

What is a spokescouncil?

A spokescouncil is an organizational structure resembling a spoked wheel. It's designed to allow for connection and decision making to be distributed non-hierarchically across large groups of people. Each group is represented by a rotating speaking delegate and a silent note-taker who agree to bring the will, interests, and needs of their working group to spokescouncil meetings. They also agree to communicate important information and decisions to their working groups after meetings.

Establishing a spokescouncil will be an evolving, experimental process. We may not get it right the first time, and that's part of the point! Even this document is an ever-evolving work in progress.

What is a working group?

A working group is a project that utilizes Ridgewood Commons. Examples include the food pantry and gym. Working groups are autonomous projects with their own decision-making processes, members, and purpose. To use the commons, they must first draft a charter outlining what their purpose is and how they plan to use/maintain the space. (See a sample charter at the end of this document.) This charter must then be ratified by the spokescouncil through the standard proposal process, and afterwards it can be revised or revoked the same way.

What is an admin committee?

Ridgewood Commons is both a community and a space, both of which require labor to maintain. In order to keep the space running, the spokescouncil can empower admin committees to make decisions and perform tasks on their behalf. Examples include the finance committee, which manages our bank accounts, and the programming committee, which schedules events. When the spokescouncil creates these admin committees, they outline a charter which clearly delineate the powers and responsibilities of the committee. These charters can be created, revised, and even revoked through the standard proposal process.

Each admin committee has a point person who is accountable for the actions the committee takes (or fails to take) and reports their activity to the spokescouncil at the start of each meeting. If the spokescouncil finds a point person's actions to be out-of-line with their charter, the spokescouncil can initiate a remediation process through the conflict support committee. If their behavior remains out-of-line afterwards, they can be withdrawn and a new point person appointed by the spokescouncil. After six months, their term completes and a new point person can be elected.

In addition to the point people, each committee has multiple members who volunteer themselves and their labor to help the committee function. These members should be considered first when a point person's term ends.

What is the admin collective?

The admin collective is comparable to the spokescouncil, but for admin committees instead of working groups. It does not have the power make decisions for the space, but rather is a

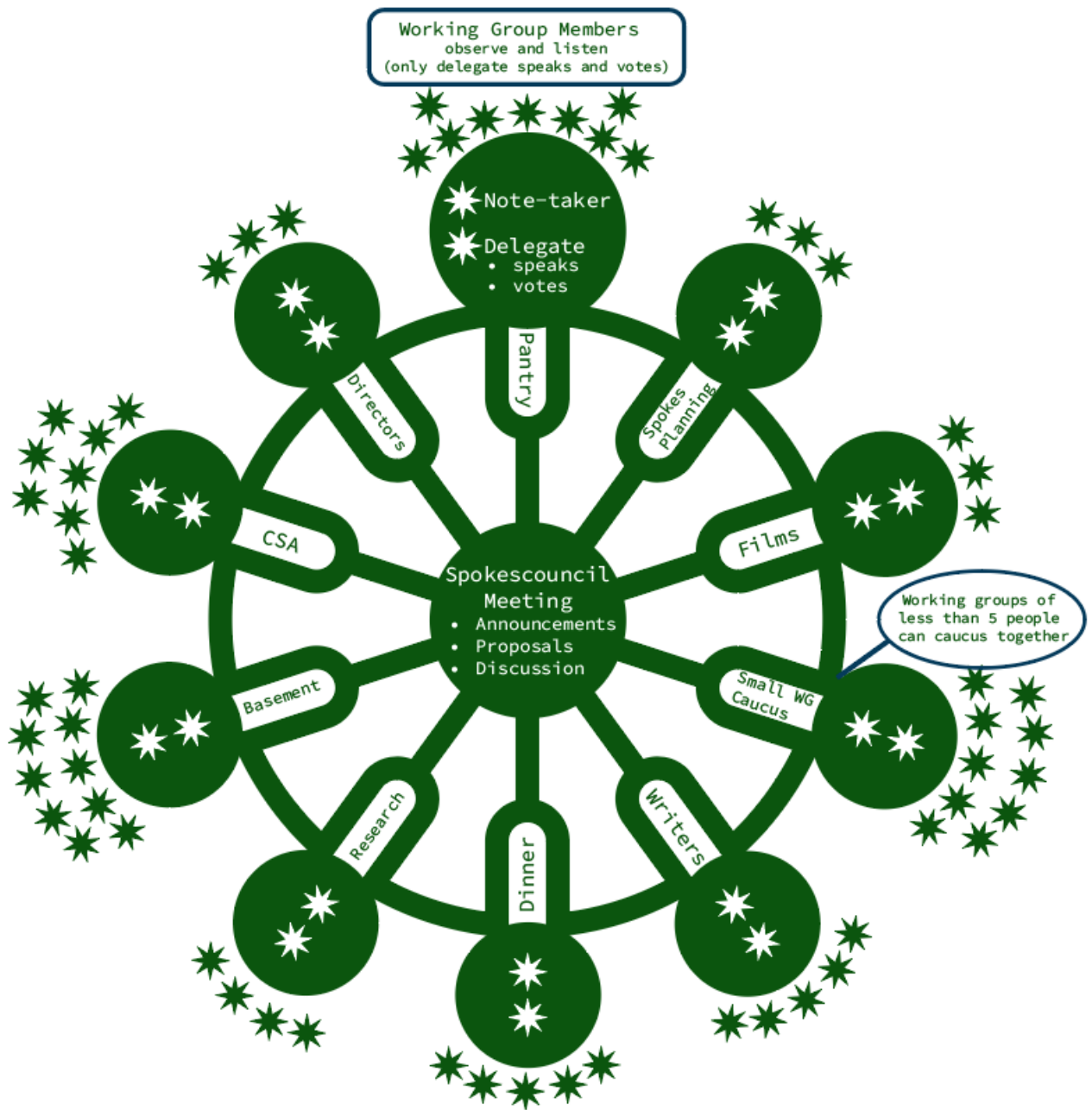
coordinating body to help the various admin committees work together.

What is the bicycle model?

Imagine a bicycle. The front wheel is the spokescouncil. It steers the bike by making high-level decisions for the space. The back wheel is the admin collective. It powers the bike by keeping the space running. While the admin collective has a great deal of power, that power is defined by the spokescouncil--through charters. This power can be modified and revoked as the spokescouncil sees fit. This is balance of power that keeps the bike upright and the authority in the hands in the membership.

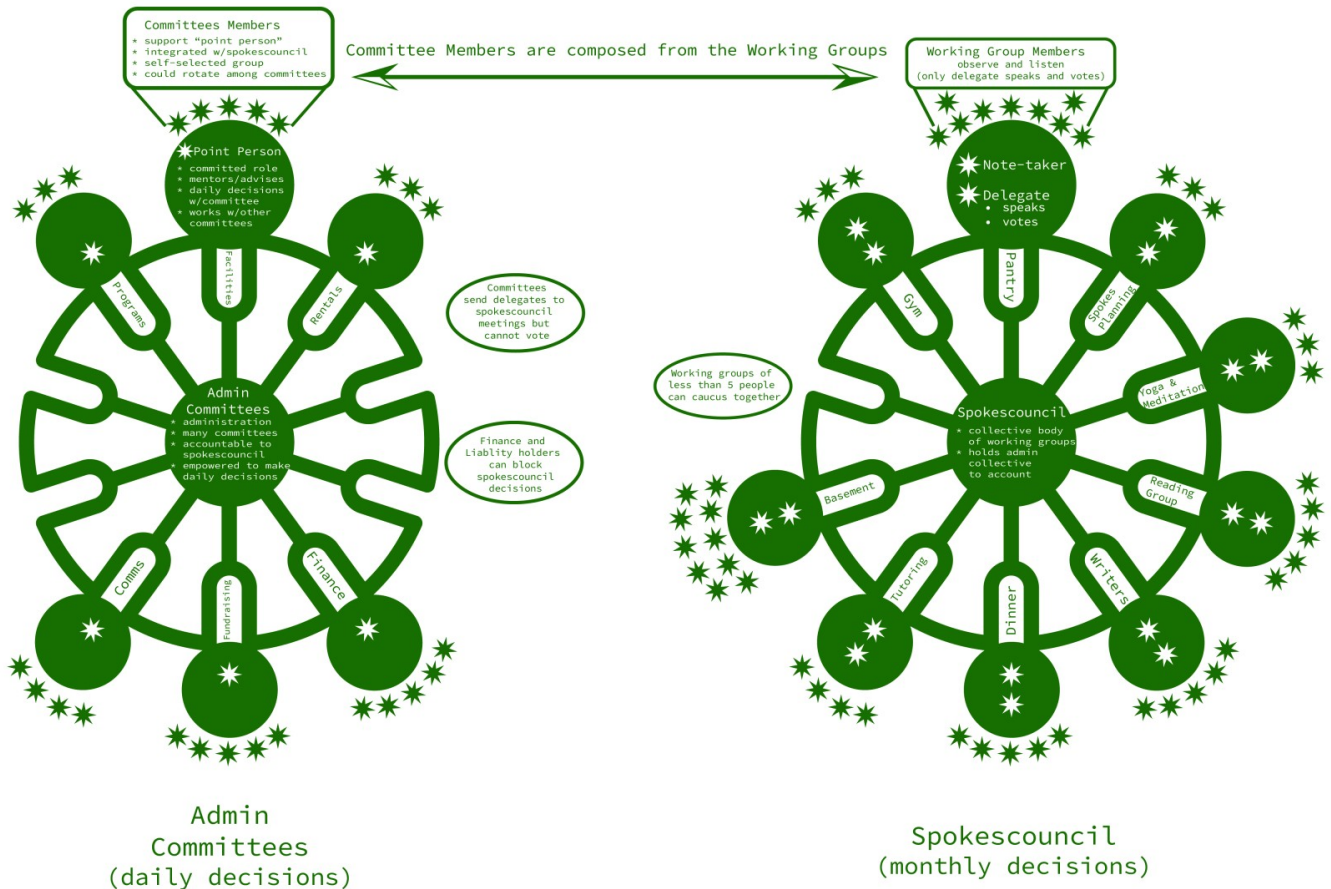
What is the fishbowl format?

A “fish bowl” format is a type of spokescouncil structure that allows all group members who are not delegates and note-takers to observe the meeting and perhaps pass notes and/or other materials to their delegate. The point of the fishbowl is to allow everyone to learn how these meetings work and develop trust with each other. The delegates are the only people allowed to speak during the meeting! This is a measure to keep meetings efficient because we will have a lot to cover and hopefully a lot of people participating. The note-taker is responsible for taking notes on the meeting and discussion and passing this information along to the rest of the working group. *It's important to note that the delegate does not make decisions for the working group!* The delegate can speak for the working group but can only vote on proposals as the working group has decided prior to the meeting and cannot make any decisions for the group that was not already decided upon previously. This is the format we'll be experimenting with for the first meeting.



TWO WHEEL MODEL of COLLECTIVE SELF-GOVERNANCE

at Ridgewood Commons



Why a spokescouncil? What will it be used for at Ridgewood Commons?

Ridgewood Commons operates currently as a loose network of autonomous working groups and projects that do not always effectively communicate with each other. A spokescouncil will hopefully serve as a process and space for facilitating connection, brainstorming, solidarity, skill sharing, decision making and debate amongst working groups. It may also act as a conduit for asking and answering larger existential and political questions about Ridgewood Commons, such as constructing points of unity, strategy and values. Ultimately, it aims to allow Ridgewood Commons's working groups and projects to **co-create** the space together.

Who is Spoke?

- A Spoke is:
 - a group of 5 or more people WHO
 - self-identify as having a stake in Ridgewood Commons (the space) or Ridgewood Commons (the concept) AND
 - a common goal/reason to collaborate amongst themselves

- What if your group is <5 people?
 - Identify a larger working group that you can caucus (join forces) with. Perhaps one that uses the space at similar times or in similar ways.
 - Still come to the Spokescouncil meeting to observe and recruit members!
- The Spokescouncil Planning crew has no opinion on how Spokes decide on a Spokesperson
- This working definition is *descriptive*. Spokes are not approved or decided by anybody. Spokes self-associate in advance of each spokescouncil meeting.
- In the future, the Spokescouncil itself may decide to change the method for determining spokes.

The Spokescouncil Planning Working Group is also a spoke! See that working group explained below.

What is the Spokescouncil Planning Working Group?

The Spokescouncil Planning Working Group is a group of Ridgewood Commons organizers who got together to develop the framework of a spokescouncil as a model for decentralized decision making and community cohesion at Ridgewood Commons, kickstart the process and nurture it as it grows. We saw the pain points and possibilities of the unique situation Ridgewood Commons faces as a loose collection of working groups and projects working under the same roof. We started our working group to research different methods of organization, teach ourselves the techniques and tools and figure out what will work for Ridgewood Commons. We do not see this working group as an authority on how the spokescouncil will function. We are more of a maintenance and research crew who can nudge things along and help provide a broader scope when issues come up. We also will maintain the spokescouncil chats as admins. It is not a closed working group but it is one that requires more interest and dedication to the project and new members will be expected to show up to do work and not just be bystanders. *New members are welcome and see below for how to join!*

How to get involved with Spokescouncil Planning Working Group:

Talk to one of the Planning crew members at a Spokescouncil meeting. They will tell you when the next meeting is scheduled. Show up to a meeting in-person first to see what is involved and see if it is a good fit for you. If you want to join, you are expected to fulfill basic labor requirements: 1) show up to most meetings (missing more than two in a row without a clear indicated reason means you may not have capacity right now. You can cycle out and back in when you have more capacity) 2) volunteer to take on action items after meetings and put solid effort into completing them. 3) If you're active in the group and later realize you cannot fulfil the above requirements, you agree to let the group know and leave the chat

It's a labor of love to join this group. It will be hard work sometimes but also hopefully fun! It will give us the opportunity to learn skills to create spaces that do not rely on structures created by capitalism to govern ourselves as we see fit.

How often will the spokescouncil meet?

The spokescouncil will meet once every month. We will rotate the days between the second Thursday and Saturday of every month.

How will delegates be chosen? How often will delegates rotate?

Working groups have the autonomy to decide how to choose their delegates. Each working group will choose one speaking delegate and one note-taker. They should also have a backup for each role in case someone can't make the meeting. Some examples of how delegates can be chosen: 1) in-chat emoji vote 2) in-person vote 2) Folks volunteer 3) Rotation between every member of a working group 4) name chosen out of a hat. There are many more possibilities that may better suit a particular working group's culture. Someone at every spokes council meeting will take attendance to make sure delegates are being rotated consistently to prevent undue influence from being collected by a minority of people.

How will we make decisions?

We are experimenting with proposals and voting in-meeting. Proposals will be submitted prior to the meeting using the physical proposal board located at Ridgewood Commons. Anyone from a working group can vote on the proposals they would like to vote on at the next meeting using a pen on the proposal page pinned on the board. The top proposals will be chosen to be included in the next meeting and decisions on them will be conducted in-meeting. Working groups should have already reviewed proposals together and given their decision to their delegate to put forward.

What is a Proposal and how do I submit one?

Proposals are forms that communicate what an individual or group would like to add or change to existing Ridgewood Commons structures and culture. They should be well thought out with enough discussion happening with those who might be affected by the proposal in advance. For example, a proposal could be: "We want a pinball machine at Ridgewood Commons." There should be a good reason for this. Maybe it's a fun way to fundraise for Ridgewood Commons because everyone has to pay a dollar to play. A few issues need to be considered to make this work. The people who want the pinball machine should decide where it will live. If it will live in the basement, Basement working group folks should be consulted in advance to see if they want this in their working space. Other important questions need to be asked in advance. If the pinball machine needs to be found for free online or fundraised for, who will do that labor? Who will do the heavy lifting to bring it in? Who will maintain it if it breaks? Is there anyone who is an expert in pinball machines at Ridgewood Commons to consult? Anyone expected to do labor for a proposal to come to be will have to be consulted in advance or expect your proposal to get blocked.

Template for writing a proposal: [[https://wiki.ridgewoodcommons.nyc/books/spokescouncil-documentation\(https://wiki.ridgewoodcommons.nyc/books/spokescouncil-documentation/page/proposal-template\)](https://wiki.ridgewoodcommons.nyc/books/spokescouncil-documentation(https://wiki.ridgewoodcommons.nyc/books/spokescouncil-documentation/page/proposal-template))]

Proposals should be submitted at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting to give enough time to choose which ones to discuss at the next meeting and for working groups to discuss in advance. Urgent proposals can be submitted within 2 weeks but the folks submitting it should alert the announcement chat admins to alert the wider community to act on it. Proposals will be posted physically on a board in Ridgewood Commons and folks can individually indicate their preference for what proposals they want to see in the next meeting. You can use the printer in the space to print it out. The SpokesCouncil Planning working group will tally them and add them to the meeting agenda.

Remember, everything is subject to change via proposal, even how the spokescouncil is structured. If it's not working, we are not stuck with it! We can change it to fit our needs as a collective body.

What is a decision for the spokes v. other kinds of decisions?

Rule of thumb: if you can solve the problem with one conversation, it doesn't need to be brought to the spokescouncil.

Large decisions that would impact multiple working groups are suitable for spokescouncil meetings, while small decisions that only impact you or your working group might not make sense for them. There are certain decisions that are delegated to Ridgewood Commons's directors for legal and liability reasons. Director's will break these down at the first meeting.

Not sure if something you want to do is appropriate for a spokescouncil meeting proposal? Ask one of the Planning crew members.

Example 1: The roof is leaking, urgent actions need to be made to fix the immediate problem. This should not be brought to a spokescouncil. People should just go and do what it takes to get the water leaking under control. However, long term the roof needs renovations. This might require large amounts of Ridgewood Commons funds to be directed to this. A working group or two would like to initiate a fundraiser drive instead of using internal funds and recruit a team of people to run this fundraiser, this is a decision to bring to the spokescouncil via a proposal.

Example 2: The reading group wants to pick a new book for the next month. This is for the reading group only to decide, this isn't a spokescouncil issue. However, if the reading group would like to build a wing to the current library and stock it exclusively full of copies of Stirner's "The Ego and Its Own", that would be a proposal the reading group would write.

Example 3 (from Real Life): Reading group members get chatty after meetings and are disruptive of evening meditation. A brief conversation between someone from the reading group and the meditation facilitator happens so the reading group members make sure they are quiet when meditation starts. This didn't need to be a spokes council decision. However, meditation and yoga are quiet activities that make it hard for rentals to be booked to fund the space, so a proposal is written to schedule all the quiet activities on Monday to allow rentals to happen any other day of the week. This is appropriate for a spokescouncil decision!

A note about conflict: Conflict happens and is healthy and should not be avoided. We want to foster a conflict support culture, not a conflict avoidant culture. There needs to be some integration of conflict support and the spokescouncil, but it is not developed yet. There are plans to start a conflict support working group that could help mediate conflict at Ridgewood Commons and access conflict support beyond the Ridgewood Commons community if needed. Spokescouncil meetings could be a good moment for folks to reach out to future conflict working group members and ask for support. There might also be space for updates on larger, more public conflicts that widely affect the community. In all conflicts, direct and open conversations should ideally start between the parties in conflict before support is requested because not all conflicts need conflict support resources but it's important for that support to be available.

LIFECYCLE OF A PROPOSAL

A working group or an individual has an idea for a change or program they would like to see at Woodbine

They write the proposal and pin it to the proposal board in the space

Individuals in working groups vote on the proposals listed on the proposal board that they would like to vote on in the next meeting

Top proposals are added to the agenda. The agenda is submitted in advance of the meeting

Working groups meet and choose one delegate and one note-taker for the upcoming meeting. They discuss their vote on the proposals on the agenda

During the spokescouncil meeting, the delegates of each working group will vote (in alignment with their working groups decision)

PASSES

Proposals will integrate friendly ammendments and proposers will make it into reality

DOES NOT PASS

Proposals will either be rewritten and submitted for next meeting or dropped

Next meeting, there will be progress check-ins and requests for help

How will voting work?

Overview of the Proposal voting process (keep close to 33 min total):

- Intro proposal - offered by the group who created it (5 min)
 - Questions/Concerns (5 min)
 - Friendly amendments (10 min)
 - Withdrawals (1 min)
 - Voting/Blocks/Stand Asides using “Fist to Five” (1 min)
 - If Block occurs > discussion > amendments offered (10 min)
 - Vote again (1 min)

Clarification of terminology:

“Friendly Amendments” are comments offered to improve a proposal before a vote. They should be quick and small in scope and can be written into a proposal after it is passed. A friendly amendment can be offered when you are in support of a proposal or have some reservations but are generally ok with it.

“Withdrawal” is when the group who put forward the proposal decides to withdraw it or delay voting. This might happen because they realize they need to make more amendments to make the proposal better or because they realize it’s not a good moment to offer the proposal as is.

Voting in-meeting will be conducted using “Fist to Five.” “Fist to Five” is a quick visual to see how a delegate votes on a proposal. The delegate raises their fist high in the air and when the vote begins, they can vote by keeping their fist close or raising a number of fingers that indicates their level of agreement for the proposal:

- Fist (0 fingers): Does not agree at all (a Block)
 - 1 finger: Hold on (a Block)
 - 2 fingers: Reservations, but could be convinced
 - 3 fingers: Okay with it
 - 4 fingers: Sounds good
 - 5 fingers: Total agreement

After votes are counted, the proposal is then passed (or not) using “Consensus Minus 2”. This means 2 “Blocks” (a Block is shown by either a fist or holding up one finger) will keep a proposal from being passed immediately. Blocks mean you are extremely against a proposal and want to prevent it from passing if possible. Delegates who block will have to justify their block and further conversation and possibly a withdrawal or new vote with amendments may follow.

Important note: Blocks are serious. Anyone making them should be ready to articulate why to the group and never be done just for the sake of blocking another group’s proposal out of bad intent or because someone is in a bad mood. Blocks should usually not come as a surprise b/c conversations had ideally taken place before the proposal was submitted with the people who would be involved in the proposal tasks. Blocks are not opportunities to shut down a vote to follow up with friendly

amendments. Blocks mean no amount of friendly amendments could make you pass this proposal.

“Stand Asides” are when delegates choose not to vote at all. This shows a neutral feeling and means the working group doesn’t care whether the proposal is passed or not.

How will the spokescouncil communicate outside of meetings?

To keep meetings moving quickly, we need a place for spokes representatives to discuss proposals before the meeting even starts. In addition, we need a way to keep the entirety of the Ridgewood Commons membership on the same page. These two chats will fulfill those functions.

Two Signal chats: 1) Ridgewood Commons Spokes Council Announcements and 2) Ridgewood Commons Spokes Council Chat. The first is purely for announcements (such as which proposals passed) and meant to be consumed by the entirety of the Ridgewood Commons membership. The latter is a chat for freeform discussion about upcoming proposals.

1. Announcements chat administrators must follow up after meetings by consulting the meeting notes and share with the chat the outcome of the various agenda items.
2. Ongoing: people in the Announcements chat should invite new Ridgewood Commons members to join the chat.
3. Ongoing: after a delegate completes their term, they must invite the next delegate to the Spokescouncil Chat. They may choose to exit the chat at this point, though that is not required.

What will we do to prepare for spokescouncil meetings?

4. Working groups will choose a delegate and a note-taker via any method your working group wants to use. The delegate should be prepared to speak in public and deliver the comments of their working group.
5. The delegate can then join the spokescouncil chats for more information
 1. Ridgewood Commons Spokescouncil Delegates Chat
https://signal.group/#CjQKINGb5NRDVS0Sh0_5ueEyHMXfP0NyXcJkvrJ6yVkTpB-oEhCWkp9_BrawEVRWrwwYjoW7
 2. Ridgewood Commons Spokescouncil Announcements
<https://signal.group/#CjQKIOCDgBuwmNf1IPbBBisjSm55rZBcHFKgsH8O95RMkWVdEhCcIUsMKaWKCsjdq84ccUJf>
6. Individuals: Read the proposals on the board and vote for the ones you want to discuss next meeting.
7. Working groups: when the proposals are added to the agenda, the chat admins will share this in advance so working groups can decide on how they want to vote.

