

Guideline for Council Governance For Converting to Sustainable Living By the Foundation of Sustainable Living

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I. The Vision and Inspiration

The vision for a governance for the Foundation of Sustainable Living (FOSL) is for an organizational structure that enables the fullest and most appropriate participation by its membership. It should facilitate self-governing, working and living together harmoniously and productively. The framework outlined here is for a Council-oriented democratic structure and includes guidelines and recommendations for its optimal operation. Democracies have a long history and have been the choice of many cultures with varied results. The beauty of democracy is that it creates a context, a flexible frame that lends itself to being designed by its participants around a common vision. Councils have been the form for organization and democratic governance used by many nature-oriented and tribal cultures for thousands of years. The original democracies on this continent were indigenous. They were rooted in a council-oriented, self-governing structure. Elements of these council systems serve as inspiration for this governance design in its infrastructure and spirit of interaction.

In the "Circle of Laws" governance, all seats around the council were occupied by "chiefs." We would call them "leaders." They contributed from their particular discipline, area of expertise, level of responsibility or group they represented. To assure balanced, whole-systems decisions, each took a seat of responsibility for a specific wisdom perspective, and spoke from that place for the community (see Councils @ Work attachment). The council was always gender balanced. The chiefs were chosen by and served at the behest of a Grandmothers or elder council, and a children's circle was represented.

Democracy

What makes this FOSL democracy different than the one we have been living in? We have the benefit of learning from and building on other democracies, communities and life experience in designing our community and its governance. There is one truth that is key: No matter what the infrastructure is, it is the consciousness that inhabits the structure that is the most important element in determining its success. Democracy is the highest calling in living together. The degree of success is determined by the degree we all can operate with trust, transparency, flexibility, inclusiveness and a high regard for each other. A democratic system of "equals" is the most vulnerable, valuable and rewarding.

Creating the Context

This document presents both a framework and basic philosophy underlying FOSL governance. It is intended to be a infrastructure that is dynamic and can continuously evolve as needed. The aim of this section of the FOSL Plan is to enable the community to accomplish their common visions by facilitating the day-to-day practical operations and skills education, embedded in a life-affirming, socially sustainable and physically sustainable, community-based on a Permaculture philosophy. This governance design supports a participatory, membership driven organization whose transparency and flexibility can sustain itself into the unlimited future. Each bio-region or community will shape the specific content of the vision, focus and guidelines for living and working together into a charter that links to FOSL. The common purpose of this context remains the same to facilitate a loving life.

Equality

All democracies assume, in theory, that we are all equal. The interpretation of "equal" has been at the root of many power struggles. Often "Leadership" is misunderstood as an unequal expression of power. We are not equal in the sense of being "the same." We bring to the community different talents, capabilities, lifestyle preferences, levels of participation, philosophies and on and on. In an effort to lay

the groundwork for clear relationships regarding power, authority, leadership and decision making, consider the following: Can we strive for equanimity in how we regard each other, with respect for and appreciation of our differences regardless of role. More important, in support of our roles and responsibilities. Some of us are natural leaders, enjoy high involvement and visibility. Some of us are at the other end of the spectrum comfortable in the background, not very visible or vocal. And, others have infinite proclivities and preferences in between. In this regard, for a democracy to work inclusively, can start by intentionally and consciously letting go of any mental yardsticks that measure, among other things, who is doing more, how often and what is “fair”. Instead we can choose to direct our focus and energy on the projects, its needs and how to best fulfill them. As unique individuals, we shine and contribute best to the greater whole when we are our most natural, in a role that ignites our enthusiasm and when we are appreciated for who we are. We are all equal in our humanity.

Power, Leadership and Authority

There are two approaches to democracy, and they are founded in very different worldviews. One is adversarial and the other is unifying. The democracy we are accustomed to living in is adversarial. Opinions are presented as polarized positions, argument, conflict and righteousness are the common currency for communication. Often followed by hard feelings. Decisions are made by committees that are compromising, trading favors or infused with vested interest. No one is completely satisfied, neither winners or losers. The adversarial system tends to get agreement on the lowest common denominator. Leadership and power are often abusive and reserved for cronies. Punishment is the strategy for dealing with those out of compliance. It is understandable that people experiencing adversarial democracy can be skeptical about democracy as a system, working successfully for a community. It is geared toward creating more of a kingdom rather than a “kin-dom.”

FOSL is ushering in a new paradigm, a unifying democracy energized by the spirit of friendship. How are we building in elements that will increase the likelihood of a successful, satisfying, harmonious way for diverse people to live together? Dialog is the currency of the culture. Decisions are the result of deep investigation, consensus-style, for the best solution for all. We can reframe our definition of Leadership. Leaders are necessary. They take initiative, harness resources and people for tasks, hold the big picture of what is needed and take responsibility to guide the process. Leadership is interchangeable and depends on the needs of the project. For optimum success, community members or citizens fully support the leader by bringing their expertise, enthusiastic participation and discernment to the process. Each project determines the levels of authority and accountability in the planning process. The keys to a unifying democracy is to make sure there is alignment in purpose and direction, to keep all the appropriate people informed, and stay current in resolving any disagreements. Conflict, misunderstandings and dissonance will happen. FOSL will have tools and practices are built in to the governance to resolve and transform disagreements in the most compassionate, life-enhancing way.

The Big Picture

The Governance and Council structure outlined below is scalable for any FOSL “entity” (community, bio-region, village, farm, business, enterprise) within the FOSL network. In FOSL, all entity members/associates and all working directly for FOSL will be members with a vote and voice. Entities will approve and/or design individual Charters/Agreements whose purpose, local governance but must be consistent with FOSL’s goals and the two Guiding Principles of FOSL, that of social sustainability and physical sustainability. The governance structure of FOSL is designed to create representation of each member, whether working at the local level or directly for FOSL. The local Council of Directors provides overall guidance for the evolving needs and direction of its community. Decisions are made as locally as possible.

Legal Structure-Mutual Benefit Companies

It is anticipated that the ownership model of property, businesses, and assets for the Foundation of Sustainable Living will be in two layers. FOSL’s Board will buy land as it can, and set up operating entities on the land as “Mutual Benefit Companies”. As a member of a Mutual Benefit Company, a person or family has ownership rights of use of the community and their area in the community by their investment of work, money, services, or property, this is good for their lifetimes, and the use is inheritable and passes with the land, to their heirs or designates if such choose to stay on the land and are found to be acceptable by the local community and FOSL.

In order to stay inside the operating structures approved by the current regulatory powers, FOSL will generally be managed in a fashion conforming to IRS regulations to maintain its tax exempt status. FOSL will have a Board of Directors and Administrative staff. The FOSL Board will be, in part, composed of members from the operating entities, which will be "Mutual Benefit Companies".

The FOSL Governance

This governance section is an outline to be filled in with specifics by the people who participate as members in the overall FOSL organization. The members of the local Mutual Benefit Companies are intended to be the beneficiaries of this body of work. Members who choose to work within FOSL will be expected to claim ownership in the Governance concepts outlined below by actively participating in their specific entity/community, their environment, with their set of skills, expertise, willingness and conscious intent.

The success of this Governance design for the Foundation for Sustainable Living community rests on the following assumptions:

- This is an intentional community using democratic processes to be socially sustainable, which implies a participatory membership devoted to peaceful, cooperative, skillful means and environmental sustainability.
- Collaboration, dialog and consensual decision-making for the good of the whole are the currency of these democratic processes.
- The intention is to be and do for the good of all. Democracy is a context, a container for self-governance whose level of success is intrinsically dependent on the level of consciousness, knowledge and involvement of the participants.
- Members are committed to be self-responsible, self-teaching, who are always learning and growing as a life-long commitment.
- To maintain a socially healthy community: Members will hold forums for enhancing human relations on a regular basis, for newly entering members and community members to focus on fostering healthy relationships, maintaining community values and integrity. Teachers and workshop leaders can be sourced internally or brought in.
- Member's forum will also be an arena for skills and various topics to support physical health of the community such as; living sustainably, body care, health and fitness, farming, crafts etc.
- Members are committed to creating and supporting these communities as environmentally sustainable and as self-sustaining on every level possible.
- The community welcomes a diversity of members, which includes all ages, genders, religious and sexual orientation, and ethnic origin.
- All members are equal in voice while skill, expertise, experience, and age is appropriately respected.
- Leadership is collaborative and situational. Leadership positions are filled by merit, general experience, and expertise in a given discipline and by being held in high personal regard by community members.

II. The Structure of Foundation of Sustainable Living (FOSL)

Foundation of Sustainable Living (FOSL)

1. **Board of Directors** - The legal body that oversees legal compliance and fiduciary responsibility for the local operating entities, Mutual Benefit Companies.
2. **FOSL Administration**- Performs functions in behalf of the FOSL Board

Mutual Benefit Companies (MBC) & other entities

1. **General Council** – Gathering of the entire membership of the community
2. **(Leadership) Council of Directors**– Administers day-to-day matters affecting the whole.
3. **MBC Administration** – Performs day-to-day functions at the behest of the Council of Directors.
4. **Standing Councils (Committees)** – Functioning councils that oversee and perform designated projects.
5. **Expert Advisors** – Individuals with particular skills, expertise or obvious talents, who serve as a resource to community members.
6. **Elders Council** – Mature and respected members of the community who provide the guiding wisdom to oversee the integrity of the governing process and its leaders whom the Elder Council is responsible for appointing.

Foundation of Sustainable Living (FOSL)

1. **Board of Directors** - The legal body that oversees legal compliance and fiduciary responsibility for the local operating entities, Mutual Benefit Companies.

Scope

- The Board will supervise FOSL Administration to carry out its day-to-day business.
- The Board is responsible for the strategic planning, financial planning, fundraising, legal compliance for the entire community of FOSL.
- The Board's primary concern is purchasing land and forming Mutual Benefit Companies in compliance with legal requirements and community needs.
- The Board will set and publish the standards and parameters for Mutual Benefit Companies and require an annual review of their charter on the anniversary of its acceptance.
- The Board will also sponsor, fund and support businesses that are dedicated to sustainability; products, technology, tools, social sustainability technologies, education.

Members –The Directors consists of Representative from each Mutual Benefit Company and must include the following roles; a FOSL executive director, financial director, legal affairs director and operations director and any operational positions needed on the director level. Directors do not have to be residents or belong to a Mutual Benefit Company if they are employees or contracted experts.

2. **FOSL Administration**- Performs functions in behalf of the FOSL Board

Scope

- Communication: facilitate communication with Mutual Benefit Companies
- Maintaining records; oversee systems support for the community's functions
- Finance: bookkeeping, payroll, financial analysis, budget oversight for Board functions
- Marketing-publishing marketing materials
- Human Resources: Board level
- Community membership: managing, tracking
- Public Relations: interface with the marketplace

Mutual Benefit Companies (MBC) & other entities

1. **General Council** is a gathering of the whole community (the entire membership in residence or whatever defines "whole" at the time including remote members). Presence at gatherings can be in-person, electronic, by pre-authorized proxy to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Scope

- The General Council is concerned with matters that affect the community as a whole; materially, socially or in governance matters.
- The General Council must give input (ideas, recommendations, information) to the Standing Councils (see section 3) and exchange ideas on subjects that would benefit from the consensual validation of the wisdom of the community at large.

- The General Council will receive reports, updates, decisions, and changes in policy from the Standing Councils.

Members - All members of FOSL including local community members and FOSL workers. Each member, of any age (those under 15 years old to be determined on an individual basis), without regard to level of financial, skill or service contribution, length or term of membership has one voice and when needed, one vote.

2. (Leadership) Council of Directors (Directors)

Scope

- This council directs all matters impacting the day-to-day operations of the community as a whole. Directors are concerned with annual planning, including direction, vision and mission; community policies and procedures, financial management, human resources, public relations, fundraising, human relations forums for new and existing members, and additional functional support to standing councils as becomes needed.
- The Council of Directors is the receiver of recommendations by the other councils on changes that affect FOSL policy, direction and operations. Directors consider all input and issues the final decision.
- Directors guide the initial design of the structure and the integrity of the process during the development of this organizational council system and each of the Standing Councils (Committees) until the Standing Councils are running smoothly and autonomously within their scope.
- The Directors will design the parameters for and receive a Charter from each of the Standing councils that defines the scope of operation, responsibility, authority, human resources and expertise, budget, structure, equipment and supplies needed. The Charters will all be available to the community at large.
- The Directors will choose or oversee the selection of key personnel and project leaders who will create and administer a Standing Council according to his or her ability, talent and fit. Directors will maintain the authority to determine whether the fit, competency and accountability of key personnel serves the goals of the Standing Council and the community at large. If issues rise to the level of dispute, the Elders will determine the actions needed.
- The Directors will oversee that the Standing Councils fulfill their Charter and service to the community in the spirit of its intention. They oversee the scope of authority of the councils.
- The Directors will develop a formal communication procedures and protocols with and between all councils and membership.
- They will design and monitor the processes and criteria for acquiring and accepting members for the Community, including financial and membership obligations. They will refine these processes as needed over time.
- A designated Director will oversee the FOSL Administrative staff.
- The Directors will design the membership criteria of Directors; length of terms, role, responsibilities and accountabilities. The particulars of the scope, protocols, strategies and tasks of the Directors will be further defined and refined with time and experience.
- The Directors will function in a consensus-style with the intention and goal of finding the highest truth and best direction for the good of all. They will more specifically define their internal decision-making procedure.

- The Directors will sit as Wisdom Council as outlined in the attached document, each holding a specific perspective and seat in behalf of the community to insure a whole systems environment to review all matters.

Members –The Directors consists of one Representative from each Standing Council plus a FOSL director, financial director, Legal Affairs director and Operations director and any operational positions needed on the director level.

Accountability Parameters- The members of Council of Directors are accountable to the Elders Council and serve at their pleasure. They are responsible for reporting to and following advice from the membership at large on status and policy changes approved as permanent, preparing regular reports to the membership, annual reports and budgets for the Board of Directors and maintaining the integrity of Community principles, overseeing the well-being of the Community, Guiding the direction and evolution of the Community.

3. FOSL Administration Council

Scope - Under the direction of the Council of Directors, the Administration Council will perform the day-to-day functions of the community not performed by individual Standing Councils, can include:

- Reception: provide central contact point internally and externally
- Communication: facilitate communication for Standing Councils with each other, members, Directors, vendors, clients
- Maintaining records; create and oversee systems support for the community's functions
- Finance: bookkeeping, payroll, financial analysis, budget oversight
- Marketing-publishing marketing materials,
- Publishing schedules, materials for communication with the General Council members
- Human Resources: support hiring and assigning staff in coordination with the needs of the Standing Councils, compensation
- Community membership: managing, tracking
- Public Relations: interface with the marketplace

Membership - Members will staff as needed under the direction of the Directors.

4. Standing Councils and Committees are the specific groups organized to formulate and facilitate the day-to-day activities of the Community. The proposed councils are; the Agriculture, Shelter, Real Property, Business, Education, Public Relations and Community Liaison. The Council of Directors may change, add or dissolve any of these councils as the need arises. (See the current descriptions below)

- The Standing Council develops a Charter to be approved by the Leadership Council of Directors for sustainability parameters and completeness and the Elders Council for functional need and fit for the community at large and quality of Leadership.
- The Charter: defines the scope of operation, product or service, responsibility, authority, human resources and expertise, budget, structure, equipment and supplies needed.
- The council elects/appoints a representative to the Council of Directors.
- A Standing council operates autonomously and independently in its area of expertise according to its Charter as approved by the Directors.
- Standing Councils may ask for advice and receive input from the General Council to consider. Decisions involving expertise of the Standing are locally made with exception of matters that greatly affect the entire community. Any disputes or a lack of clarity will be deferred to the Council of Directors for resolution and if still in question, then the Council of Elders will make the final decision.

- Standing Councils may organize themselves internally according to their needs in alignment with the principles and values of the community. They may create a core council for leadership responsibilities and sub-councils for projects or tasks limited by time and/or scope.
- A Standing Council can employ members of the community, hire independent contractors as needed and create expert resources. Project Leaders are accountable to the Directors.
- Standing Councils will manage human resources matters such as talent and personnel acquisition, training, interpersonal interactions, shifting of responsibilities and compensation (within the purview of the Charter) internally. If any matter is irresolvable internally, the member or any staff can request review by the Council of Directors.
- A Standing Council will be considered the expert in its field by the community at large and therefore use that knowledge to make decisions for the best interest of the community. Only in cases considered a serious breach of its responsibilities, violation of community principles and values can the actions of a Standing Council be called for review by the Directors and or the Elders.

Membership – As each Standing Council is established it will determine its needs, present them to the Council of Directors for coordination and approval. It will outline its needs in its Charter, or informally if time is of the essence. The Directors will support each Standing Council according to community needs and available resources.

Accountability Parameters- Standing Councils are responsible for: the day-to-day management of the business of the council according to its Charter. It will report regularly (to be determined according to individual need) to the Council of Directors on the status of the work, proposed policy changes, always maintaining the integrity of Community principles and the wellbeing of the Community. Charters will be updated if the scope, interest and tasks of the Standing Council change. Charters will be renewed annually. Approval for major changes will be sought from the Directors.

The Charter defines:

- the scope of operation-what it wants to accomplish by when
- product or service provided for whom
- reporting responsibility (Leadership), decision authority
- resources; expertise, budget, equipment or supplies needed
 - communication to community planned (website, internal emails, reports)

Core Council for Leadership of a Standing Council

As the size of the Standing Council increases, each Council may chose to have a small group work together as Core leaders to increase council efficiency. Standing Councils can have a **Core** of 3 or 5 people (*to be selected internally*). It is important to have a responsible Core to expedite the business of the Standing Council.

The **Core** in each council will:

- select a representative to sit in the Leadership Council
- determine meeting times and places
- prioritize tasks and conversations according to goals
- maintain records
- make decisions within its scope
- organize sub-councils/committees for specific task implementation
- communicate with the General council
- make recommendations to the Council of Directors as needed

- process the input of the Director's and General councils meetings

- maintain the integrity of the process being created

Sub-councils are organized for carrying out specific projects or tasks. A sub-council does not have to limit themselves to members of the Standing Council. Any member of the Community whose talent and/or knowledge could serve to expedite the task can be invited to participate for a specific purpose. Independent contractors, experts, specialists may be hired to fulfill needs of the project.

- **Proposed Standing Councils (to be added)**
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6. Expert Advisors

Expertise and advise from various people as needed with no decision making capacity.

7. Elders Council

III. The Evolution of Involvement

The council system is designed for the involvement of all members of the Community. Members may participate in General Council meetings on Standing Councils and on the Council of Directors. They may work on a sub-council for a project or be selected for any positions that will be designed in the future.

Members are invited to choose at least one council to participate on. Members may participate on as many councils as they wish and serve on any level they feel called to.

For the success and survival of a participatory organization it is vital that people are inspired to be involved. It is to this end that we present this model. The wisdom, experience, guidance and participation of all of us will shape the future of the Community.

IV. General Guidance for all Councils (in progress)

Keeping the Integrity of a Unifying Community Process

Balancing the needs of outer structure with the inner energy of respect and agape guides the Community organization in working together and maintaining ongoing relationships:

- To strive to meet each other at interface and to see differences as stuck energy needing an appropriate fulcrum to help unblock the flow. Forcing an issue could foster non-participation or withdrawal can be felt as depletion in the energy.
- Council governance creates an opportunity, an opening. In this spirit we can come to the circle in new mind, holding open the space for ideas or another way to see.
- The value of respect toward another being is optimal in the interchanging roles of leader and supporter, speaker and listener.
- As this model evolves we want to keep present the frame of our intention; to work and live together collaboratively, bringing our work and community as a model to the people of the world as a healing opportunity.

V. Decision Making (In process)

It is recommended that each council make decisions or make its recommendations based on a Consensus-based process. It is assumed that many decisions will be made in the day-to-day

conversations and dialog. This **Consensus Decision Making Process** is recommended for those times that decision isn't apparent, clear or brings up very different views.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING PROCESS

A consensus decision-making process is designed to capture the best wisdom of the group. Decision-making follows a rich conversation that allows the opportunity for the best thinking, from many perspectives to be considered. Although this process has a component of voting, rather than being a competitive win-lose process, it is meant to measure support and to surface any considerations that may have an unintended impact on the desired results.

When agreement is apparent

In the course of conversation, if it becomes apparent that a clear decision is called for, a member of the group can frame a proposal for a decision. If there is no dissent then it is implied that all have agreed. If the decision will be part of the permanent record of the group, such as a new policy, it is wise to write the decision on a board or on paper to be read aloud, so that the explicit wording can be agreed upon.

Using the Consensus Decision Making process

At some point during group conversation when:

- issues get complex and agreement is not apparent or clear
- it seems that there are not many more new ideas coming forth
- someone would like to get a measure of the level of agreement present
- someone is ready to float a possible decision

Any member of the group can suggest the use of the Consensus Decision Making process to check the level of agreement in the group. The person proposing a decision can frame it, (with the help of others if they wish,) and ask where individuals in the group stand by a show of fingers on the proposed decision according to the rating system below.

Levels of Acceptance (show fingers of a hand)

CONSENSUS ON A DECISION **CAN BE ACHIEVED WHEN ALL MEMBERS REGISTER AN OPINION OF 1, 2 OR 3 FINGERS** (UNLESS THE GROUP WANTS A HIGHER LEVEL OF AGREEMENT-1'S & 2'S.)



Yes, I can say an unqualified yes to the decision. The decision is an expression of the wisdom of the group.



Yes, I find the decision perfectly acceptable. I can live with the decision.



Yes, I am willing to support the decision. I do not fully agree with the decision. However, I do not choose to block it, I trust the wisdom of the group.



No, I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision. I still have some questions before I can support it



No, I cannot support this at all. I feel we have no clear sense of unity. We need to do more work before agreement on the decision.

If there are votes of four or five or three (optional) in the group, their reservations are solicited and considered. Further conversation follows, other decisions are to be proposed. This process may be repeated until the group feels that it's wisdom is apparent. This process becomes more efficient with familiarity and will lead to more harmonious, well thought out decisions.