

**The Community Meeting Paper: Core Principles and the  
Somewhere Housing Neighborhood Council Meeting**

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PSYC: 2550 Community Psychology

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Put the paper's DUE date here spelled out like December 9, 2021

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## **The Community Meeting Paper: Core Principles and the Somewhere Housing Neighborhood Council Meeting**

Somewhere is a housing community owned by ABCD Bank, and it is located at The Pseudonym in Hong Kong. Only employees and their families are allowed to live on the property, which provides housing for approximately eighty-two families from around the world. Many families that live within this community are on two-year assignments. Currently, no employee or their family is allowed to live within this community longer than five years. If an employee of ABCD Bank does stay longer than five years, they are required to move out of Somewhere, and find housing elsewhere, as they are now considered a local ABCD Bank Hong Kong employee. This Housing community is for expats only. Though very transient, after attending the Somewhere Neighborhood Council Meeting and interviewing the community leader, I was able to feel a bit more connected to this place as an American family living in Hong Kong for a while.

Somewhere has a Neighborhood Council meeting that takes place on the first Friday of each month in the clubhouse. All adult family members are welcomed and encouraged to attend. This particular meeting took place on [date goes here] at 10 am. Upon arrival, I was greeted by M., the Neighborhood Council Chairperson, and I was welcomed to coffee, tea, and a variety of pastries. I felt connected and included by their greeting. After introductions were made, the meeting started at 10:15, because those introductions were a part of the meeting itself, which I found interesting. There were fourteen individuals attending the meeting, including me. It was pointed out at the beginning of the meeting that more people are normally present; however this meeting happened to fall on a three-day weekend and many families were out of town on holiday.

There was no written agenda for ordinary attendees, but the Neighborhood Council Members had an agenda in their hands, and I later learned that it was available on the website which I should have accessed before attending. They do also post minutes after each meeting for public review. Once the meeting got underway it was divided into three topical segments: facilities, events and charities.

The facilities portion of the meeting covered many different topics pertaining to the recreational areas and recent surveys conducted by the property management team. Discussions ensued about the community pools, removal of the diving boards for safety precautions, and whether to increase the number of lifeguards. The topic of the current swing set followed and whether it needed to be replaced. Many voiced their concerns while M. industriously took notes. Someone told me that the facilities manager is also usually present, making note of any concerns and offering feedback during the meeting; however, she was out of town.

Next, we discussed the results from the energy conservation survey that was distributed amongst the community. Several people offered additional ways to conserve energy that were not listed on the survey, and we discussed sending out an email to the families for further tips on how to conserve energy and water. Several other minor property issues were discussed before we moved on to the events portion of the meeting.

During the events segment, many upcoming functions were discussed and tentatively planned, including the welcome and the farewell get-togethers. During the summer months there are many families moving in and out of the community, so lots of plans were made in this part of the meeting for these two important moments of transition and shared time in community.

Next, we moved onto the biggest portion of the meeting, upcoming charity events. The community seems to be very active in various charity organizations. The charities discussed were

the sedan chair race, birthday happiness, and family fun day. The sedan chair race takes place in October, and requires a team of nine women to carry a sedan chair around The Peak trail. We discussed who might be on this year's team, and who would head up finding any new recruits. Next, we needed new volunteers to head up the months of October and November for the birthday happiness charity.

Finally, the family fun day, where various charities set up booths about their organizations, while all families in our community are invited to a big cookout and lots of fun activities for the kids. The big discussion was about which charities to include this year. Each of these three charity events is time consuming requiring much planning and many volunteers. In more recent years, the Somewhere community has been able to raise a lot of money and awareness for these causes.

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 AM. I do not think anyone left right away. They seemed to know one another, and it turned into a social hour. I waited because M. had offered to answer any questions I had after the meeting. As the Neighborhood Council Chair, M. heads up many aspects of what happens within this community, plus she has lived here longer than anyone at nine years, having been grandfathered in from an older ABCD Bank housing contract, which I found very interesting. Already what I know about being a part of this community is that one of the toughest things is getting used to saying goodbye to people, because of its transient nature. For all the neighborhood council does to welcome new families, and say goodbye to others, it's hard to not have longer term friendships.

## **Community Psychology Reflection**

### ***Prevention***

I can only guess that the Neighborhood Council came into being when the Somewhere

Community, and maybe ABCD Bank themselves, realized that families were not doing so well as expats relocated to Hong Kong for work, left on their own to figure out how to socialize and get their needs met. I do know that others in the greater expat community here who do not have something like this Neighborhood Council have a lot more struggles than we do. That leads me to suspect that the Neighborhood Council is preventing some of those struggles and so, by definition, it is either primary prevention or secondary prevention, depending on whether Somewhere community formed a Neighborhood Council before problems presented or at their onset. Either way, I'm confident their work prevents bad outcomes.

I also think they prevent problems by welcoming new families with festivities. If some of the problems being prevented were, for example, mental health struggles, then the investment of time and resources by the Neighborhood Council is strategic and preventative by fostering a sense of community, connecting us with one another as resources. I am also aware that at previous meetings of the Neighborhood Council, they have addressed specific community concerns in ways that prevent further suffering – a sort of tertiary prevention.

### *Social Justice*

Social justice was not apparent at this meeting, but I am not sure that it needed to be. That feels bold to write, I realize, so let me explain. Within our community, all families are inherently treated equally as they all work for the same company, doing similar work, and with a similar immigration and executive status. I suppose the core principle of social justice is prevalent in that respect, because there is fairness in the structure of our families' employment. There is distributive justice in relation to housing, health care, and education, because they are allocated equally amongst all members in the Somewhere community; there are no options, no different levels of care, no preferential differences that some of us get and others do not.

Another spouse has told me that this is a lot like the U.S. military in that aspect. The procedural justice is mostly determined by ABCD Bank, since everyone who lives within Somewhere community works for ABCD Bank. The bank mandates who lives where, and provides for each family: furniture, educational expenses at each of the international schools, equivalent medical insurance for each family, etc.

Basically, social justice was not apparent in the meeting, but I suppose it is embedded without our community's charter, and I could infer that social justice matters to the community based on the fact that a big part of the meeting was about charity work, although I feel like that's stretching a bit.

### *Ecological Perspective*

I did not see this core principle in the meeting at first, but I came to realize that it underlies the Somewhere community's functioning, and it arose in the meeting when discussing festivities. Each household is a part of Somewhere community because of our common bond of having a spouse who works for ABCD Bank. At broader ecological levels, we are within the same context, sharing the same neighborhood, healthcare, entertainment options, and socialization. The Neighborhood Council exists to help us, as individuals and as families, to "fit" into our new environment of Somewhere community. That is an ecological perspective, evident in the planned festivities for new families and departing families.

The Neighborhood Council also implicitly supports households in the process of adaptation to our new realities as expats in Hong Kong. Our interdependence is on the forefronts of our minds. I can think of several personal examples of how we help one another, and this takes the form of quality neighboring, because we recognize that we need one another, and we value one another. If we moved here with a more individualist perspective, we quickly nurture an

ecological one.

### ***Respect for Diversity***

This was evident within this meeting, I believe because it is a part of our neighborhood's structure. This is who we are. For instance, at this particular Neighborhood Council meeting of only 14 people, individuals from Mexico, Poland, U.S., UK, Australia, and India were present and contributing with new ideas and approaches to upcoming events despite the cultural diversity among members. Many volunteered their time for upcoming events and charities. This diversity offers much insight and cultural awareness about the intricate nuances within the community on many different levels. One might expect that we would form little sub neighborhoods based on national origin, but we are too diverse for that to be possible. We have to not just tolerate, but truly respect one another here. This is based on race and national origin, however. On that level, we are united as being expats here in Hong Kong.

In spite of what looks like extreme diversity, we are otherwise not very diverse. I believe all residents are of a similar socioeconomic status. We are all married to someone of the opposite sex, and I have not met anyone with visible disabilities. I do not know whether we would respect human diversity on all fronts, considering gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religion, and other parameters, but I also feel that we have enough diversity by national origin to keep us busy, and the respect among community members seems clear to me by how much work we do together as a team.

### ***Active Citizen Participation***

Citizen participation was unmistakable throughout the meeting. The rule is that any adult individual in our community is invited to attend our Neighborhood Council meeting. Of the individuals that did come to the meeting, everyone but me considered themselves a part of the

council. I could potentially be an official member of the council if I want to, and maybe now I will consider this in the future, but right now I'm just a community member who attended. Formally, there is a Chairperson and a Secretary, but anyone who is present, including me, gets to weigh in on making decisions regarding community infrastructure, events and charity functions. I think everyone but me spoke about at least one topic. It was a discussion process that became formal because the decisions were what would then happen. The voting and decision-making carried weight and determined where resources would be spent, and how things were going to change in our community.

The fact that people from different countries are voting on the same concerns clarifies that citizen participation is what drives the council. I believe they have a fair process for decision-making, which is indicative of this core principle.

### ***Grounding in Research and Evaluation***

This principle was present somewhat in the form of data analysis and interpretation at this meeting. With the use of a qualitative research method, the facilities management team had sent out surveys to each of the Somewhere community residents about their usage of energy and water, while also providing tips on how to conserve both of these resources. During the meeting, the surveys were discussed along with any additional ideas on how to be more of an environmentally conscious community. So this means that the Neighborhood Council spent money to conduct that survey, and to print those tips on how to conserve, but that made that decision based on findings from the survey, meaning it had an empirical grounding. The decision to spend money was based on research, even though it was a very simple survey, it still reflects a data-driven decision to spend money, and the advice itself (on how to conserve) was based on survey findings, as opposed to just a google search and some assumptions about people. This

grounding is clear.

Conversely, there was no discussion or common knowledge of any type of quantitative research study or method being used within our community at this meeting. Though only one type of research method was utilized it provided valuable information into how current residents could conserve energy and water more efficiently to both the facilities management and current residents. This tells me that at least to this extent, decisions are based on some research.

### ***Interdisciplinary Collaboration***

This was minimally present at this meeting, but we are a sheltered community, so collaboration is inherently limited a bit. There are a few things I can point to as illustrations though. There is the joint effort of ABCD Bank and the property management company alongside of the current residents, joining together the strengths of each party collaboratively. This was apparent with the discussion about the need for a new swing set on the playground. During the meeting several different styles were discussed and will be voted upon at the next meeting. The swing set chosen was within the price range the bank was prepared to spend, and the property management made sure there was adequate space on the playground to accommodate the new equipment. With respect and open communication by the residents, the help from the property management, and the funding budget from the bank, all parties' needs are met, demonstrating a truly collaborative community effort and unity. I also see that the council draws on individual community members' strengths, from those who attend.

### ***Sense of Community***

The sense of community was apparent to me particularly in the discussions regarding playgroups, coffee socials, and our community meeting planning for the future. With the availability of playgroups, new and older residents come together, while giving their children an

opportunity to make and play with new friends. This is also a part of promotion of wellness (as most things in this meeting were), but I think more specifically it gets to wellness through building a sense of belonging. We are living in Hong Kong, and we are not all from the same country. What we have in common is that we are not originally from Hong Kong. Sense of community is something we have to be intentional about, because the only thing we have in common is having a family member employed by ABCD Bank here.

The sense of belonging that is a part of the membership element of sense of community is meaningful to us. This Neighborhood Council gives us an opportunity to have influence, shared values, and community economy wherein we support our neighbors and know that they are there for us too. The shared emotional connection is inescapable if not as a member of Somewhere community, then as a member of the broader expat community in Hong Kong. When we see one another in various social contexts, and our eyes meet and we recognize the other as a neighbor, a sense of familiarity and ease joins us, for which I am grateful.

The coffee socials are open to all adults within the Somewhere community too, and provide a different type of theme at each gathering. For example, the last coffee social host was from India, and she showed everyone who attended how to make naan bread, which was great. Additionally, our community meeting is a way in which all residents come together by improving the surroundings through working together, as well as being a resource for social support. These things together foster interdependence and collective unity amongst all individuals within our community.

### ***Empowerment***

As a manifestation of social power, our potential empowerment is limited in the Neighborhood Council. We are expats in a foreign land, and we already feel somewhat indebted

and very grateful for the support we receive from ABCD Bank. We do have access to the process that governs some of the rules about our lives. Are we truly empowered? It is hard to say, because ABCD Bank ultimately invests in our community to whatever extent it chooses, but we get to decide where the focus will be, which feels empowering. For example, ABCD Bank decides on an overall budget for the Neighborhood Council, so they have most of the power, but then the council votes and decides on how to disseminate those resources, which is somewhat empowering.

I believe our access to social power is limited in that we cannot gain increasing amounts of power over the circumstances of our lives. The most power we can have in this context is to have M.'s job and be president of the Neighborhood Council, which is only slightly more power than what I have now as a neighbor who might attend the council meetings.

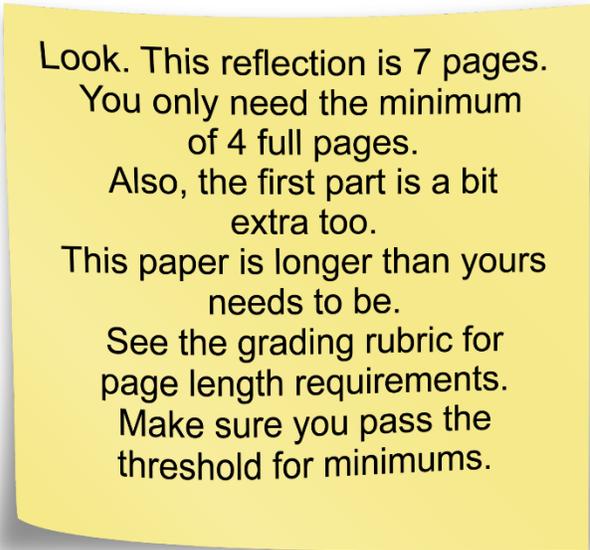
### ***Promotion of Wellness***

I feel like the Council promotes wellness implicitly in most of what it does. Prime examples were when the meeting focused on family-centered social events, new exercise class schedules, and possibly some changes in community infrastructure. The meeting has those three parts to it (facilities, events, and charities). The meeting went on for a long time, and each part of it had something to do with promoting wellness, for families in particular. Also the attention to grief, and to the families moving in and out, acknowledging the ongoing needs of community members who could otherwise be negatively affected by such a transient community structure.

Also, facilities issues are for individual housing concerns. Events are for residents' wellness, and charities help families in need, which is a goal of wellness. I'd say that this principle was the primary purpose of the Neighborhood Council even existing. With this sense of promotion of wellness, a foundation is in place for the other core values to stand upon.

## Closing Thought

Overall, it was surprising how such a transient community, in which no one individual owns the property in which they live, and in which one must move out after a five year maximum stay, can come together and represent so many of the core values with the knowledge that their presence within this community is time-limited. However, without the presence of a strong leader such as M., one does wonder if this community would be as interconnected as it is. I think this demonstrates the need and importance of such core principles, at least in this setting. I am glad that I attended the meeting. It went on longer than I expected it to, but I felt valued when I was there, and I plan to attend future meetings as well.



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**NOTE: YOU PROBABLY WILL NOT HAVE ANY REFERENCES FOR THIS PAPER.**

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The screenshot shows a list of references with several callout boxes providing formatting instructions:

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- Shortened DOI:** Points to the shortened DOI in the reference by Bachen, C. M., McLoughlin, M. M., & Garcia, S. S. (1999).

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