

Happily Ever Aftering In Cohousing

A Handbook for Community Living



By **Charles Durrett**

with Bernice Gonzalez

and Erik Bonnett

of

McCamant & Durrett Architects

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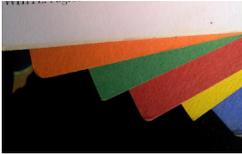
And of course, I thank Katie McCamant who helps cohousing groups figure out how to get the work done and to move into beautiful communities.

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Living happily ever after



Using Colored Cards for Deciding

One efficient method for reaching consensus used in many communities is to use colored cards. Each person in the room has 5 three-by-five-inch colored cards (construction board, colored on both sides). When deciding on an issue, each person must raise one of the five cards (green, blue, yellow, orange, or red) according to the following guidelines:

- 1. Green:** The person agrees with the proposal in question. If all the cards are green, this means there is a unanimous agreement.
- 2. Blue:** A person is neutral about the decision, or mostly for it, but with a slight reservation. If all cards are green and blue, this means that everyone consents.
- 3. Yellow:** This person has a question considering the proposal at hand, which needs to be answered before this person can make a decision.

4. Orange: A person holding this card has a serious reservation about the issue but is not willing to block the entire consensus. If there is time, that reservation is discussed. If most of the cards are green and there are also blue, and an orange card is shown, everyone in the group consents that the solution might not be “my favorite,” but that this is the solution to proceed with nonetheless.

5. Red: The person holding this card is completely against the decision and does not consent.

This process requires that every person in the room participate in the decision-making process. Dominant personalities will find it harder to push their ideas through at the expense of less vocal members; soft-spoken members must take responsibility for voicing their concerns. Using cards allows the group to quickly identify where all members stand on an issue and to address concerns in a deliberate fashion.

Using Cards for Discussions

Colored cards can also be effective for conducting discussions. Before being called on to speak about a particular issue, participants must first put up a colored card according to the following instructions. They will then be called upon in this order:

- 1. Red:** I have a process observation, e.g., the discussion is off topic. (This way everyone in the meeting can be a co-facilitator.)
- 2. Yellow:** I have a question.
- 3. Green:** I can provide clarification.
- 4. Orange:** I call for a straw poll.
- 5. Blue:** I have a comment or opinion.

First, the facilitator calls on anyone holding a red card. (If someone holds up a red card a skilled facilitator recognizes there is a process problem and simply corrects it.) People raising yellow cards to indicate questions receive the next attention. After a question has been asked, people holding green cards are called to provide clarification. After all questions have been answered, the facilitator calls on participants holding blue cards. At this time, comments regarding the topic of discussion can be addressed.

The red card is often the strongest in its effect. A red card can be used to halt the discussion, lets participants signal to each other if the conversation has gone off topic, an agenda item has gone overtime, or there is a breach in the group's agreement about the way things are discussed. If you raise a red card and you

can't explain your issue, then there's another problem. You need to be able to explain why you red carded.

You don't need to belabor a point if there is already agreement, as shown by the cards or a straw poll (show of hands). Members can contribute to the flow of the meeting by asking, "Where is this relevant?" The speaker can answer: "This is relevant because . . ." The facilitator has the right to interrupt, and shouldn't be afraid to ask direct questions like: "What's your point?" or "How is this relevant?"

Use the cards religiously, do straw polls religiously. The result will be a discussion that is timely and on point. It looks cumbersome at first but like an auction, things can move rapidly and efficiently with practice.

C. Using Consensus

Consensus does not mean that everyone is in complete agreement, and does not imply that the suggested solution is the only one. Rather, consensus is about reaching the optimum outcome. Consensus allows everyone involved

