

## Co-op Toolbox - Part 4:

# Maintaining the Co-op Property



Serving co-ops in Durham, Toronto and York Region.

A good maintenance program is essential to a well-run co-op.

- Co-op members want to live in well-maintained co-ops. They want repairs done promptly. Co-ops have a duty to provide safe and properly maintained housing.
- Good maintenance reduces vacancy loss. If the co-op is well-maintained, members are less likely to move out and it is easier to attract new members.
- Well-maintained buildings discourage vandalism.
- Routine maintenance can reduce costs. Co-ops that neglect maintenance will eventually have to make expensive repairs.



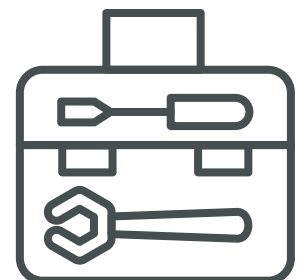
The board's role is to make sure that the co-op is keeping up with maintenance, both in the short term and in the long term. It is important for the board to ensure that the co-op has

- a maintenance budget
- a replacement reserve plan
- a plan for emergencies
- a process to deal with safety hazards
- a routine and preventive maintenance program
- a process for dealing with members' requests for repairs
- a system of property inspections and repairs
- a clear policy on members' responsibilities
- a process to ensure good quality repairs



Sometimes, co-ops will reduce the maintenance budget to balance the budget or to avoid raising housing charges. This approach will cost more money, not less, in the end. Putting maintenance off often means more costly repairs down the road.

Co-ops use the replacement reserve to pay for replacing or repairing capital items such as roofs, furnaces, elevators, and sidewalks. These items are usually expensive to replace or repair. Co-ops put money aside in a reserve so that they can save over time to cover the cost. A replacement reserve plan helps you decide how much money the co-op should be putting aside.



A replacement reserve involves

- inspecting your buildings and property to make a list of capital items and an estimate of how long they will last
- finding out how much it will cost to replace each item
- deciding how much you need to save each year to pay for replacing capital items.

The board is responsible for making sure that the co-op is prepared for emergencies. Members and staff need to know what to do and who to call in an emergency — fire, flooding, electrical hazards, power failures, no heat, and so on. The board is also responsible for making sure the co-op deals with safety hazards such as

- Icy steps or walkways
- Lifting edges on flooring
- Wet floors
- Uneven walkways
- Poorly lit areas

Apartment co-ops need to inspect and maintain major mechanical systems (elevators, boilers, safety systems) regularly. The law requires regular maintenance of some of these systems (fire safety systems, elevators). Others have recommended maintenance schedules.

Your co-op should have a system for keeping track of maintenance requests. Co-ops can use a computerized system, work order forms, or even a simple maintenance log. The system needs to record

- when the member made the request
- who will do the repair — maintenance staff or a contractor
- when the work was completed and inspected.

Regular inspections are the only way to know for certain which repairs need doing. They will help the co-op identify current problems and plan future maintenance. Schedule inspections for the whole co-op, inside and outside, once a year. Move out inspections are equally important.

For large jobs, the board will have to evaluate quotes and approve contracts. The co-op should

- provide a written list of the work the co-op wants done. Do this every time you ask contractors for prices
- ask more than one contractor to give a price
- have a standard written agreement or contract for all work that covers warranties, deficiencies, holdbacks, change orders, and strikes.
- have someone inspect the work before the co-op pays the contractor.

Prompt repairs and routine maintenance will save money in the long run and make your members happier.

