

VOTING FALLBACKS

Consensus-based groups sometimes have voting fallbacks. In the case of cohousing groups, the most common reasons are to satisfy bankers, who aren't accustomed to consensus decision-making, and/or to reassure community members, especially those less experienced with successful consensus process. These groups normally have a super-majority fallback (typically 75%) rather than mere majority (51%).

Some communities also use a form of voting such as ranking priorities in order to allocate resources, say for the annual budget. In this case voting is usually seen a tool within the regular meeting process, rather than a departure from consensus.

When to Go to a Vote

If you are going to have a voting fallback, it's essential to have clear guidelines on when it can be invoked. Examples include:

- After "x" number of meetings on an issue without resolution
- If 2/3 of the group want to vote
- If the group consenses to a vote

If a vote is needed arising from an unresolved consensus meeting, the vote is usually taken at the next meeting, with adequate notice.

Sharingwood Cohousing (in Snohomish, Washington) has adopted the following guidelines to distinguish when to vote and when to use consensus.

Use voting:

- When the greater good of the community is not at stake, AND
- When the issue has no individual stakeholders (people whose property, family, finances or well-being would be directly affected by the outcome)

Assuming the above two conditions have been met:

- When there is a time deadline more important than resolving everyone's preferences
- Design and detail issues which have conflicting but equally valid opinions

Use consensus:

- When the issue involves or affects the whole group or the future of the community
- When there are one or more individuals who have a personal stake in the outcome
- When the issue relates to ideals or principles

