

Creating connections in multi-unit buildings



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How to reach us

EMAIL AND PHONE

✉ neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca

☎ 519.747.8772

☎ 1.866.786.3941 (TTY)

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ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

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About this guide

Despite sharing common spaces, connecting with neighbours in multi-unit buildings can be challenging. To maintain privacy, sometimes residents in multi-unit buildings can be more hesitant to talk to their neighbours. This guide provides information and resources to help you interact and develop strong neighbourly connections with people living in your multi-unit building.

Does your neighbourhood have multi-unit buildings? Are you having difficulty connecting with residents in these buildings? This guide also provides advice for neighbours looking to connect with residents in multi-unit buildings. Skip to the [connecting with multi-unit buildings](#) section for some helpful tips.

What are multi-unit buildings?

Multi-unit properties are residential buildings with more than one household or unit. Multi-unit buildings range in size from two units (duplex) to an apartment building (five or more units). Commonly, multi-unit buildings are referred to as apartments and condominiums.

Apartments are residential buildings with five or more units. An individual or corporation often owns the entire building and tenants rent the individual units.

Condominiums are multi-unit residential buildings where individuals own each separate unit. Owners pay monthly fees to cover costs associated with common elements and building maintenance. Residents of condominiums are commonly a mix of owners and renters, as property owners may choose to rent their units.

Duplex, triplex, or quad-plex are low-rise buildings made up of two, three, or four residential units. Residents may own the individual units or rent from a landlord or property management corporation.

Condominium boards are comprised of property owners elected to govern the business affairs of the condominium and represent the interests of all property owners. For more information on these boards, check out this [helpful article](#).

Property managers are often hired to support operations in condominiums and apartment buildings. Property managers work for property management corporations to handle resident complaints, process building maintenance requests, collect fees, and perform other administrative tasks.

Superintendents reside in apartment buildings, or in close proximity, and are available to respond to emergencies 24/7. These individuals are the ‘eyes and ears’ of the property owner. They handle property maintenance, tenant turnover, show rental units, and respond to tenant inquiries/requests.



Different types of buildings may present different barriers for connecting with neighbours. Get creative and consider how you can promote neighbourhood connections despite different challenges.

Why connect?

There are many benefits of being friendly and establishing positive relationships with your neighbours:

(1) Smiles, waves, and greetings make everyday life better!

Simple acts of kindness, like a smile or wave, can help brighten spirits.

(2) Social connectedness improves our mental and physical health.

Humans are social beings: engaging with our neighbours reduces isolation, promotes a sense of caring and belonging, and increases overall happiness.

(3) Relationships promote sharing.

Whether it is the traditional lending of a cup of sugar, or tools to hang some new artwork, sharing resources with fellow neighbours is the kind thing to do. When neighbourly connections are formed, residents are more likely to share resources and seek them out!

(4) Neighbourly connections lead to building-wide events and projects.

Simple connections often lead to deeper connections. When you meet neighbours and develop relationships, you can collaborate to plan future initiatives that involve all residents.

Building-wide projects, like community gardens, seasonal celebrations, little libraries, or barbeques, are great ways to start developing connections.

(5) With established relationships, addressing issues (like a noisy neighbour or pet) is easier.

Instead of immediately sending a complaint to your property manager or landlord, you can work with fellow neighbours to resolve conflicts. Compassion and understanding help each person talk through the challenge from their perspective and work towards a solution.

(6) A strong and connected community makes your building more desirable to prospective renters and buyers.

Developing a positive reputation and strong sense of community will increase the value and desirability of where you live!

(7) Neighbourly connections promote safety.

When we know our neighbours, we feel safer and more secure. Connected neighbours are often more likely to watch out for each other when someone might be ill or injured, check on your home during vacations, or help during a building emergency.

How to build connections

There are many great ways to develop connections with neighbours in multi-unit buildings. Whether you are just getting started, or are looking to plan events and activities, the list below features some helpful ideas.

IDEAS TO GET STARTED

- Smile and say hello! Friendliness paves the way for positive relationships. To develop connections with your neighbours being positive, outgoing, and willing to break the ice really helps.



Sometimes it is hard to know what to say to new neighbours or people you have never met. Check out this [list of conversation starters](#) for some helpful tips!

- Offer a helping hand. If you notice a neighbour struggling with a heavy item, offer to help. When riding the elevator with someone, offer to press the button for their floor. These quick interactions can help create positive relationships.
- Be a courteous and respectful neighbour. If you are having guests over (and it may be loud) notify your neighbours. Make sure to leave common areas clean and tidy (dispose of garbage and recycling properly and wipe down fitness equipment after use). For 36 tips on how to be a good neighbour, check out [this list](#).
- If your building has common spaces, like a fitness area, pool, patio, or games room, use them! These areas are great spaces to meet fellow neighbours and host activities with other residents.
- Schedule playdates for children and pets! Invite fellow neighbours for a playdate at a local park.
- Join the Hey Neighbour! Block Connector program. Block Connectors are neighbourhood leaders that help share information, support fellow neighbours, and build a sense of community. To learn more about the program, check out the [neighbourhoods website](#).
- Greet new neighbours! Leave a little note on their door to introduce yourself and welcome them to the building. If you are comfortable, include your contact information and encourage new neighbours to reach out if they need anything.
- Attend building events. You do not have to plan the events to reap the benefits. When attending building events engage by chatting with neighbours, playing games, actively listening, and offering to help.

MORE IDEAS TO SUPPORT CONNECTIONS

- If you are thinking about planning a project or event for neighbours, it is a good practice to connect with building management early on in the process. Management could be a property manager, superintendent, or a condominium board. Taking time to discuss your idea and work through any issues, can help prevent future conflict and ensure project success.



Some multi-unit buildings have rules and guidelines that may affect your proposed project. By connecting with building leadership early on, you can ensure that your idea aligns with any rules or guidelines in place.

- If your building has a social committee, consider joining their efforts. Social committees are made up of residents who desire to form connections with neighbours in and around their building. These groups work together to plan building wide events and projects.
- If your building does not have a social committee, consider starting your own. Begin by developing a small team of neighbours that are interested in creating neighbourly connections. Establish a preferred method of communication, such as a Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, or Google Hangouts. Plan meetings to discuss your ideas and organize events/projects.

Collaborate with your condominium board, property managers, and/or superintendents, to establish a formal social committee. While residents can independently develop social committees, it is best to have the support and guidance of building management. Once your group is established, make sure to hold regular informational meetings. This provides an opportunity for residents to learn more about the committee and join if interested.



Food can be a great way to keep things fun at meetings and draw new people to participate. To be inclusive, make sure to consider allergies and food sensitivities.

- Create a virtual community for your building by using a social media platform, like Facebook or WeChat. An online group will provide a space for neighbours to share helpful information (about parking, local festivals, businesses, and more), connect with each other, and promote building-wide events or projects.



Your building management may already use an online portal to communicate with residents. Explore how you can use this platform to interact with neighbours and promote information sharing.

- Building message boards can be a great place to advertise social events, promote building projects/initiatives, and develop connections between neighbours. If your building does not have a message board, consider working with building management to establish one.
- Welcome home neighbour! Establish a welcome committee to greet new residents and welcome them to the building. As a group, consider preparing small welcome packages that include helpful information about the building, neighbourhood, and upcoming social events.
- Throw building wide events. Host the event in a common space within the building and invite all residents to get to know one another. When planning events, consider ways you can make them inclusive for all building residents, this may include providing childcare, offering events at different times, and having food and beverages that appeal to diverse dietary needs.

Event ideas:



Coffee and tea social: Contact a local business to supply the beverages and baked goods. Or, host a tea exchange. Ask each guest to bring a few of their favourite types of tea and do a swap.



Neighbour potluck: Invite neighbours to bring their signature dish. Enjoy delicious food and chat with your fellow neighbours. Food is a great icebreaker – “I love this! What’s the recipe?”



Fitness class: Recruit a local fitness instructor to lead a yoga, Zumba, or workout class for interested neighbours. Make sure the class is suitable for a variety of levels and accessible for all residents.



Movie night: Pick a classic flick and invite neighbours to watch together! Provide snacks or encourage residents to bring their favourite movie treat.

- Develop a club! Find fellow neighbours with similar interests and passions. Post information about your prospective club in common areas to gauge interest. Whether you are passionate about video games, reading, yoga, animals, or knitting, there is bound to be other residents that share the same interests.
- Be inclusive and invite all residents to attend events and join clubs. To reach all neighbours, get creative with invitations. Do not just rely on one method of communication, consider using an online portal, posting details on a Facebook group, putting posters in high-traffic common areas (message boards, elevators, mailboxes, fitness facilities, parking garages), adding flyers to mailboxes, encouraging word-of-mouth, and more.
- Plan a charity or fundraising initiative. For example, consider organizing a building-wide food drive. Encourage neighbours to drop off non-perishable food items at a bin in the lobby or another common area.

Connecting with your neighbourhood

In addition to developing connections with people living in your multi-unit building, try to build relationships with neighbours in your surrounding area. Here are some helpful ways to connect with your neighbourhood:

- Collaborate with neighbourhood leaders (block connectors, neighbourhood groups, and associations) to plan events and projects for all neighbours. Contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for more information on neighbourhood leaders in your area.
- Advertise neighbourhood events in your building. Post event details on online portals, social media pages, building message boards, or add flyers to resident mailboxes.
- Develop a building buddy system. Reach out to neighbours in other multi-unit buildings and develop connections. Share information, provide ideas and inspiration, and communicate regularly. Consider establishing an online group chat (with platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, or WeChat) to facilitate virtual communication.
- Get outside and explore your neighbourhood! Go for walks in the area or head to a local park. Be friendly and chat with people you see.

- Attend events planned by the city or local neighbourhood leaders. Be engaged, start conversations, and develop connections with neighbours. Consider sharing your contact information to encourage future communication.
- Many neighbourhood groups and associations have created social media pages to encourage neighbourhood connections. Request to join these groups and begin forming virtual connections with other neighbours.

Connecting with multi-unit buildings

If you live in a multi-unit building, other neighbours (from outside the building) might want to connect with you. This section is designed to provide them with tips and tricks for connecting with residents of multi-unit buildings.

To develop connections with your neighbours in multi-unit buildings, we encourage you to:

- Reach out to building management and ask how to contact the building's social committee. Forging a connection with this group will help you plan joint events and projects.
- Think about your network. Do you know anyone that lives in the building? This might be a helpful first contact. This individual may be able to advertise your neighbourhood group, events, and projects, and encourage other residents to get involved.
- Reach out to building management and ask if they are comfortable advertising your neighbourhood group, project, or event. Posting information in common spaces, on online portals, or inserting flyers in mailboxes, will help encourage building residents to engage in your neighbourhood initiatives.
- Many apartments and condominiums have park spaces and playgrounds near them. Consider hanging out near these spaces. Chat with people you meet, ask if they live in the building or complex, and share information about your neighbourhood group/association.

Resources

- The City of Waterloo has created a number of guides to support neighbours and their efforts to build neighbourly connections. For a full list of guides available, visit the [neighbourhoods website](#).

- For tips on making connections and getting to know your apartment neighbours, check out these articles:
 - [Getting to Know your Apartment Neighbours](#)
 - [How to Break the Ice with New Neighbours](#)
- Connecting with neighbours has changed since COVID-19. Check out these articles for some safe ways to interact with neighbours:
 - [Five ways to connect with neighbours during coronavirus outbreak](#)
 - [Under one roof: How COVID-19 turned my apartment building of strangers into a community](#)
- Having an issue with a neighbour? For tips on handling conflict with neighbours in a multi-unit building, check out these informative blog posts:
 - [Six strategies for handling a dispute with a neighbour](#)
 - [Neighbour Disputes: 7 Ways To Keep The Peace](#)
- If you are struggling to solve a conflict with your neighbour, consider setting up a housing mediation session with Community Justice Initiatives (CJI). This service is free and referrals can be received from city bylaw officers, community agencies, police officers, or individuals. For more information on housing mediation, visit [CJI's webpage](#).
- Do you need help building neighbourly connections or funds to support your neighbourhood initiative? Check out the City of Waterloo's [neighbourhoods website](#) or contact neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca for more details.