

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2023 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 331

(Delegate Terrasa, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Judicial Proceedings

Real Property - Cooperative Housing Corporations, Condominiums, and  
Homeowners Associations - Virtual Meetings

This bill establishes additional requirements for virtual meetings that are held by a cooperative housing corporation, condominium, or homeowners association (HOA) (generally known as common ownership communities (COCs)). The bill also authorizes the person conducting a meeting (or the person’s designee) to take specified actions during the meeting, including removing a participant from the meeting under certain circumstances. Furthermore, the bill specifies that a meeting of the governing body of a COC held by electronic transmission must be held in accordance with existing applicable meeting requirements.

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill is not anticipated to materially affect State operations or finances.

**Local Effect:** The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local operations or finances.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

Analysis

**Bill Summary/Current law:** Chapters 523 and 524 of 2021 permit the applicable governing body for a COC to authorize any meetings to be conducted or attended by telephone conference, video conference, or similar electronic means. If a COC holds any meeting through electronic means (1) the equipment or system used must permit any meeting participant (as specified) in attendance to hear and be heard by all other participants in the meeting (the bill clarifies that this is *in accordance with the governing*

*documents*) and (2) a link or instructions on how to access the meeting must be included in the meeting notice.

An authorized participant attending through electronic means is deemed present for quorum and voting purposes. Matters may be scheduled for a vote during such meetings, and ballots may be delivered to members/owners with notice of the meeting. Only those present during a meeting through electronic means may vote a ballot in accordance with these provisions; authorized individuals who are not present may otherwise vote by proxy (and be considered present for quorum purposes), as specified. A reasonable deadline may be set for return of a ballot, including through electronic transmission, subject to the limitation that the deadline be within 24 hours after a meeting concludes. The inability of a member, unit owner, or lot owner to join a meeting due to technical difficulties with the participant's telephone, computer, or other electronic device does not invalidate the meeting or any action taken at the meeting.

Under the bill, the person conducting the meeting (or, as specified, the person's designee):

- must allow all participants a reasonable opportunity to (1) be heard by all other members participating in the meeting and (2) participate as if the meeting were conducted in person;
- provided that all participants are granted the ability to unmute themselves, may mute all participants (1) while the governing body or its designee is conducting business; (2) during presentations; and (3) to avoid interference from background noise; and
- may, if a participant interferes in the ability to conduct the meeting (1) revoke the ability for the participant to unmute and (2) if necessary, remove the participant from the meeting after warning the participant.

Additionally, the bill requires that if a meeting is conducted by video conference or similar electronic means, all participants must have the same access to any chat function.

Generally, a meeting of the governing body of a COC must be open and may be held in closed session only under limited circumstances specified in current law (*e.g.*, for discussion of matters pertaining to employees and personnel, for discussion of individual owner assessment accounts, etc.).

For more information on cooperatives, condominiums, and HOAs, see the **Appendix – Common Ownership Communities**.

## Additional Information

**Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 1147 of 2022.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Office of the Attorney General (Consumer Protection Division); Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 10, 2023  
rh/jkb Third Reader - March 24, 2023  
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## **Appendix – Common Ownership Communities**

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When a person purchases a single-family home, condominium, or an interest in a cooperative housing corporation, he or she may also be required to join an association of owners, which is intended to act in the common interests of all the homeowners, condominium unit owners, or cooperative owners in the community. Collectively, these associations are often referred to as common ownership communities (COCs). In Maryland, a growing number of newly constructed or newly converted residences are located in some form of a COC.

The affairs of a condominium are governed by a council of unit owners, which comprises all unit owners. Among other powers, the council of unit owners has the power to impose assessments on the unit owners to pay common expenses. A council of unit owners may delegate its powers to a board of directors, officers, or a managing agent. Condominiums are governed under Title 11 of the Real Property Article.

Many new housing developments are subject to a homeowners association (HOA) that is created by a governing document and has the authority to impose mandatory fees on lots in the development in connection with the provision of services or for the benefit of the lots, the lot owners, or the common areas. HOAs are governed under Title 11B of the Real Property Article.

A cooperative housing corporation or “cooperative” is a corporation that owns real property. A resident of a cooperative does not own his or her unit; rather, the person owns an interest in the corporation, which leases the unit to the person for residential use. Cooperatives are governed by the laws in Title 5, Subtitle 6B of the Corporations and Associations Article.

Condominiums and HOAs may be authorized by their governing documents to impose liens on units or lots to collect unpaid assessments or fees. In a cooperative, the governing documents usually provide for the collection of delinquent fees, and evictions for unpaid fees are generally pursued by way of a landlord-tenant action.

Since registration of the various COCs is not required statewide, the exact number of COCs in Maryland is unknown. However, public offering statements for condominium regimes are required by law to be registered with the Secretary of State (SOS). SOS registration records show that, as of December 2022, 2,788 condominium regimes have been registered with the State. The State Department of Assessments and Taxation, which maintains assessment records based on class of property, reports that there are more than 227,000 condominium units in the State as of July 2022. The Foundation for Community

Association Research estimated that there were 6,910 community associations with an estimated 1 million residents in these associations in the State in 2021, the most recent information available.

### *Task Force on Common Ownership Communities*

With a growing number of Marylanders residing in COCs, and evidence that some COCs had issues with governance, dispute resolution, and financial stability, the General Assembly created the Task Force on Common Ownership Communities in 2005 (Chapter 469 of 2005). The issues addressed by the task force included the education and training needs of COC boards and prospective buyers, availability of alternative dispute resolution services, special considerations of aging COCs, collection of assessments, and resale of homes within COCs. The task force met 10 times, held five public hearings, and submitted its final report in December 2006. The report's findings and recommendations have served, in subsequent years, as the basis for numerous pieces of legislation intended to improve the operation of COCs. For example, legislation enacted from 2007 through 2022:

- authorized a group of three or more unit or lot owners in a condominium or HOA to petition a circuit court to appoint a receiver in specified situations frequently found in aging communities (Chapter 321 of 2007);
- gave the Consumer Protection Division within the Office of the Attorney General increased authority over violations of the Maryland Homeowners Association Act (Chapter 593 of 2007);
- eased restrictions on the ability of condominiums and HOAs to amend their governing documents (Chapters 144 and 145 of 2008 and Chapter 480 of 2017);
- strengthened the transition process from developer to the governing body of a condominium or HOA by allowing the governing body to terminate specified contracts and requiring the developer to provide specified documents (Chapters 95 and 96 of 2009);
- required the governing body of a COC to purchase fidelity insurance or a fidelity bond covering various acts of malfeasance by COC officers, directors, and other specified employees and agents (Chapters 77 and 78 of 2009 and Chapter 615 of 2010);
- granted priority to a specified portion of a lien of a condominium or HOA over the claim of a holder of a first mortgage or first deed of trust in the event of a foreclosure on a unit or lot (Chapter 387 of 2011);
- limited the amount of damages for which the governing body of a condominium or HOA may foreclose on a lien against a unit owner or lot owner (Chapters 448 and 449 of 2013);
- expanded the purposes for which a condominium's board of directors may hold a closed meeting, similar to the law for an HOA, by allowing a meeting to be closed

to consider terms or conditions of a business transaction in the negotiation stage if disclosure could adversely affect the economic interests of the council of unit owners (Chapter 110 of 2013);

- established meeting standards and standards for late charges for delinquent payments, eviction restrictions, an auditing process for books and records, and a dispute settlement mechanism for cooperatives under specified circumstances (Chapter 567 of 2014);
- altered the contents of a required disclosure for the resale of a condominium unit, authorized the assessment of specified fees by a condominium council of unit owners or an HOA for providing specified information, and required the Department of Housing and Community Development to adjust the maximum authorized fees every two years (Chapter 735 of 2016 and Chapter 817 of 2017);
- increased to \$10,000 the maximum amount of the council of unit owners' property insurance deductible for which a specific unit owner is responsible if the cause of any damage to or destruction of the common elements or units of a condominium originates from an event inside that owner's unit (Chapters 56 and 57 of 2020); and
- established that specified COCs in the State must conduct a reserve study satisfying specified requirements every five years to determine the amount and necessity of reserves for anticipated capital replacements, repairs, and improvements. COCs must also adequately fund the recommended reserves, as specified (Chapter 138 of 2020; Chapter 433 of 2021; and Chapter 664 of 2022).

The task force's report also featured findings and recommendations relating to the creation of an ombudsman in local governments. Since the report's release, Prince George's County created its Common Ownership Communities Program in 2007 with the stated purpose of assisting governing bodies, as well as owners and residents of HOAs, residential condominiums, and cooperative housing corporations, with education, training, and alternative dispute resolution. Charles and Montgomery counties have offices dedicated to COCs that predate the task force.