

Vancouver Tenants Union



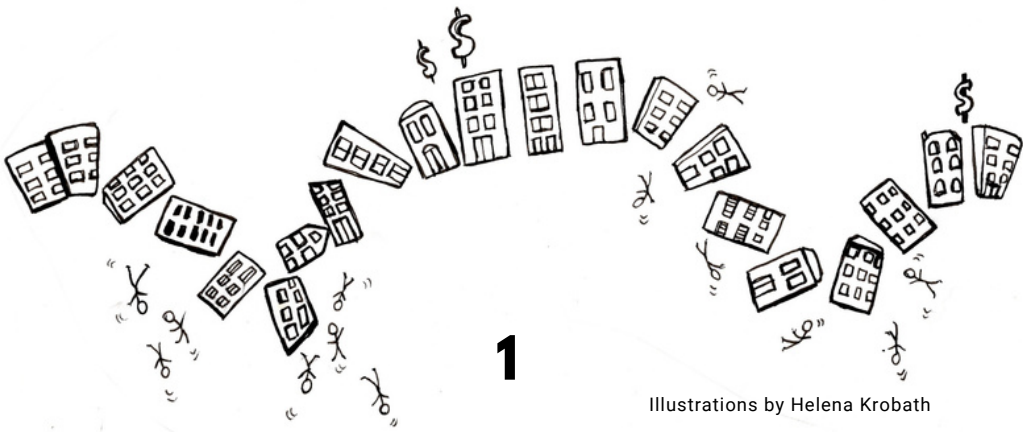
MEMBER HANDBOOK

**Organizing for housing justice
on the unceded territory of the Squamish,
Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations**

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Updated: June 2023



WHY A TENANTS UNION?

In cities around the world, dramatic rent increases and stagnant wages put renters in an increasingly impossible position. Most of us know someone

who has been pressured, tricked, or terrorized out of their homes by landlords looking for increased profit. The only thing standing in their way is us.



***AS A UNION OF TENANTS, WE WORK
COLLECTIVELY TO ASSERT OUR RIGHTS AND
DEMAND HOUSING JUSTICE FOR ALL***

As a tenants union member, you join thousands of fellow renters, building power and supporting one another. Our union is also connected to a broader tenant-powered movement - fighting for housing rights around the world.

You are encouraged to not only be a member, but to help drive this work. This handbook, adapted from our constitution and bylaws, is a primer on how our tenants union functions and how you can get plugged in.

Housing justice is possible. Together, we can make demands and take direct action - to protect tenants, shape policy, and assert housing as a human right, with multiple intersections.

**Keep
Updated**

Members who are opted-in to receive emails will receive regular updates in their inbox.

You can also check the VTU website:
vancouver tenants union.ca/news

OUR VALUES

Adapted from the VTU Constitution, ratified on Nov. 26, 2017

The VTU's membership is comprised of those who do not own property, people who rent, people who do not have stable housing, and people who are homeless. We seek to build a transformative movement for housing justice and housing rights for all people.

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Everyone deserves a safe, clean, affordable, and accessible home - regardless of race, economic status, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, religion, lifestyle, or citizenship.

HOUSING SHOULD NOT BE A COMMODITY

To achieve housing as a human right for all, we should support de-commodified housing such as cooperatives, land trusts, public/social housing, and other models that support affordable & dignified homes in our communities.

RESIST DISPLACEMENT

Excessive rent increases, illegal evictions, renovictions, demovictions, and the broader process of gentrification, can force tenants into vulnerable conditions and destroy communities. To resist this, we advocate for policies like stronger rent control and eviction protections.



Photo: Michael Tseng

FIGHTING FOR THE MOST MARGINALIZED LIFTS EVERYONE UP

Everyone deserves an income that allows them to live with dignity. This means supporting higher social assistance rates and higher wages. The decentralized structure of our union aims to make room for those most affected by housing injustice to become leaders in our movement. We strive to make our union accessible to all, which means means putting time, energy, and resources into things like language justice, childcare, and removing barriers so that people with different abilities and identities can participate. These efforts are always ongoing.

DECOLONIZE

We live and organize on the stolen and occupied land of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh. We commit to constantly examining our values, tactics, and being receptive to Indigenous voices to ensure we remain aligned and in solidarity with the goals of decolonization and Land Back.

BUILD TENANT POWER

Community and solidarity is the antidote to isolation and vulnerability. In order to achieve long-term, transformative housing justice, we need to work together. Sharing our stories helps us see the commonalities between one another. Educating each other on our legal rights helps us identify what needs to change. Taking collective action builds power.

SOLIDARITY ACROSS MOVEMENTS

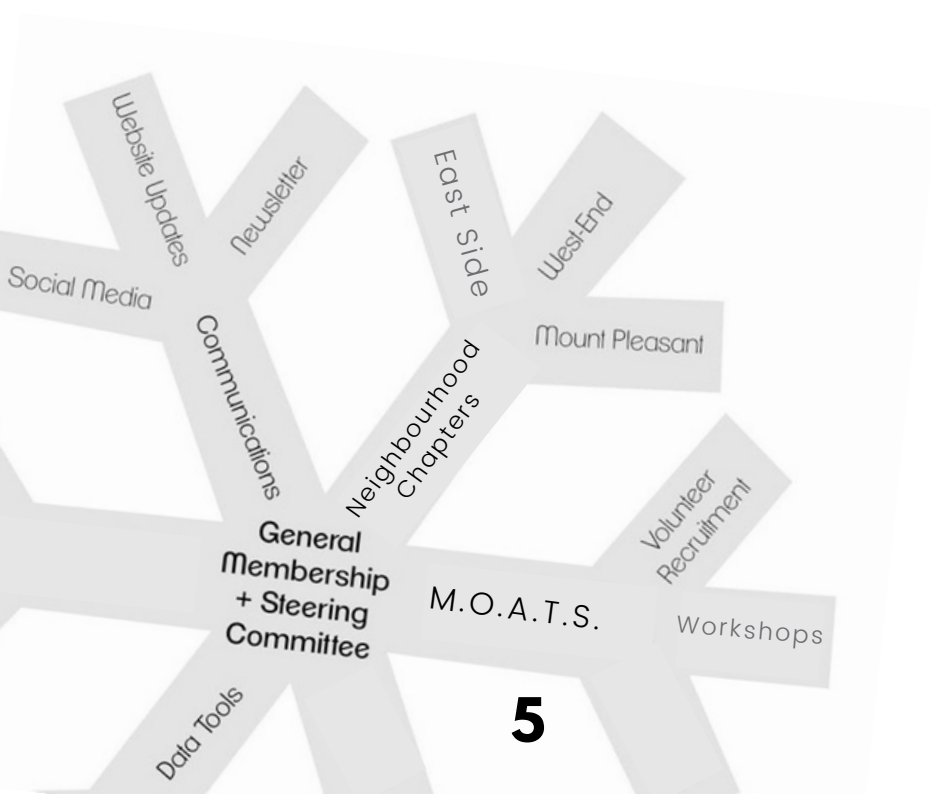
Housing rights are connected to many similar and interconnected struggles for social justice around the world. We will show up, support, and stand in solidarity with those movements.

DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE

The VTU is a democratic, member-led union. Our structure is based on what's called the *snowflake* model.

The union's elected body, the *Steering Committee* (SC), is composed of elected members and member representatives who are appointed by Working Groups and Neighbourhood Chapters. The SC is responsible for ensuring that the many interdependent arms of the VTU stay coordinated, upholding our values, and bringing major updates and decisions to the general membership.

Any VTU member can get involved in a Working Group or Neighbourhood Chapter. These groups set their own meetings, agendas, and goals.



GENERAL MEETINGS (GM)

General Meetings are the best way to learn about and get involved with the VTU. Typically at these meetings, we:

- Introduce ourselves
- Share updates, victories, and lessons from Working Groups and neighbourhood Chapters
- Analyze new political developments that affect tenants
- Vote on motions and proposals brought from members
- Collectively strategize on our next steps

We hold a minimum of five GMs a year, which are usually open to the general public - meaning you can invite your neighbours, friends, or family.

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Everyone coming to a VTU meeting will be asked to follow these community agreements:

- **One-mic** - means to respect each other's speaking time.
- **Speak Up/Listen Up** - means that people who are comfortable speaking should step up on their listening skills, and people who tend not to speak should step up speaking more.
- **Break It Down** - explaining words or phrases that are unclear/ inaccessible.
- **Challenge Ideas, Not People** - disagreements should be expressed with what people have said and not the people themselves.
- **Respect Each Other** - oppressive behaviour will not be tolerated.
- **Be Present & Take Care Of Yourself** - do what is best for your physical and emotional well being

HOUSING JUSTICE AND TENANTS RIGHTS IN VANCOUVER

Time Immemorial

The unceded and occupied land now called "Vancouver" is the shared home of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples

1969

Renters win the right to vote in municipal elections, thanks to the Vancouver Tenants Council - the first city-wide renters' organization

1886

The City of Vancouver incorporates. Property is carved up by white real estate speculators. Colonial governments assist by displacing Indigenous people and legalizing racially segregated neighbourhoods

2017

200 tenants gather to launch the Vancouver Tenants Union

NDP gov't make a number of reforms to Residential Tenancy laws, including ending fixed term leases and geographic rent increases

2018

VTU, advocates and labour unions protest proposed provincial rent increase of 4.5%

In response, the Province lowers rent increase formula by 2% to cap at inflation only

1993

Federal Liberal Gov't stops building social housing. Since the 1970s the both levels of government had built between 1,000 and 1,500 new units of social housing per year in B.C.

2012

The City of Vancouver introduces a program to incentivize new "affordable" rentals by waiving development fees. By 2022, the City defines \$2224 for 1 bd as "affordable"

1974

BC's first ever NDP gov't introduces vacancy controls (rent control tied to the unit, not the tenant) amid a housing and inflation crisis. Social Credit Gov't eliminates all rent controls in 1983

2004

BC Liberal Gov't re-introduces annual rent controls, tied to a tenancy. Formula is 2% + Inflation. No rent controls when a tenant moves (as it is today)

2019

Provincial Gov't makes minor reforms to tenancy law, vowing to "stop renovations" but does not tie rent control to units (vacancy control) as VTU and others demanded

2020

VTU win a short-lived eviction ban due to COVID-19, but the Province rolls it back just five months later and gives tenants with rent debt 1 year to pay up.

2022

Vancouver passes "Broadway Plan" to densify along the Broadway Subway Line. VTU launches a resistance campaign to fight mass demovictions and enforce tenant protections.

MOTIONS & RESOLUTIONS AT GENERAL MEETING

Any member in good standing can bring forward motions to a General Meeting, or AGM to be voted on by the members present at the meeting.

According to our bylaws, the Steering Committee must also consult members at a General Meeting when we are considering decisions to spend more than \$1000, or significant matters that affect VTU as a whole, which are called **special resolutions**.

Special resolutions, could include things like endorsing political campaigns, joining coalitions with other organizations, or proposed changes to the VTU’s constitution and bylaws. Members can also challenge a decision made by Steering Committee through a special resolution.

Like regular motions, any member can propose a special resolution, however they require two other members to support bringing it forward. Two-thirds of members must approve of the resolution for the decision to be carried.

Voting on Motions

Only members **in good standing** can vote.
This means you must be up-to-date on your annual dues and have to have been a member for at least 45 days.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS (AGM)

The VTU holds an AGM every 12-15 months. These are held in conjunction with a one day convention that includes workshops, guest panels, food, and a chance for tenants to connect with each other. The Steering Committee is also required to provide members with an annual financial report and reports from Working Groups and Neighbourhood Chapters.

STEERING COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

At AGMs, members elect a new Steering Committee using a ranked ballot. As long as there are enough candidates, at least half of the elected Steering Committee members must self-identify as part of an equity group. This could include:

- Persons with lived experience with housing vulnerability;
- Indigenous persons;
- Racialized persons;
- Persons with disabilities;
- LGBTQ2IA+ persons

RUNNING FOR STEERING COMMITTEE

Members who decide to run must be in good standing, and write a written statement of intent that will be made available for all members to read. Elected SC members should also be able to commit to attending meetings once every 7-14 days. An elected SC member may serve up to four consecutive terms.

Further Reading

You can find our union's full *constitution and bylaws*:
vancouvertenantunion.ca/about

WORKING GROUPS

Between general meetings, VTU members organize in working groups and neighbourhood chapters that meet regularly and build tenant power in various ways. Each working group and neighbourhood chapter sends a representative to sit on Steering Committee to ensure our all the moving parts are in touch and staying coordinated.

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZING AND TENANT SOLIDARITY (MOATS)

These members work to educate and agitate members, especially those looking to learn more about renters' rights and how to organize with our neighbours. This is a good working group for new volunteers to get involved. To learn more contact: **membership@vancouvertenantunion.ca**

COMMUNICATIONS

Responsible for both internal (membership), and external (social media, press) communications. Working closely with other VTU Working Groups, Comms team members help develop and implement outreach strategy for events, campaigns and more.

To learn more contact: **comms@vancouvertenantunion.ca**

DATATOOLS

The Data Tools Working Group uses data as a resource for tenants in their struggle against the increasing precariousness of the housing situation in Vancouver.

To learn more contact: **vtu.datatools@gmail.com**

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHAPTERS

Neighbourhood Chapters organize tenants within apartment buildings, and work to build community and solidarity at a local level.

You can find a directory of currently active chapters on the website linked at the bottom of this page. If you don't live in an area where a neighbourhood chapter exists, you are welcome to join one nearest to you.



Further Reading

For the most up-to-date info on how to join VTU Working Groups and Neighbourhood Chapters, go to vancouvertenantsunion.ca/get_involved

RESOURCES

If you have questions about your rights or an issue with your landlord, you can contact fellow members on our website www.vancouver tenants union.ca/contact

As a volunteer run union, we do not exist to replace social services that already exist to help renters with legal advocacy. Therefore, we might refer your question/case to organizations like the **Tenants Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC)**, a government-funded non-profit that has paid tenant advocates that you can call for help.

AN EDUCATED TENANT IS AN EMPOWERED TENANT

We also encourage you to check out our growing list of educational materials: vancouver tenants union.ca/resources

RENEWING MEMBERSHIP

Our union is powered by members in every way - this includes our funding. Members are asked to pay dues once a year to renew your commitment to our movement.

You can do this at any meeting or online:

www.vancouver tenants union.ca/dues_renewal



Members who have the means are encouraged to **donate monthly**. This helps build our union's financial sustainability.

INVITE A NEIGHBOUR TO JOIN THE VTU

**Membership Form on back of this page
or**

**Sign up online:
vancouvertenantsunion.ca/join**

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Annual member dues start at \$1

Our suggested membership fee formula:

\$1 per \$1000 of your annual income

CASH or CHEQUE

Payable to VANCOUVER TENANTS UNION

SEND FORM TO

**216 - 268 Keefer St.
Vancouver, BC V6A 1X5**



MEMBERSHIP FORM



[Please Print in UPPER CASE]

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____

Email _____

Dues Paid? (\$1 minimum) ☐

Donation: One Time ☐ Monthly Supporter ☐

Amount: _____

Signature: _____

Would you like to be on our Volunteer Email List? ☐

Emergency Related Tenancy Issue: _____
