

Each officially recognized neighborhood association in the City of Portland is required to produce a set of citizen-written organizational bylaws. It is the responsibility of the neighborhood board to see that they are updated in accordance with the city's Standards and consider amendments if they do not reflect the current purpose and operating procedures of your neighborhood association.

Unfortunately, many board members are unfamiliar with the important processes and procedures outlined in their bylaws and may be operating out of compliance as a result.

Here are a few tips to help you to understand the important elements of your bylaws:

1. Make sure each board member has a copy of the bylaws. As new members join the board make sure they receive a copy for their reference.
2. Each year it is a good idea to review the bylaws as a group to make sure everyone understands the rules that they are required by city law to follow.
3. If, upon review it appears as though there are procedures that are not being followed, consult with SE Uplift staff and/or the Standards to see if there is flexibility in changing this process to better meet the needs of the organization. If there is, make the required edits and follow the procedures outlined in your bylaws to officially vote to adopt and amend your bylaws.
4. Bylaws are the roadmap for how your neighborhood association will operate. Be sure to follow the map at all times and use the bylaws as your guide.

What are the most important aspects of the bylaws that board members must know?

- Know your process for voting. Is this specified- by hand, orally, ballot, etc? If so, make sure to follow the process outlined to ensure that you are in compliance. Are all members eligible to vote at all meetings? In some cases, only board members may vote at board meetings. Check to see the specific voting procedures in your bylaws.
- At a minimum, the Standards require neighborhood associations to provide seven days notice for general, board and special meetings and a minimum of 24-hours notice for emergency meetings. Make sure these minimum requirements are met or if more stringent lengths of notification are outlined, make sure you allowing the appropriate amount of notice.
- Know how many members must be present at a meeting in order to vote. This is known as "quorum." The Standards require associations to state a specific number or fixed formula to reach a number. Quorum may vary by meeting type, so make sure you are aware of the appropriate number of members needed to make an official vote on behalf of the neighborhood association at each meeting.

- Many bylaws state a specific number of members required on the board. Unfortunately, many associations are often out of compliance as board members leave the board and positions are unable to be filled. It is advised that the bylaws give minimum and maximum numbers for flexibility on the board.
- Know terms of office for board members. This is one area where many neighborhood associations falter. Be sure that you keep records of when each board member begins their term and the length that they will be in office. If a board member resigns and a new member is appointed to fill in for the board member, they simply finish the original board member's term. Once that term has expired, they can run again for the position. Having clear records will come in handy around election season, as you will be clear who is up for election and who is still in office!
- Follow elections procedures as outlined. Many associations have processes in place for when and how members can be nominated. Some have specific details regarding nomination committees. Be sure to follow what is outlined.
- Bylaws should have specific procedures for development of the agenda and consideration of proposals. Be sure to heed these processes and the appropriate means of notice to parties as necessary.

Please Note:

These are just a few of the elements from your association's bylaws that are often not followed correctly, leaving associations vulnerable. There are many other sections that are just as important to follow. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the bylaws in their entirety.

If it becomes challenging to follow the procedures above or any additional procedures you may have, perhaps it's time to revise your bylaws. Be sure to note the process for adoption and amendment of bylaws when doing so to ensure that you are in compliance. Consult with SE Uplift staff as needed.

It is important to follow all elements of your bylaws for many reasons: to be accountable to the neighborhood; to operate in a fair and just manner; and to protect your neighborhood from any legal action or grievances. Any person or group may file a grievance against your neighborhood, alleging a violation of the ONI Standards or the association's bylaws that has directly affected the outcome of a decision. As long as your association keeps its bylaws up-to-date with the Standards and follows the processes and procedures outlined in the bylaws, you and your fellow board will be safe from any such legal action.