



Renters And Housing Union (RAHU)

The Constitution

Preamble:

As renters we are by definition not the owning class, and are at the frontline of facing housing precarity.

We acknowledge that the land on which we live was stolen from First Nations peoples, and as the custodians of these lands, their sovereignty has never been ceded.

We are committed to the cause of decolonisation through acts of our organisation, including ‘paying the rent’ to First Nations peoples.

The human right to a safe, secure home should not be determined by capital, nor those who seek to make profit in exploitation of this right.

As such we don’t endorse any political party nor take direction or influence from any political party related to government.

We are renters and people in precarious housing from all industries, ethnicities and identities. Through our shared commonalities, we commit to upholding our rights in union.

Solidarity is our weapon.

Article I: Name and Purpose

Section 1: The name of the organisation shall be the **Renters and Housing Union**. The abbreviated name shall be **RAHU**. Herein it will be referred to as “the Union.”

Section 2: The purpose shall be for renters and people in precarious housing to self-organise collectively to establish, defend and uphold the right to safe and secure housing through self-advocacy, representation, education, and frontline eviction defence.

Article II: Membership

Section 1: Union members will be people who rent their home address; be it private or public tenancy; of formal or informal tenancy agreement; squatters; homeless persons; and all people in precarious housing. No one shall be excluded due to race, ethnicity, gender or sexual diversity, nationality, creed, disability, or any other non-economic criterion other than as outlined in Section 2.

Section 2: Landlords, real estate agents, property managers, police officers, bailiffs, sheriffs and any other person whose economic position or employment is inconsistent with the purpose of the Union shall not be eligible for membership of the Union.

Section 3: Homeowners who are not landlords may join as Solidarity Members, but will not be voting members, nor be able to hold an officer position within the Union.

Section 4: A new member application can be challenged by any member in good standing, as defined in Article VI, Section 3 (f), on the basis of eligibility for membership or suitability based on past known behaviour. Such challenges will be heard by the Branch to which the member application has been made or, if no Branch exists, by the Delegates Committee. Acceptance or denial of the application will be made by a majority vote. A Branch's decision can be appealed to the Delegates Committee.

Section 5: All members shall agree to abide by the rules of the Union and make themselves acquainted with its purpose. This obligation shall be clearly stated on all membership applications.

Section 6: Members in good standing have the right to examine all Union records that do not contain private personal information. This includes, but is not limited to, archives of the Delegate Committee email list, meeting notes and financial records. A member who wishes to examine any records shall make a written request to the Secretary detailing the records they wish to examine. The Secretary will then have 14 days to fulfill this request.

Article III: Structure

Section 1: The Union will be composed of branches, the boundaries of which will be determined by the elected Delegate Committee. A Branch may apply to be authorised by the Delegate Committee at such time that it has 5 members.

Section 2:

- a. Each Branch will elect a number of delegates to sit on an elected Delegate Committee.

- b. The number of Delegates for each branch will be determined by the size of the branch, with a minimum of one delegate per 10 members.
- c. The Delegate Committee shall be made up of the Secretary, Treasurer and all elected Delegates of authorised branches.
- d. The Secretary and Treasurer will have voice, but no vote, in the Delegate Committee.
- e. The duty of the Delegate Committee will be to make administrative decisions for the running of the Union between the meetings of the General Membership.

Article IV: Officers

Section 1: Secretary

- a. The Secretary shall be responsible for maintaining accurate membership lists, archives of Delegate Committee and General Membership Meeting notes, providing quarterly and annual written reports to the membership, producing the annual referendum ballot, and ensuring the production of a quarterly membership bulletin by the Communications Committee.
- b. The Secretary will act as Chair of the Delegate Committee, with voice but not vote.
- c. The Secretary will be responsible for convening Delegate Committee meetings and shall provide Delegates with a draft agenda no less than 30 days beforehand.
- d. The Secretary shall be elected by members in good standing annually as part of the annual referendum.
- e. The Secretary shall be a signatory on the Union's bank accounts.

Section 2: Treasurer

- a. The Treasurer shall be responsible for managing the Union's bank accounts and funds, keeping accurate financial records and providing quarterly and annual written reports to the membership.
- b. The Treasurer will sit on the Delegate Committee with voice, but not vote. The Treasurer will take and compile any minutes from the Delegate Committee meetings.
- c. The Treasurer shall be elected by members in good standing annually as part of the annual referendum.

Section 3: Delegates

- a. Delegates are elected by a Branch to be the voice and vote of its members on the Delegate Committee.
- b. The Branch is responsible for electing these representatives by whatever method it deem appropriate.
- c. A Delegate is subject to removal only by the Branch that elected that Delegate.
- d. It is the responsibility of Delegates to advise their Branch when Delegate Committee meetings will occur, and consult their Branch and receive instructions on how to vote on administrative decisions.
- e. It is the responsibility of the Branch to provide timely and adequate instructions to their Delegate on how to vote on administrative decisions.

- f. If the Branch fails to provide such instructions to the Delegate, the Delegate may vote as they deem appropriate.

Section 4: Committee Chairs

- a. Committee Chairs shall be responsible for calling and organising the meetings of their committee, managing their Committee's bank account and funds, keeping good records which members can examine, and providing quarterly and annual written reports to the membership.
- b. Committee Chairs shall be elected as described in Article IX, Section 1 (b) and (c).

Section 4: Terms

- a. Terms shall run from 1 January to 31 December of the same year.
- b. No officer may serve more than three consecutive terms in the same role, unless there are no other qualified candidates standing.

Section 5: Removal of Officers

- a. The Secretary and Treasurer are subject to removal, which shall be initiated by a petition of 10 percent of all Union members in good standing as of the most recent 1 January.
- b. The petition must be delivered to the Delegate Committee and shared with the officer being removed.
- c. A removal vote must be conducted within 45 days of receipt of the petition. All parties must have a fair opportunity to publish a statement on the ballot.
- d. A successful removal vote triggers a by-election for the position in question. This election must happen within two weeks of the removal vote.
- e. If an officer is replaced, their substitution will only serve out the remainder of the initial term.
- f. Delegates may be removed by the same process, but only by the members of their Branch.

Article V: **Elections and Referendum**

Section 1: This article shall take effect from 1 January 2021. Upon the adoption of this document, officers shall be elected by ballot to serve a term ending 31 December 2020. On 1 January 2021 this section shall be automatically deleted and the following sections shall be renumbered to reflect this change.

Section 2:

- a. Elections for Secretary and Treasurer and a referendum on any amendments to this Constitution shall be held in January of each year.
- b. All members in good standing on 1 January are eligible to vote.
- c. In November of each year, the Secretary shall publish a notice in the Union's internal bulletin calling for nominations and other referenda items.

Section 3:

- a. Proposals to amend this Constitution shall be submitted to the Secretary no later than 1 October.
- b. Proposals may originate from a Branch or from a petition signed by ten (10) percent of the Union's members in good standing on 1 January of that year. If there are fewer than 5 Branches, proposals may be submitted by two members in good standing.
- c. Amendments to this Constitution shall be passed by a simple majority of the ballots cast.
- d. Successful amendments shall come into effect on 1 January of the year immediately following the ballot.

Section 4:

- a. Nominations for officer candidates shall be submitted to the Secretary no later than 1 October.
- b. Nominations may be made by any member in good standing, but the member nominated has the right to not accept the nomination.
- c. The name of all nominated candidates eligible for office shall appear on the ballot paper.
- d. The candidate receiving the highest number of votes cast shall be declared elected.
- e. All candidates for an officer post must have been in continuous good standing for at least one year before their nomination, unless there are no other qualified candidates standing.

Section 4:

- a. The votes shall be counted by a three person ballot committee elected from the membership of a Branch.
- b. The Delegate Committee shall appoint a branch to host the ballot committee on a rotating basis, through all branches in the Union.
- c. The ballot committee must report the referendum results in writing by email to the membership upon completion of the counting and publish them in the internal bulletin.

Article VI: Membership Dues

Section 1: The Union sets the dues rates as the following:

\$1 per month
\$10 per month for waged workers, on a voluntary basis

Section 2:

- a. 10% of the Union's funds will be donated to Pay The Rent Victoria every financial quarter.
- b. First Nations peoples are not expected to pay dues.
- c. This payment will be made with no attached conditions or contracts to Pay The Rent Victoria

- d. At such time as this organisation dissolves, or the Union membership would like to elect an alternative organisation to donate funds to, this will be done with the advice and direction of First Nations organisations based in Victoria

Section 3:

- e. Monthly dues are payable on the first of each month.
- f. Members whose dues are current or up to 59 days in arrears shall be in "good standing."
- g. Members whose dues are 60 days in arrears (from the first of the month when dues were payable) will be in "bad standing" and will not be entitled to any rights or benefits in the Union or able to hold any union office until such dues have been paid.
- h. After four months in bad standing members will no longer be considered members and will have to reapply to join.

Section 4:

- a. Financial decisions are to be approved by the membership at General Membership Meetings, except as provided for in a budget.
- b. Budgets are to be approved by the membership at General Membership Meetings.
- c. Expenditure provided for within a budget is at the discretion of the Secretary and Treasurer.
- d. Expenditures are to be reported by the Treasurer in the quarterly bulletin.

Section 5:

- a. A three-person Audit Committee shall be elected from a Branch every May.
- b. The Delegate Committee shall appoint a Branch to host the audit committee on a rotating basis, through all Branches of the Union. No branch shall perform the duties of the Audit Committee consecutively unless there are three or fewer Branches.
- c. The committee shall submit the audit report of the accounts of the Union to the annual bulletin, and membership mailing list.
- d. The committee shall respond to questions as addendum to the report for circulation via mailing list, and for presentation at the following General Meeting.

Article VII: Meetings

Section 1:

- a. General Membership Meetings shall occur no less than every other month.
- b. The Secretary shall choose a recurring time and day for the General Membership Meetings.
- c. A General Membership Meeting may be called within this interval by the Secretary or a majority vote of the Delegate Committee.
- d. Quorum at the General Membership Meetings shall be a minimum of 10 members in good standing, or 20% of the Union's membership, whichever is lower, and not including elected officers of the Union or any Branch.

- e. Attendance of the General Membership Meetings shall be in person or through electronic means, if providing such means is practical.

Section 2:

- a. Branches shall set their meeting interval at their discretion, but shall meet no less than once per month.
- b. Quorum at Branch meetings shall be shall be a minimum of 5 members in good standing, or 50% of the Branch's membership, whichever is lower

Section 3: Decisions at all meetings of the Union and its bodies shall be made by majority vote of the members in good standing present.

Section 4:

- a. The Delegate Committee shall conduct its daily business by email list. The e-mail list will serve as a standing meeting of the committee, with motions able to be made, discussed and decided. Any member of the Union in good standing may subscribe to this list.
- b. Delegate Committee members shall draft and approve bylaws for procedures of the standing meeting.
- c. The Delegate Committee will hold meetings in person or electronically at a regular quarterly interval that is mutually agreed upon by the Delegate Committee.
- d. Minutes will be taken by the Treasurer and made available to the membership on the Delegate Committee email list.
- e. Delegate Committee meetings shall be chaired by the Secretary.
- f. A special meeting may be called at the request of two Branches of the Union.

Section 5: Stacking

- a. If it is clear that a political party, organisation or other political grouping are present in a meeting for their own political purposes, any present member can call to suspend the meeting on account of stacking.
- b. If a member calls for the meeting to be suspended, an alternative meeting time will be announced and reconvened at that later date.
- c. At the reconvened meeting, the membership must address the issue of stacking
- d. The membership may also decide to take disciplinary measures against individuals and/or groups who stack meetings including; censuring motions, or calling to suspend or expel a particular member as per Article II Section 5.

Article VIII: Amendments

Section 1: This constitution may only be amended in the annual referendum, following the procedure described in Article V, Section 3.

Article IX: Committees

Section 1:

- a. A Committee to focus on a specific topic may be formed or abolished by a vote of the Delegate Committee. There may be committees formed such as; Public Housing Committee, Homeless &/or No Fixed Address Committee; Gender Equity, LGBTQIA & GNC Committee; Migrant & Temp. Visa Holders Committee; First Nations Committee
- b. A Committee Chair shall be elected at the next General Membership Meeting after a committee is formed.
- c. Thereafter, until the committee is abolished, the Committee Chair shall be subject to election as part of the annual officer elections, as described in Article V.
- d. Committees are to make decisions democratically regarding matters under the topics for which they were created.
- e. All committees are to be accountable to the Union and shall report in writing in the quarterly bulletin.
- f. Committees to make their own rules about membership requirements.

Section 2:

- a. A Committee Chair may present a budget to any General Membership Meeting for approval.
- b. If approved, the budgeted funds shall be provided from the general union account and kept in a new account for the Committee.
- c. The Secretary, Treasurer, and Committee Chair will have access to each Committees' bank accounts.
- d. If a Committee is abolished its bank account will be closed and all funds returned to the Union's general account.

Section 3:

- a. There shall be a standing Communications Committee.
- b. The Communications Committee shall be responsible for the management of the Union's website and social media accounts, the overseeing union email accounts, and for compiling a quarterly internal bulletin, to be published in January, April, July and October.
- c. The Communications Committee shall send an electronic copy of the internal bulletin to all members of the Union
- d. The Communications Officer shall be responsible for mailing the bulletin to individual members who request a paper copy, to be reimbursed by the Union for printing and postage.

Section 4:

- a. There may be standing committees such as;

Article X: Safer Spaces Policy

Section 1: Safer Spaces Policy

RAHU is a union committed to upholding the rights and dignity of renters and people in precarious housing. We recognise our membership is diverse and as a union we recognise that oppression is layered, and is used as an instrument of power. As such, we strive to keep our common places free from oppressive action, behavior, and language.

These oppressive actions include but are not limited to: racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and any expression of disrespect and/or intolerance of size, gender identity, sexual identity/expression, (dis)ability, age, educational level, and cultural background.

We will not tolerate acts of disrespect, violence or oppression to our fellow members, and understand our shared responsibilities to address these wrongdoings if they occur to our fellow members.

Because we want to learn from and educate each other, we will each be responsible for addressing these issues in ourselves and others.

Article XI: Complaints Procedure

Section 1

If a member feels the Union constitution and or this policy is being / has been violated, to themselves or another member, the following steps should be taken:

1. Reference the policy to the whole group: for example, "In RAHU, we have a 'Safer Space Policy' that all members are mutually responsible to uphold. I feel this policy has been violated by talk of '[comments made]'. Please keep the Safer Space Policy in mind."
2. If the policy is still being violated, the issue should be brought up to the person in violation directly and/or the chair, an officer, a delegate, or a member whom you would like to act as an advocate on your behalf so that an effective plan of action can be instituted.
3. If the issue has not been addressed successfully within the Union, a member or advocate can engage an outside organisation or group to help facilitate a further plan of action on behalf of the affected member and in accordance with the principles of the union.

If a member feels like this policy is being violated and is uncomfortable bringing this up personally, they are encouraged to seek an ally of their choosing to advocate for them. In a meeting, a person can ask for a point of personal privilege to take a break and discuss this with the necessary parties. Meeting chairs, officers, delegates, and members should be conscious of this policy and address issues as they arise.

Further, space shall be defined as any office, meeting, event (including trainings, social gatherings, etc.), internet platform (including email communications and social media, etc.) that is in use by the Union, which includes any body formally recognized by the Union, such as the Delegate Committee, local Branches, other committees, and any accountable sub-formation of the aforementioned bodies.

Section 2:

If a satisfactory resolution is not able to be achieved, or attempts to address misconduct have not been made by the perpetrating member, the complainant, or any other member may apply for the perpetrating member to be removed from the Union.

The elected advocate and officers will submit a report and timeline of the actions of the perpetrating member with the anonymity of the complainant if requested.

This report will then be submitted to the membership at a General Membership Meeting whereby the Union will vote on the expulsion of the perpetrating member.

During the period from application of expulsion up to the vote of expulsion, the perpetrating member may have their membership suspended, including exclusion from Union spaces, and all privileges of membership will be renounced.

Section 3:

An expelled member has the opportunity to appeal the decision of the Union within 30 days of their expulsion. An expelled member may submit their appeal to the Secretary.

Measurable and evidenced actions of addressing their behaviour will be required in order for their expulsion to be overturned.

There may be a requirement for the member to demonstrate longer term actions in addressing and improving their behaviour.