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Co-operatives are member-owned organizations. Through them people work together to meet common needs and goals. Co-operatives can take different forms: there are, for example, consumer co-operatives, credit unions, worker co-operatives, and housing co-operatives. Co-operatives bring their members immediate economic benefits in terms of reasonably priced quality goods and services. They are also committed to shared ownership and democratic decision-making. There are well over 9,000 co-operatives in Canada.

What is a housing co-operative?

A housing co-operative is a co-operative that provides housing to its members. While there are a number of different types of housing co-ops, typically, the co-operative owns or leases the building and the land, and the members, through their shares own the co-operative. Aside from their membership share, members pay a monthly fee to cover operating costs (including taxes, mortgage payments, and utilities) and to build a reserve fund to cover future repairs and improvements. There are over 2,000 housing co-operatives in Canada.

What are the benefits of being a member of a housing co-operative?

A housing co-operative is comparatively affordable to join. Compared to other types of housing, co-operatives typically have lower down payments, economies of scale, and a longer mortgage term.

Living costs remain affordable. Since co-operatives charge their members only enough to cover costs, repairs, and reserves for future expenses, monthly fees remain comparatively low.

Security. Co-operative members have more security than tenants. Members can live in a co-op for as long as they wish, as long as they follow the rules (bylaws) of the co-op and pays their housing charge (rent) on time.

The right to participate. Co-operative members elect the board of directors that sets all significant policies for the co-operative. They also have the right to run for election to the board. Members also vote on the co-operative's annual budget and its policies.

Membership in a community. People who live in co-operatives have chosen to live co-operatively in a community. A housing co-operative can serve as the base for establishing other community activities such as vehicle sharing and joint purchasing.

Are housing co-operatives regulated by government?

Housing co-operatives are usually legally incorporated corporations. In Manitoba, an incorporated housing co-operative must comply with the provisions of *The Cooperatives Act of Manitoba*. Member rights and board responsibilities are set out in the Act. Certain provisions of *The Residential Tenancies Act of Manitoba* apply to Manitoba housing co-operatives. The federal *Income*

Tax Act determines the non-profit status of housing co-operatives.

A housing co-operative is also bound by the provisions of any operating agreement that it enters into with a provincial government housing authority (or any other government agency).

Housing co-operatives must also comply with all laws that relate to their activities in matters such as safety, employment, contracts, privacy, occupiers' liability, the environment, and human rights.

How is a housing co-operative run?

Members control the co-operative in a number of ways. The co-operative's bylaws have to be approved by the membership. The membership also elects the board of directors. Aside from the board of directors many co-operatives have separate committees to deal with issues such as finance, environment, and member involvement.

Who takes care of the building?

Depending on their size, housing co-operatives might hire their own maintenance staff, engage the services of building management company, or share building management with other co-operatives.

How do you join a housing co-operative?

One joins a co-operative by purchasing a share in a co-operative. The price of this share varies depending the nature of the co-operative's area of economic activity and provincial law.

How are suites assigned in a housing co-operative?

Housing co-operatives usually have membership criteria that govern how apartments are assigned.

What happens when a member moves out?

In most Canadian housing co-operatives, when a member decides to move out, the co-operative buys back the members' share. Many co-operatives maintain a redemption fund to ensure shares can be bought back in a timely manner.

What do I own as a member of a housing co-operative?

A member owns shares in the co-operative. The ownership of these shares gives them the right to live in a unit owned by the co-operative.

What are the responsibilities of a co-operative to its members?

Housing co-operatives sign occupancy agreements with their members that outline their responsibilities. Typically, co-operatives are required to maintain the property, pay all expenses related to the operation of the co-operative, ensure the supply of basic services such as heating, cooling, hot water, and electricity.

Where can I get more information on housing co-operatives?

Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada: <http://www.chfc.ca/index.asp>.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation: "Guide to Co op Housing".

Government of Manitoba, Co-operation Promotion Board

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/coop/pdf/cpb/cpb-co-op-housing-guide-web.pdf>

For more information

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