

BEECHWOOD CO-OPERATIVE HOMES

Beechwood is a Waterloo housing co-operative consisting of 78 units located near amenities including parks, nature trails and shopping. The housing complex includes eight units that have been designed to accommodate people with disabilities including those with mobility challenges. Several members of the co-op have breathing issues such as COPD and asthma.

Smoking was an ongoing issue for this community. A significant number of members were being involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke from neighbouring units due to seepage. Attempts were made to conduct repairs and limit the transfer of smoke, but these efforts proved expensive and ultimately unsuccessful.

After learning that smoke-free bylaws were possible, a group of members began to organize. With the support of the board of directors, the group brought a petition around to their neighbours calling for a smoke-free bylaw. Enough signatures were collected that the board started the bylaw creation process by unanimously adopting a no smoking policy on December 18, 2015. The board then called a general members meeting to debate and confirm the policy.

The general meeting was held on January 7, 2015 and just under half of the members attended. Participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the policy, which would not allow smoking anywhere inside units. According to co-op staff member Chris Robinson, there were two main reasons for the high level of support: “safety and a community that wants to be healthy.”

With broad acceptance of the concept of not allowing smoking within units (including garages), the debate centred on which outdoor spaces would be allowed. In the end, with the exception of the playground, the co-op decided to let people use their judgement but revisit the issue if problems arose. At the end of the meeting the co-op voted by a large majority to make all of their buildings smoke-free and for the policy to take effect immediately, with no grandfathering.

According to co-op staff, the policy has been a terrific success. It is still a popular policy and there have been very few complaints about non-compliance.