus
- Allowed for more vocal and active members to have more power
- Viewed more as a philosophy than as a helpful governing process
- Allowed “standing aside” option
- Growing dissatisfaction led to many deciding not to join committees or participate in community meetings



# Road to sociocracy (dynamic governance) - 2015

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- Presented info to community @ on-going meetings
- Completed survey regarding decision-making process
- Options for confidential, 1:1 discussion, and online input resulted in moving onto the next step
- Another trainer/consultant presented @ community-wide meeting
- Community-wide consensus decision with “stand asides” by some members to begin 10 month trial



# Transition Plan - 2016



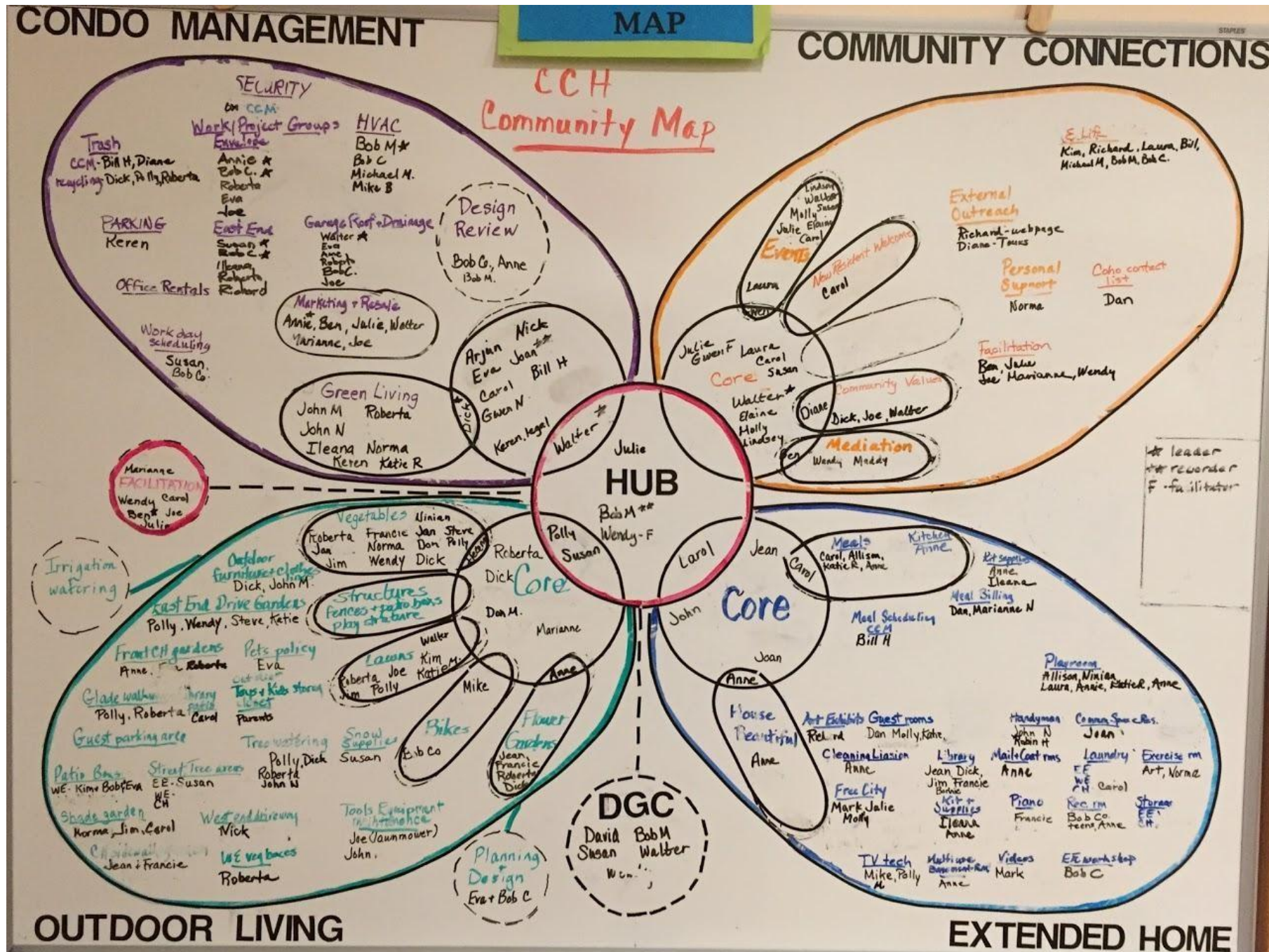
- Initial weekend training for community members by consultant who had developed temporary governance agreement
- Circles and sub-circles formed with aims and domains identified; leader and delegates' roles defined and then chosen using sociocracy process
- Tools: handbook of essentials of sociocracy in gov. agreement and posters with key points used @ circle meetings
- Brief teaching session @ each community meeting now called Full Circle



# CONDO MANAGEMENT

## MAP

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS







# Transition Plan

- Consultation provided by trainer on an on-going basis
- Governance Development Circle of 7 members formed to revise our initial gov. agreement to include those strongly supporting sociocracy and those strongly opposed
- “Field Guide Governance Framework” completed in 2019 with 10 month trial, trial extended with plan for full consent in 2020 and change in bylaws from “consensus” to “consent”
- Evaluation of trial period and consent to new gov. agreement delayed due to covid pandemic

# What Didn't Work

- Began too fast with entire community instead of starting with one/two committees
- Limited training of leaders of circles and facilitators for Full Circle meetings; not organized & on-going for community members
- Governance Development Circle disbanded too quickly
- Not addressing hybrid of consensus and sociocracy when used
- No implementation of role improvement for leaders



## What Worked



- Initially started as a pilot project with a set date to get feedback and make a decision to continue
- Ten minute training sessions on different sections of our governance agreement presented @ each Full Circle meeting
- Experienced residents available to lead meetings when needed.

# What Worked

- More focused attention on including the voice of less active members which increased community involvement
- Identifying improved relationships among residents and why; the processes depersonalized disagreements in decision-making; allowed for structured, non-judgmental feedback after meetings
- Recognizing more efficient and effective decision-making process with the use of consent including very specific factors such as the template for minutes
- Evaluate aims and domains of circles/sub-circles on an ongoing basis



# Impact of Sociocracy in the Community

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- Improved relationships
- Clearly organized the areas of responsibilities of members and committee
- More efficient and effective decision-making process and use of consent
- Written governance agreement has been a helpful guide
- Residents motivated to use sociocracy in their jobs





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[CambridgeCohousing.org](http://CambridgeCohousing.org)

# Question & Answer Time





# Adoption Process Summary

- Do study group/implementation circle
- Get everyone to know some, many to know more, a few to know a lot
- Get training and coaching
- Try small scale implementations
- Create gov document & circle structure
- Plan for continuous learning
- Orient new members





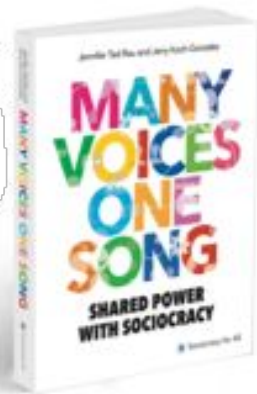
# Organizational Membership in Sociocracy For All

- Your community members can get a variety of trainings and resources with Sociocracy For All at a discounted rate.
  - 25% off all SoFA Online Conference Tickets
  - 25% off Empowered Learning Circle video courses
  - 25% off live classes
  - 50% off the regular price for SoFA books ([Many Voices One Song](#), [Who Decides Who Decides](#))
  - 10% off [coaching](#) and [SoFA custom classes](#)
- Delegates from your organization can attend and participate in
  - SoFA Communities of Practice for communities (meets monthly)
  - Read/write in the SoFA Forum (any time)





# Sociocracy For All resources for communities



- study group curriculum (4 sessions, 1.5h)  
[www.sociocracyforall.org/elc](http://www.sociocracyforall.org/elc)
- Training for all levels  
[www.sociocracyforall.org/training](http://www.sociocracyforall.org/training)
- workshops  
[www.sociocracyforall.org/workshops](http://www.sociocracyforall.org/workshops)
- the books!  
[www.manyvoicesonesong.com](http://www.manyvoicesonesong.com)
- sample governance documents, case studies
- [Steps List: Bringing Sociocracy to an Established Organization](#)



# Sociocracy in Communities Conference

## Saturday, November 20th, 2021

sign up to be notified when registration opens

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/sociocracy-in-communities-conference-2021/>

More about sociocracy in communities:

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/community/>



Sociocracy For All

