Minutes - UCOL meeting

**Thu 4 February 2021 7.30-9.30pm**

at Centre for Sustainability, Uni of Otago, 563 Castle Street North

and via Zoom - MeetingID: 9016 25 9016 Password 25 25 25

<https://otago.zoom.us/j/9016259016?pwd=ZGZQRnM2L2tsai90eENKRExQUEtJQT09>

*Chair and note-taker:* Donald and Jan

*Apologies:* Anna and Anthony, Sue T, Rosemarie and Maurice

Present: Miriam, Pauline, Liz, Min, Rainer, Kristin, Warren, Susan, Sandy, Marianne, Frances, Karen, Alex, Anne, Sander, Gay, Sara, Maria,

Zoom: Claire, Tim, James

Appreciations: Crew who helped shift sauna, DCC being happy with things, builders moving site office which seems a step towards being off site.

**Reminder of events scheduled for this weekend:**

Saturday 6 Feb 10am at Toiora: Sauna Raising (4-5 people for an hour)

Sunday 7 Feb 3pm Vegetable Group (all welcome, RVSP Miriam)

**Minute of Record: Induction Workshop** was held on 30 January 2021 at Centre for Sustainability

11 people attended, including David Bainbridge-Zafar from DCC. Some stayed for shared lunch. Follow up email was sent asking people to express interest in renting or buying. One response so far (renting) – added to Google Drive folder “Prospective buyers/renters” - <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dzKCw1z7WabMLH2StvL_igO8WEPL6gEk?usp=sharing> All green

**Cohousing Agreement Workshop**

Some adjustments were made afterwards and have been sent to our admin group. Version 4.2 is now ready. We will set aside 30 minute slot at next meeting. People who do have opinions, particularly on the highlighted part above the light blue line to please email Warren prior.

**Access before settlement** -3 options: (1) grant possession (2) renting from UCOL (3) access through keys. Assuming that DCC issue practical completion certificate, there should not be a problem with insurance company allowing us to put possessions in there. However there are a lot of issues that need careful consideration eg what if settlement fails for someone already in. Therefore access through keys may be preferrable, but that will require personnel to be available.

**If we do choose to have access through keys** – it could be that we have three people who hold keys. Thee is a need to canvas who needs access and for what purpose: Min, Rainer, Sander, Liz all mentioned their reasons. Pauline does not need to get in until settlement. If professionals going in to do things, they’re probably covered by their own insurance, however we won’t be. Prior access requirements to be added to Marianne’s moving in organisation

**Health and Safety** – Painting and decorating involve risk and we need to ensure that this is covered in the time that UCOL have control (between S&W finish and individual ownership). Before any decorating takes place there needs to be a workshop for those who wish to do their own painting, so when the decision is made about access we need to have a short workshop and set up processes for signing in and out, and reporting of any incidents. Sara and Sandy to craft something once we know how we will do access/rental.

**Mortgages and body corporate administration** (as already reported). Liz reported that Cooperative Bank very happy with new Body Corp rules and the valuation which she received today.

**Budget Control Group (BCG)** Maria’s notes sent through. List of things that need to be done when we move in. One item is the rangehood in the kitchen because it has implications for final inspection. We will need a variation for installation of the rangehood. At tomorrow’s site meeting we will find out if better to do as variation within our S&W contract, or to do a separate contract later.

**Project Control Group (PCG)** met last week and discussed finishing date. Still speculative at this stage. Practical Completion Certificate will be given by S&W after any defects identified by architects have been fixed. This is the finish of the S&W contract and therefore when we must start paying insurance, if we go for a complete practical completion certificate (rather than separating inside and outside and doing partial completion certificates). The check is comprehensive – it will take a few days to check every window, every door etc. Also the council has come back with a few things and other bits of paperwork that need doing. The current estimate is at least end of next week by the time it I finished. M units will have their inspection done later (and there is some work needed with the final inspection for the outside of the structures). An update on this information will be available at the site meeting tomorrow, and possibly a finishing date, so the PCG will send a note to the group with a likely timeframe after the meeting tomorrow.

**Conciliation Team** – The Conciliation Team had its first meeting last Tuesday. It intends to work out a proposal for its principles and processes, for review by the whole group at a later date.

**Insurance continues to be a work in progress**. State Insurance (direct insurance company ie don’t work through a broker) has said they weren’t interested. Anthony has been trying to track down info on the performance on the SIPS panels for insurance. It looks like we will have to accept the current prices/contract for the first year.

Payment can be done in full for 12 month period or by instalments at a 8% interest plus administration fee of $100. Payment required within 30 days of policy starting. Anne suggested that we may each pay our annual insurance amount from the first body corp fee charged. Contingency could possibly used but may have accounting implications. This will be looked into further before next meeting.

**Exceptionalism and its consequences**. Marianne said she put this item on the agenda some time ago out of a concern she observed that ‘we were special’ and that ‘ordinary requirements didn’t / shouldn’t apply to us’. While this came up around the issue of obtaining mortgages, it has been there for her for some time: statements to the effect that what we’re doing is ‘exceptional’, as if no one else has created supportive communities / neighbourhoods before. The other side of this can be a sense of superiority which had felt increasingly uncomfortable to her: her belief is there is lots to learn from others and hopefully, we will keep evolving as we do so.

While apparently the term ‘Exceptionalism’ was coined to describe the way the United States of America believes its form of democracy is so good that it has the right to impose it on other countries, a recent Chris Trotter column ( Fri 29th Jan) took Judith Collins to task for ‘*the profoundly objectionable assumption ( on behalf of the National party) that the only real Kiwis are people like themselves*’. In Marianne’s view, there has been some of this happening within our group and its effect has been to silence some voices.

Her other concerns were that we say one thing about ourselves but act in a way that is contrary (eg sustainability);

We appear to espouse an unswerving commitment to a particular doctrine ( a characteristic of cults) when there are actually a lot of different ways we can build a community housing project.

This ‘narrative’ that ‘this is best’ / we know best’ can result in people feeling uncomfortable expressing disagreement resulting in a tension between what is said and what is lived out. Eg we say we come to consensus for our decisions but some are still uncomfortable with those outcomes– and act as though that consensus hadn’t occurred.

Marianne also wondered if the feeling that our cause is so righteous flows on to a view that the law doesn’t apply to us as a Company eg by law, we’re required to have an AGM – Marianne isn’t aware of this having happened. We are also required to act ‘in good faith’.

Her final and deepest concern related to an apparent lack of transparency between ourselves and outside agencies. eg there seemed to be a determination to act in a way that seemed ‘sneaky’ – eg to bury of the 5% covenant in other documentation with the expectation that banks don’t see it. She expressed a concern that not operating in ‘good faith’ could blow up for us, and prejudice future cohousing developments as a result.

The chair asked that rather than challenge the messenger or these assertions, we make any additional comments. Comments arising from the ensuring discussion are listed below:

* What can we do to improve our processes? What can we do to improve?
* Learning to live together – can be done in many different ways vs we signed up for cohousing so don’t want to give up on that and consensus.
* It’s not helpful when terms of exceptionalism are used to define us. It is important that Toiora High Street Cohousing is where we can all flourish and find our own place.
* All aiming for the same vision, or otherwise we wouldn’t have signed up. There has been a challenging set of conversations to rewrite the detail that takes account of more recent views and what external environment requires of us. We are learning how to be this community – learning the script.
* We need to be wary of the “this is the way it will be done”. Sometimes it can be difficult to be understood if you are taking an opposing view. We have to listen as well as talk. We need to listen really hard to one another, as well as talking openly and bravely.
* Consensus can be a tyranny – when there’s a prevailing view and one feels need to put out an alternative view. It can feel like a big challenge if you want to do that.
* At the start we agreed we would take ownership for feelings – use the “I” word. Therefore everyone has responsibility to do that.
* We worked so hard to do consensus and make changes, but we must not lose sight of needing to get things done (for the banks or for any other practical consideration).
* The example of using a term such as “like a block of flats” was used to highlight how this can feel hurtful, because of the superiority implied when a term like this is used to characterize the view of anyone suggesting something that departs from the cohousing view espoused by earlier members of the group.
* Response was made that what we’re doing is something different: we will continue to meet together to make decisions and talk together … and that is what makes cohousing different. Common house, shared meals are important differences and we should not need to be willing to give up on them.
* These opposing views were summarized as the tension between the different places on the idealistic vs pragmatic spectrum that we as individuals sit with our values. That we have emotional attachment to our values, and the different positions on that spectrum lead to a clash of values – but we need those values and we need each other.

Disappointment was expressed that what we thought was achieved last Thursday night has still not been seen or approved by individual lawyers. Anne listed the multiple emails she has sent to Simon Milne, who promised it would be done 2 or 3 Feb and said he would advise when it was done, but has still not done so.

**Moving in Organisation** Only Catherine’s response still outstanding and it looks like it will work out fine because some moving in weekends, some using companies during week. Some units can move in directly from High and Alva streets. . Only a few constrained by having to move immediately on settlement. As soon as we get a date, Marianne will get spreadsheet out to us. She will also seek information from individuals about early access. Who wants it and what for: ie personal or professional need. (Professionals coming in to fix curtains, do painting etc will presumably have their own insurance cover)

**Gather software notes from Warren**: Work is chosen from clear job descriptions and also a record is kept of how much time is actually used. It also takes into account those unable to do particular task or for a particular time period. Reservations for guest rooms done with time limit and ability to negotiate if something comes up. Reservation system also can be used for other areas or resources eg tools, dining room. Meals were posted with menus, who is doing it, approximate cost (actual cost worked out by gather according to the inputs from the cooks of what they spent on ingredients). In that inputting of cost of ingredients there is provision for pantry reimbursement. Many reports and statistics produced which help with budgeting etc for meals in future. The software also has the ability to hold personnel records eg medical records, next of kin, allergies, birthdays. Not all the functions need to be used. The software is very customizable.

**Fittings**  Despite the potential for bulk order from Plumbing World on the things all houses will need eg towel rack, toilet roll holder, it was clear that most people wanted to do their own purchases because it was a way to personalize their units. This also avoided the work involved in centralizing orders. Appreciation was expressed for Juan’s work with shower fittings, splashback etc and his willingness to put so much time into finding out what individuals wanted.

Min said she is still keen to talk to anyone who wants to share the cost of getting a single builder onsite for this kind of work, and Gay promised to send photo of her wonderful toilet roll holder.

**Open Day/Garage Sale** It was felt that these should not be combined, and discussion revealed that there are different opinions on what kind of Open Day is wanted – perhaps three open days: Afternoon tea and/or ribbon cutting for builders/contractors/interested guests in the open space when we move in, a Sat or Sun open day for all our friends and then something else for general public (and taxidrivers who are saying that they’ve heard the units are really small) because the interest in our community is far more widespread than just our friends.

Earthsong have regular monthly Open Days with a few people who want to opening up their units for people to walk through, and the rest of the community just going on with their normal activities.

Individually we can ask our friends – eg Alex’s habit is to send an email invite to about 50 people for his housewarming(s) and while this is fine, there was also interest in a party “just for us”, along with talk of the open day for the public with the opportunity for koha towards the kitchen.

In summary there was enthusiasm for a range of events but without a settlement day it is premature to discuss further. The item will be kept on the agenda for when we have finalized dates.

**Grounds for the Montpellior units**: M1, M2, M3 M2 has concrete patio poured, M1 is ready to be poured. M3 is a variation that has been approved. All under control.

**Please pay asap** for the glass screens if you are one who needs them and you get an email from Juan.

**Next meeting will be Thursday 11 Feb** at the Sustainability Centre, usual zoom link. Chair and notetaker will be Donald and Jan