

# Establishing a Community Association in Calgary

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Congratulations!</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About Community Associations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Simply – What is a Community Association?</b>	<b>3-4</b>
<b>Benefits of Formally Registering as a Community Association</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is the Difference Between A Residents Association and a Community Association?</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>Is There Land for the Community Association?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How is land determined?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How to Form a Community Association</b>	<b>5-7</b>
<b>What Are the Challenges?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>About The Federation of Calgary Communities</b>	<b>7-8</b>

## Congratulations!

By reading this manual and actively engaging people in your neighbourhood, you are taking the first step in establishing a community association to provide social, recreational and educational programs for your members and their families. By becoming a registered community association you are also positioning your association to make neighbourhood improvements and have a voice in the City of Calgary planning and development approval process.

This manual is intended to help you understand the process for establishing a community association. It also provides templates for use, however your steering committee must determine what is best for your own situation and for that reason this handbook is meant only to be a guide. Good luck!

## About Community Associations

There are currently 150 active community association in Calgary, representing almost the entire city, and 7 in the surrounding area. It is estimated that 20,660 community association volunteers annually contribute 2.4 million hours of public service, which has an equivalent monetary value of over \$28 million. These volunteers operate, manage and maintain facilities and amenities with a value of more than \$200 million. They come from a diverse population base with about one-quarter of the city's population supporting community association through paid membership.

Community associations have the potential to be on the front lines of important social, cultural, environmental and community issues. They can respond in many ways to the needs of their residents; fostering and supporting them to fully and actively engage in community and civic life. This happens through the provision of social, recreation and sports programs, through neighbourhood improvement initiatives, and through direct input into planning and traffic issues, and other public affairs. Community associations have the potential to mobilize citizens and local resources to make a vital contribution to community life – enriching the quality of life and wellbeing of their communities. Overall, community associations can provide a shared sense of citizenship and inclusion. For decades, all Calgarians have benefited from community associations.

Community associations can be the anchor for community life.

## Simply – What is a Community Association?

Community associations are usually registered societies that have a general mission to improve neighbourhood life within a specific geographic region. They can take on many forms: Some cover large regions and multiple neighbourhoods while others can be small. Some have facilities and paid staff and some have none. What they all have in common is that they are volunteer run and share a common mandate to provide programs, services and communications to their residents that will improve the quality of life.

Such activities could include:

- Offer social and recreational programs for residents of all ages.
- Offer sports programs for children
- Develop and enhance community pride and spirit through hosting special events (e.g. Stampede Breakfast, Winter Carnival).

- Undertake neighbourhood improvement initiatives such as spring clean-ups, tree planting, playground development and more.
- Provide information to residents through a newsletter and/or web presence and act as a unified voice on issues affecting the community.
- Provide input into the planning and development process and foster good planning practices.

## Benefits of Formally Registering as a Community Association

Community associations have the potential of being on the front lines of every important social, cultural, environmental and community issue. They can respond in countless ways to the needs of their residents; fostering and supporting them to fully and actively engage in community and civic life, through the provision of social, recreational and sports programs, and through direct input into the City's planning process and other public affairs. Community associations have the potential to mobilize citizens and local resources to make a vital contribution to community life – enriching the quality of life and wellbeing of their communities. Overall, community associations can provide a shared sense of citizenship and inclusion. It would be difficult to find a single Calgarian who has not benefited from a Community association.

Without a formal structure many of the benefits of community associations cannot be realized.

As a registered society, you are able to engage in fundraising events through gaming. In addition, you are also eligible to apply for some government grants to help support your programs or build amenities.

Your community association will be part of the existing Calgary community association network through the Federation of Calgary Communities. This network has the ability to be a strong force within the political sphere and being active in the network can be rewarding. You will also have the ability to advocate on issues of common concern and partner with each other on initiatives. You will have access to networking and training opportunities. In addition, you will be able to access Federation liability and board of directors insurance at reduced rates and other services through The Federation.

You will also receive formal recognition from The City of Calgary Planning Department in terms of circulation on development applications and other planning consultations. This provides your community with an important voice in the planning process.

The City encourages formal community associations to run their own programs and facilities; they see community associations as full partners in the delivery of social and recreation needs.

Take some time to generate a list of benefits to “establishing a community association” within your own community. Think about what impact it could have on the residents in terms of community spirit, connectedness, capacity for collective action, and quality of life.

## What is the Difference Between A Residents Association and a Community association?

Historically in Calgary, community associations have evolved within given geographic boundaries to fulfill the role of the “community-based” organization. Today some new communities are built with a “resident’s association” first. What’s the difference?

Community associations are volunteer organizations with voluntary membership that can include any person in a neighbourhood. They are run by volunteer boards and are intended to meet the needs of their members. These needs help define the types of programs and services that community associations offer. Community association facilities are on public property and many offer programs that are open to all Calgarians. In addition, community associations can represent residents in public affairs, such as planning. Community associations set fees that meet local needs and are affordable to their residents.

Residents associations are somewhat similar to condominium associations. They are established by the developer in order to maintain jointly owned amenities that are part of the initial marketing of the community. These amenities are on private property, and are typically only open to property owners. Only property owners are members of residents associations. Each property owner pays a mandatory fee, an obligation that is on the title. As a major property owner, the developer is represented on the residents association, and may control the association until the community is built-out, which could take many years. As such, residents associations do not serve a “representative” role and often choose not to offer services to the residents if they cannot fully recover costs in doing so.

To sum up, the purpose of community associations are to meet the needs of the community and they can play a representative role. They are run solely by a volunteer board and are responsive to their membership. Residents associations are created by developers to manage jointly owned property and facilities, and are responsible to the property owners.

## Is There Land for the Community Association?

The answer is usually yes. You will need to work the City of Calgary, Calgary Neighbourhoods to establish your community association and they will identify the Municipal Reserve Land set aside for your community. You will need to secure at least 200 community memberships before the City of Calgary can lease land to a community association. Not every community association decides to build a facility; many use the land for recreation purposes without building a hall.

Remember the more members you have the easier it will be to recruit volunteers, raise funds and host successful events. You should aim to have 20 to 30% of your community as members.

### How is Land Determined?

Early in the planning and development process, land that is expected to be transformed into urban (residential) uses is conceptually planned for in policy documents called Area Structure Plans or Community Plans. Included in these policy documents are the approximate future locations of major parks, schools and community facilities. Developers then make more specific plans for the locations of roads and subdivision of property. The community association site is defined and transferred to the City at this time. Community association sites are on public land and are meant to serve the needs of the community in perpetuity.

## How to Form a Community Association

1. Contact the Federation of Calgary Communities at (403) 244-4111 and become recognized as a prospective member. There is no fee until you have established your organization (about 2 years after incorporation). Through our Member Services, we can help provide some support and guidance. We will also track other individuals who have indicated interest so that we can connect all interested parties.

Don't hesitate to call – if we don't know the answer we will connect you to someone who does.

2. Contact the City of Calgary, Calgary Neighbourhoods department by calling #3-1-1, and identifying what community you are calling from. You will be directed to an appropriate representative.

Calgary Neighbourhoods can assign you a Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator (NPC) who can assist with:

- Writing your Bylaws and Objects
- Determining your boundaries
- Developing a “Strategic Plan” for your association,
- And more!

3. Convene the residents in your area – try and gain some momentum and support. The people that attend should be representative of the community, coming from all areas. To get out a good group of people it may require you to do some door knocking. Remember, people will volunteer if they are personally asked. Ultimately you need volunteers, ideally at this first meeting, if there is sufficient support and interest, you should strike a Steering Committee with at least 10 to 12 residents.
4. Liaise with other nearby community associations for their comments and suggestions. You should also be exploring the opportunity for partnerships as well as gaining their advice and wisdom on establishing and running a community association. The Federation of Calgary Communities can provide you with the names and phone numbers for community Presidents in your area.
5. Once you have all your documents prepared you will then be ready to register under the Societies Act with Corporate Registry in Edmonton.  
Visit the following website for the application form:  
<http://www.servicealberta.ca/716.cfm>  
You can also contact them directly  
Help Desk Telephone –For Toll Free use the Rite # 310-0000, enter (780) 427-2311, select 3<sup>rd</sup> option

This will give you not-for-profit status under the Corporate Registry. There is a small fee and a copy of your bylaws and objects must also be submitted for your community association. *(Note: A not-for-profit is different from a charitable organization. Charitable status is a much more difficult process obtained through Revenue Canada. A charity is able to issue a tax receipt for donations where a not-for-profit cannot. Your community association does not need to have charitable status to do the work of your community association. Charitable application does require that your bylaws and objects be written differently so the pros and cons must be weighed by the members, and very few of the community associations in Calgary have charitable status. If you wish to pursue charitable status, you can apply after you become a not-for-profit. The Federation can provide you additional information on obtaining charitable status, if your community is interested).*

6. Once you are a registered community association you will be eligible for full membership with The Federation of Calgary Communities. The Federation can provide you with valuable resources and services including access to a group liability and board of director insurance program. Your membership is free for the first two

years. Call the Federation at (403) 244-4111 for more details and the benefits of membership.

7. Now the real work begins...these are some things that you will need to consider:
  - Create an Organizational Structure, Roles, Responsibilities, and Job Descriptions
  - Board Development – recruitment and retention
  - Fundraising and Financial Management. Often organizations must be incorporated for a certain length of time before they are eligible to apply for grants or gaming events. For this reason, new community associations usually start to build their fundraising base through memberships and community fundraising events. It is imperative to have policies and procedures which ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability.
  - Soliciting Community Memberships. A strong membership is important as it indicates general support for the community association and usually provides the first source of revenue. With more members a community association may be more successful in recruiting volunteers, raising funds, or even obtaining a good turnout at special events. Furthermore, at some time, the community association may need to have a strong membership base to qualify for some benefits. For example, the City of Calgary can lease land to a community association, only once they have obtained at least 200 memberships. Although a community association should strive to recruit as many members as possible, a successful membership drive will usually recruit approximately 30% of the households in the community.
  - Ongoing Responsibilities. Some tasks such as general meetings, production of audited financial statements, submissions to Corporate Registries and membership drives must occur annually.

## What Are the Challenges?

Challenges for community associations are that they often take time to develop, to both raise enough money to build a facility (if desired), and to build and sustain a sufficient volunteer and population base to support its programs and services. Community associations also require ongoing funding to maintain services. These can be very serious challenges and should not be taken lightly.

Options should always be considered when exploring the feasibility of establishing and sustaining a vibrant community association. Merging with an existing community association can have a number of benefits to both communities as they will have a larger population to draw upon for membership and volunteers. You may also consider partnering with a homeowners or residents association – when there is only one residents association for the same geographical area, it might be strategic to align your organizations or form a strategic partnership.

## About The Federation of Calgary Communities

The Federation of Calgary Communities is a not-for-profit support organization for Calgary community associations. We also support more than 60 Service, Associate and Auxiliary member organizations that include small area not-for-profits. The Federation is a registered not-for-profit society that directly provides capacity building support and guidance to our members.

Currently 98% of Calgary community associations are Federation members. In addition, The Federation is continually receiving requests to support smaller Calgary area not-for-profits who currently have little or no access to organization development resources and services, like subsidized audits. All of our member organizations are volunteer driven not-for-profits, each with varying degrees of not-for-profit management skills and experiences. The Federation exists to provide organization development, financial management and community planning support to our members, and to provide a representative voice on issues important to building, supporting and maintaining community life.

We are a valued community capacity building organization. We are The Federation of Calgary Communities.

Please feel free to call us at (403) 244-4111 or visit our website. The Federation has six departments with programs and services for our members (see related membership package for more details):

- 1) **Audit**  
(Fee-for-service for Federation members at a subsidized rate)
- 2) **Urban Planning**  
(Free: planning and development support)
- 3) **Member Services**  
(Free: not-for-profit management, and community engagement support)
- 4) **Building Safe Communities**  
(Free: community engagement as it pertains to crime prevention and safety)
- 5) **Celebrating Communities**  
(Free: communications, network-celebrations, member recognition)

## ***THE FEDERATION OF CALGARY COMMUNITIES***

### **Vision**

Each Calgary neighbourhood has a vital and representative community association.

### **Mission**

To improve neighbourhood life in Calgary by providing services and programs that create, support, and enhance vital and representative community based associations.

### **Values**

The Federation of Calgary Communities operates with commitment, integrity and leadership, recognizing community, diversity and volunteerism.

## ***Improving Neighbourhood Life in Calgary***

***Looking for more support? Visit [calgarycommunities.com/members-only/](http://calgarycommunities.com/members-only/) for hundreds of resources that can help you!***

***Password is 'community'***



