

New Bylaws

I know, you all probably feel like you've spent too much time on bylaws in the last year and a half. And it's probably true. But I think there are many reasons to make new bylaws

Why new Bylaws?

Current bylaws: almost all power in the Board

First of all, the current bylaws put almost all power in the hands of the Board. And while there are good parts to this... it made it so the only real power the members had was the power to attend meetings and elect the Board... This means that the only check on a Board out of touch with the membership would be to wait until their terms expire and then not re-elect them. So, the members... Were telling us that they wanted more control over what the council did, without adding too much general burden while allowing people with special interests to contribute to things... The goal we took to rewriting these bylaws was to empower members while keeping their workloads as reasonable as possible. This goal led to several...

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Goal: Empower members while keeping workload reasonable

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Core ideas

Core ideas that guided us while we worked on the bylaws...

The first is that the members will be able to contribute to the activities of the Council, and even drive them...

The main context in which the members will drive activities is through committees, which is where most of the policy work of the Council will actually happen...

Leaving the Board to provide accountability and structure to the committees...

While adding provisions and safeguards that will make sure that the Board and committees continue to reflect the desires of the members.

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Committees are where policy work happens

Board provides accountability & structure

Transparency and safeguards to prevent misuse

While adding provisions and safeguards that will make sure that the Board and committees continue to reflect the desires of the members.

Membership

Before we get into any of those, we'll first talk about who counts as part of the membership...

The first part of qualifying for membership is that someone be at least 16 years old and attest to having a Capitol Hill connection. Simply these requirement, however, could allow relatively small groups of people to take control of the Council by bringing a bunch of people to a single meeting. While thinking about how to counteract this, we thought about what we really want from members, and thats...

To be actively involved in the work of the Council. So, in order to qualify for membership, in addition to the above, people must either attend 2 meetings, do 4 committee activities, or attend 1 meeting and do 2 committee activities every 12 months. We believe this balances a demonstration of service to the Council with ability of people to do activities that fit in their schedules. And once people qualify for membership...

They have several rights. As before, they have the right to vote in elections and run for the Board. But new to this version, they have the ability to propose and vote on policies (using a process I will describe in a moment) as well as serve as voting members on committees...

Non-members will still be able to attend meetings, comment during public comment period as time allows, and participate in committees according to the policies of the given committee...

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Non-members: may attend, comment as time allows, serve as non-voting committee members

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Member-driven policymaking and action

Members can take nearly any action the Board can through 1 of 2 paths

So, how will members actually drive policymaking and action on the part of the Council? There are 2 pathways...

First, the at least twice yearly Community Governance meetings have been designed to be the time when the members can really drive actions of the Council. They can propose motions that will guide the actions of the Board or committees. The members in attendance at that meeting then vote on the motion.. If it passes, then a vote of the whole membership will be held electronically. The actions the members can take at these meetings are basically all actions the Board can take, with voting thresholds for specific actions outlined in the Bylaws. But every 6 months is possibly not responsive enough...

So we created a petition mechanism whereby members can take action outside of the normal cadence of Governance meetings. These petitions can be delivered during the public comment period of any regular meeting. There are different thresholds for different types of actions, which can be described as low, medium, and high. An example of a low threshold activity is proposing to censure a Board member, a medium threshold action is creating a member-initiated committee, and a high threshold action includes amending the bylaws...

One of the important things we have done is equalize the difficulty of achieving any action for the Board and members. One of the actions both the Board and the membership can take is forming a committee...

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 - a. At least 2 per year
 - b. Members can propose a motion
 - c. Those in attendance vote on moving the motion to a membership vote
 - d. Membership vote held within 30 days

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2. Petitions: a way to take action outside of a CG meeting
 - a. Delivered during public comment of a regular meeting
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Voting thresholds for Board and Member-driven actions are the same

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Committees are the of CHCC

This is where action happens

Which is where we see the action of the Council happening going forward...

Committees will be composed of members and will focus on a specific topic under a certain governance framework that will be specified in their charter. Their charters will specify which types of actions they can take as the Council. This devotes the power of the Council to people who specialize in a given area, while allowing organizations and institutions that the Council interfaces with to see the actions as official actions of the council. These committees must be approved in one of two ways...

The first way is a board established committee. In these committees, the Board has direct oversight over the committee, including reeling the committee back in line if it exceeds its authority. Boards must include at least 2 Board members on each committee. These committees are approved as a Board action. If, however, the Board will not approve a committee the membership wants...

The membership can create their own member-initiated committees. In this case, the membership will have direct oversight, leaving the Board unable to control the committee. This means the membership needs to take a more active role, so such committees need to be renewed and must report more frequently to the membership

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Composed of members

Two paths:

1. Board-established committees
 - a. Board has direct oversight
 - b. At least 2 Board members serve on the committee
2. Member-initiated committees
 - a. Formed because membership wants a committee the Board won't make
 - b. Members have direct oversight

The membership can create their own member-initiated committees. In this case, the membership will have direct oversight, leaving the Board unable to control the committee. This means the membership needs to take a more active role, so such committees need to be renewed and must report more frequently to the membership

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Authority to act within their charter as approved by relevant body

These committees are empowered to act as the Council within the scope of their charter as approved by the relevant body, either the membership or the Board...

But both types of committees are accountable to the members via regular reporting, just that the member-initiated committees are required to report to the members at more regular intervals...

And there are mechanisms in place for a relevant body to rescind an action of the committee, if they believe it has overstepped its bounds...

The only control that the Board has over member-initiated committees is that they can prevent any committee from taking action only if a committee is exposing the Council to unreasonable risk. In addition to adding committees empowered to act on behalf of the Council, these bylaws add provisions for

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Board may temporarily prevent any committee from taking action for 30 days only if a committee is exposing the Council to unreasonable risk

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Meetings and transparency

Meetings and transparency...

Regular meetings will be at least once every rolling 3-month period with a goal of having monthly meetings. In addition to which will be...

At least 2 Community governance meetings each year where the membership can guide policy...

All meetings will require remote participation when possible and further...

All meeting minutes and financial records will be transparent and preserved according to a schedule spelled out in the bylaws. So, these are the major changes that are coming and...

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Transparency:

- Public minutes & financial reports
- Records preserved 3–7 years

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What's coming

Proposed draft is here

<https://capitolhillcommunitycouncil.com/bylaw-update-fall-2025/>

We would love any comments you have. Send to chcc.officers@gmail.com or respond to the Google Form on the page by 10/3

Next steps:

Amendment finalized 10/22

Public comment period 10/26 – 11/25

Community Governance meeting (old version) and vote on amendments
11/26

The next steps are for the members to review the draft on our website and send any comments you have before we finalize the draft. We will then be finalizing the amendment by the 22nd of Oct. The finalized amendment will go out for public comment for a month starting on the 26th of October, with a vote on the amendments on the 26th of Nov. We're excited to be done with the process and look forward to hearing your thoughts about the Bylaws. Thanks!