

# The Book of Commons

*Putney Commons Owners Association*

v.5.0

January 2023

## Our Vision

We are creating a small, cooperative neighborhood of diverse individuals, sharing friendship and support while living independently in an ecologically responsible community, making decisions through consensus. All members are responsible for fully participating in the work and spirit of the community, including business meetings, as best they are able. In this way we share our values and vision and benefit from the gifts each person brings to our community.

Our small scale enables a relatively relaxed and manageable climate for working together, for setting common goals and agenda, and for getting to know and care about what's important to each member.

*Adopted April 14, 2016*

## Our Values

### **Respect**

We respect the freedom of each person to live as he/she chooses, so long as that does not interfere with the ability of others in the community to do the same. We respect personal privacy. We respect diversity in ideology, spirituality, interests, backgrounds, talents, beliefs, and opinions. And we welcome expressions of that diversity.

### **Stewardship**

We live gently on the Earth. We are thankful for Nature's resources, being conscious to take good care of them and use them effectively.

### **Responsibility**

Each of us, as well as all of us as a community, takes responsibility for our actions.

### **Cooperation**

Through tolerance, generosity, sharing and compassion, we live cooperatively with one another and the larger Putney community. We try to place the interests of the larger communities ahead of our own self interests.

### **Honesty and Trust**

We act with openness and honesty, practicing the trust we have in each other. We have the courage and trust to speak up when we see contradictions or

inconsistencies between our behavior and our stated goals and values.

### **Safety**

Our intention is to make our community a safe place – emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

## **Guiding Principles**

### **Consensus Decision Making**

As stated in our Vision, members of Putney Commons participate in consensus decision making, believing that everyone owns a part of the truth and that consensus leads to the strongest decisions. Members may agree with a motion that is up for decision, disagree with it but not block it, or disagree and block consensus. Consensus at Putney Commons does not require unanimous agreement but is achieved if no member blocks consensus.

When consensus cannot be achieved, a two-thirds vote of the members present may place the issue on the agenda for a second meeting. At that meeting, an affirmative vote of two thirds of the members present is necessary to pass the motion. (See the By Laws, Article III, Section 9.)

### **Conflict Resolution**

Our approach to conflicts is to use them as a way of building trust, creating innovative solutions to problems and strengthening relations. Our intention is to be direct, respectful and honest with each other, transforming our issues, concerns, and conflicts in a clear and focused way, and through curiosity and careful listening.

We endorse conflict transformation strategies and techniques that focus on underlying principles instead of taking positions, active listening with no interruptions, and working towards solutions that meet the success criteria of all parties; we agree to follow up with each other on the implementation of the resolution.

# Rules and Regulations

## **1. Land Use**

The land and roads are held in common by all members of Putney Commons Owners' Association and are maintained by the Association in accordance with the By Laws.

Individual members may choose to maintain areas immediately surrounding their homes. Neighbors will make joint decisions pertaining to plantings and other additions that would affect their areas.

## **2. Unit Design**

Putney Commons is an intentional community comprising 9 households (the 9<sup>th</sup> house is currently under construction). The houses in Putney Commons are low-profile, single-story dwellings that are designed to be highly energy efficient and to harmonize with our local environment. Putney Commons is within walking distance of the town's retail and municipal businesses and offices and welcomes Putney residents to our surrounding woodlands via a right-of-way path off Main Street.

Putney Commons members will hold a designated meeting to review and approve any proposed structural modifications of an existing unit before such modifications can be undertaken.

*Pocket Spaces:* The roof overhang of each connecting unit is to be squared off. The use and landscaping of this pocket space will be determined by mutual agreement of adjacent owners. The agreement will be shared with the rest of the community in a timely way.

*Parking Policy:* Each home at Putney Commons has one covered parking space. The intent of the additional outside parking spaces at each cluster is to accommodate visitors. Residents may use only one additional outside space for parking of personal vehicles.

## **3. Waste Stream, Recycling, Compost and Trash**

Our commitment as a community is 1) to individually and collectively minimize our waste and 2) to treat our unavoidable waste to minimize its impact on the health of our land, its soil, its plants and animals, ourselves, our community and the larger biosphere.

- Our homes are connected to the Town of Putney water and sewer system, have low-flush toilets and water-saving shower heads. No toxic materials or inappropriate waste are to be flushed down toilets or drains. Homes are individually metered for water use.
- We encourage the use of environmentally friendly cleaning and de-icing products rather than strong detergent-based cleaners.
- Trash collection for Putney Commons, Inc. members, is for non-recyclable items only. Thank you for respecting this. We ask all residents to limit their trash by reusing and recycling as much as possible, thus reducing the amount of trash created and collected. If an owner is renting their unit, they will review the trash-recycling process with their tenants.
- Each home is provided with a large front porch storage box capable of containing several recycling containers. Recycling can be dropped off at the [Windham Solid Waste Management Transfer Station](#) at 327 Old Ferry Road in Brattleboro. The WSWMD facility offers single-stream recycling. Members are responsible for transporting their recyclable waste to the transfer station.
- Community members should compost as much organic waste as possible. Putney Commons maintains a compost area near the community garden. Members are encouraged to share in the compost as they develop gardens around their homes. Please add leaves or other brown matter (shredded newspaper will do) after adding your kitchen scraps to the compost pile.
- Toxic materials and hazardous waste must be disposed of according to [Windham Waste Management](#) rules.
- Yard waste (weeds that have gone to seed, shrub pruning, etc.), including large woody material, tree limbs and Christmas trees, should be hauled to the biopile on the edge of the southern forest to decompose naturally.

#### **4. Pets, Animals, and Wildlife**

In our community and on our land, we want to live in solidarity with animal companions, both wild and domestic. We want them to be healthy, to live natural lives, to live and die with dignity. We do not tolerate cruelty to animals.

Our policy is to provide management and behavioral standards that protect the safety, beauty, tranquility, sustainability, and health of the Putney Commons community, its neighbors and its animals.

All animals impact the environment. Food and care for domestic animals require streams of food, packaging, transport, medicines and waste processing. These impact not only our own land and resources but land and resources faraway. Therefore, in keeping with our principle of sustainability, we will love animals but bring them into our lives mindfully.

##### *Pets*

Putney Commons welcomes indoor and outdoor pets belonging to any household. Individual households are limited to a total of two outdoor animals.

Owners are responsible for the care and good behavior of their animals and for ameliorating any damage caused by them. Residents are responsible for informing owners as quickly as possible about any animal-related problem. Residents are also responsible for keeping other animals or children from provoking or hurting animals.

Animal-related grievances that we cannot address quickly among some subset of community members will be referred to the Owners' Association through the community's conflict transformation guidelines.

Any animal that deliberately hurts or threatens a person or other animal will, at the discretion of Putney Commons Owners' Association, be subject to expulsion.

All dogs must be [licensed](#), neutered and have up-to-date protective inoculations. Dogs must be leashed in accordance with Town of Putney regulations. On Putney Commons property, dogs must be under their owner's control at all times whether on leash, retained by an invisible fence, or off leash in the field, in the woods or the Sacketts Brook area. Owners are responsible for cleaning up after their dogs.

Given the priority of our desire to support and protect the birds, our concern about the damage to the environment that can be caused by cats, homeowners must keep and care for indoor cats only.

Visitors who bring animals to Putney Commons shall be expected to abide by this policy.

#### *Wild Animals*

We welcome wild animals and strive to preserve their habitats, especially in forest and wetlands. On our land you will find deer, wild turkey, moose, fox, rabbits, squirrels, rodents, and a wide variety of birds. We intend to protect endangered species on our land. We do not allow hunting on our property.

### **5. Community Policies**

- *Association Fees:* We pay monthly fees that are due on the first day of each month. They cover such items as mowing, plowing, sanding, community insurance, trash collection and a reserve fund. Checks are made out to Putney Commons Owners' Association and hand delivered or mailed to the Treasurer.
- *Insurance:* All owners must maintain homeowner's insurance appropriate to Condominiums. Tenants must carry renter's insurance. Copies of the face page of insurance policies must be filed with the Treasurer.
- *Smoking:* We are a non-smoking community for reasons of health and safety. The Putney Community Center also has a no-smoking policy. We ask that smokers go to the intersection of the Christian Square Cul-de-Sac and Putney Commons Way. We expect visitors to abide by our policy.

### **6. Entering and Leaving Putney Commons Owners Association**

#### *1. Incoming Household*

The Association maintains a list of individuals and families who have expressed an interest in joining Putney Commons and makes orientation materials available. Following participation in two or more Putney Commons meetings/gatherings, the interested party and PCOA members have an in-person meeting to answer each other's questions. If the potential member remains interested and if the Association members arrive at affirmative consensus, the potential new member is placed on a list of vetted prospective members.

The Association provides an incoming household with copies of the Putney Commons Owners' Association Bylaws, the *Book of Commons*, the Statement of Understanding, and the most recent budget.

## 2. *Residence year-round*

It is important that buyers realize they are joining an intentional community with community responsibilities, not just buying a house.

We support one another in building our community life together and promoting the well-being of our neighbors and our land. We count on each other to feel responsibility for managing and living in a small, close-knit community.

The houses at Putney Commons are the members' primary residences. To maintain and foster cohesion and mutual support, we expect owners to reside at Putney Commons year-round and to actively participate in meetings, maintenance, and the flourishing of our community. Occasional absences of longer than two months are discussed with the PCOA members, so that we can minimize any negative impact that a member's long-term absence from their home might have on the Putney Commons community. (See also Section 7, Rental Considerations, Policies, and Procedures)

## 3. *Outgoing Household: Selling Your Putney Commons House*

An outgoing household is a household where all its members have decided to leave Putney Commons Owners' Association. An outgoing household will give the Association 2-months written notice of its intent to leave.

Outgoing households remain members of the Association with all the privileges and obligations of membership until their unit has been sold. During this period, they are fully responsible for their unit.

Putney Commons Owners' Association has 60 days from receipt of a written notice of "intent to leave" to enter into an agreement to buy the unit from the owner or to notify prospective members from the vetted waiting list that a house is available for purchase. The outgoing household chooses the new member, considering the current needs of the community in making that decision.

When a unit becomes available for occupancy, the Association notifies those on the list of potential vetted members. Sellers are asked to give priority consideration to these vetted potential members before contracting with a realtor.

If after those 60 days a new buyer has not been designated or if the Association hasn't agreed to buy the unit, the owner may try to sell the unit on the open market.



- Owners and their agents are responsible for:
  - Seeing that serious prospective buyer(s) receive a copy of the *Current Putney Commons Owners' Association Book of Commons*.
  - Notifying the Putney Commons Owners' Association President, in a timely manner, of the serious prospective buyer's contact information so that the President can arrange for that person or persons to attend a Putney Commons Owners' Association meeting.
- The outgoing household must give notice to Putney Commons Owners' Association when it enters into a purchase and sale agreement, whether orally or in writing. The notice must include the following:
  - the identity of the prospective buyer
  - all of the terms and conditions of the agreement of sale including any financing terms.
- The Association retains the right to buy the unit on the same terms and conditions by giving written notice of its decision to do so within 15 business days after its receipt of the notice. If the Association does not choose to purchase the unit, it will also put that decision in writing and give it to the outgoing owner.

Outgoing households must pay all household debts, such as utilities or assessments, at least seven days before the sale of the unit is scheduled to occur. The Association has the right to contact utility providers and other potential claimants to confirm compliance with this obligation.

If an outgoing household fails to satisfy this obligation, the Association (not including the outgoing household), will place 125% of the amount estimated to be owed from the sale proceeds of the unit in a separate escrow account. Upon satisfaction of all debts, any excess monies will be returned without interest to the outgoing household.

Any disputed obligation will be resolved according to the conflict transformation process defined in the *Putney Commons Book of Commons Guiding Principles*.

#### 4. *Death of a Last/Only Member of a Household*

If all members of a household die, the following sequence of potential owners of that unit will be respected:

1. Heirs and beneficiaries
2. Putney Commons Owners' Association
3. Persons vetted as potential members

#### 4. The general public

Until the unit has a new owner(s), the estate of the deceased owner(s) is liable for maintaining the unit and paying all assessments.

The Association will determine an appropriate orientation to Putney Commons Owners' Association for the new owner(s) or tenant(s).

The heir(s) of a PCOA unit have the option of renting their unit (instead of selling it) for a one-year period, with the option of renewing on a year-to-year basis. Renewal will be subject to approval by PCOA. In choosing a renter, consideration to those persons on PCOA's vetted list is encouraged.

### **7. Rental Considerations, Policies, and Procedures**

Rental units provide a way for people to come into the community who are more economically diverse (no down payment required) and more age diverse (no long-term commitment). They also provide a way for people to flow in and out of the community faster than through unit sales, bringing new energy and ideas into the community.

We recognize the need for the community to be included in the process of choosing renters. The owner will share relevant information with community members.

We recognize the need of owners to make reasonably timely decisions in relation to their personal plans.

*A Putney Commons owner-member may rent his/her unit under the following guidelines:*

1. Owners are asked to give notice of their intent to rent their home for a period of more than one month.
2. Renters and landlords annually sign a written lease agreement. The landlord provides the renter with a copy of the Association's Book of Commons and sees that the renter complies with all applicable PCOA policies and procedures.
3. The owner/landlord must provide the [Vermont Department of Taxes](#) with a completed LRC-140 Landlord Certificate by January 31 of each year.
4. The renter signs the Putney Commons Owners' Association Renter Statement of Understanding. The secretary retains the signed agreement.
5. The landlord places the security deposit in an interest-bearing account in a local bank.
6. The renter shows proof of a Renter's Insurance Policy and gives a copy to the treasurer.
7. The renter is invited to attend PCOA meetings. Their questions and comments

are welcome, but they do not participate in consensus decisions.

## Members of the Putney Commons Owners' Association (2023)

Elizabeth Christie

Kai George

Eva and Brad Greene

El Dearborn & Richard Brady

Helen Bodel

Claire Stanley & Jack Millett

Terry Ehling

Naomi Detenbeck

### **Officers (2023)**

Eva Greene (President)

Claire Stanley (Vice President)

Kai George (Secretary)

Richard Brady (Treasurer)

**Statement of Understanding**

**As a member of Putney Commons Owners Association community:**

I have reviewed **The Book of Commons**, and I understand the values and responsibilities of living in this community.

I support the values expressed in the Vision Statement.

As a member and homeowner, I will take an active role in the life of Putney Commons, attend meetings and stay abreast of community decisions. I recognize that I am expected to devote time and energy to Putney Commons as a self-managing community.

I understand that most decisions at Putney Commons are made by consensus, and I agree with that process. I agree to be bound by decisions already made at Putney Commons and recognize that I will be a participant in making future decisions.

If I rent my unit, I will select tenants who respect the values and agreements of the Putney Commons community. I agree to follow the rental policy and procedures as approved by the Putney Commons community and as specified in the current version of the Book of Commons.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Renter's Clause: I have read and respect the contents of this document.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_