

Keeping order in the hood

Without wishing to enflame things, I want to suggest the good folk of Tainui St are on to something important.

I've tried out a few neighbourhoods in my time, and reached the only logical conclusion - that every hood needs a formal committee to vet newcomers.

Some I lived in certainly had the informal version.

A big block of apartments in Auckland where we bought a place had something called company titles. That made every owner a pseudo company director, but the real power lay not with your shareholding but the length of time you'd lived there.

It was decades in the case of some, who had informally organised themselves into what we fondly labelled the pensioner mafia.

They were ruthless about being neighbourly. Death of a social kind was meted out to those straying beyond a written set of rules, which included never hanging washing in your sunporch, even if it was three storeys above street level.

We had a silly thought that being on the top floor we could extend into the roof. That led to a crisis meeting at which lawyers issued warnings we were "on notice" over anything we might say. We dropped the idea.

That was more than 20 years ago. We laugh when we drive past the building now and see the rooftop room plan was long ago carried out by subsequent owners. The mafia ranks must have thinned.

A neighbourhood run along those lines is an unhappy place, so you'd have to be careful about the rules for your formal vetting committee. I can think of a few things they could cover, though.

You'd want to ban anyone with a small dog. We've got a few yappers in our area that can get on your wick sometimes.

While I'm on animals, I'd also insist on no male cats. We left our car doors open for a split second the other day and someone's tom did a spray over the driver's seat. I suspect people I was interviewing that day for an article could smell it on my clothes the minute I entered their office (they were too polite to say).

Players of loud music would need to be weeded out, although judging that at application stage would be challenging. You could require people to specify what sort of music they like, and automatically exclude those inclined towards heavy metal, classical and the BeeGees.

And talking of noise, there's an obvious need for rules about vehicles. Nothing with gaping exhaust pipes, racing stripes, wide tyres or rear spoilers would be entertained.

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A rule about overfilling the bottle bin might be helpful for more than the obvious reason. The noise of bottles banging together can be irritating, as I discovered once when living in Auckland's nightclub district. Ear plugs eliminated the racket of sirens, people being assaulted, revving engines and thumping music - but the crash of bottles being tipped into bins got through every time.

Regarding bins, it's fair to say bin etiquette has become quite a big thing. I've been guilty of this myself, so I need to be a bit careful here, but people who persistently put out the wrong one and cause confusion up and down the street are probably not going to fit an orderly neighbourhood.

There would need to be rules about the colour you paint your house, and the size of your letterbox numbers, and another governing winter fires. A few chimneys in our hood belch the foulest stench sometimes. One untested theory is it comes from the burning of disposable nappies and incontinence pads.

Would it be going too far to insist on suitable clothing for excursions to the letterbox or dairy? No bedroom slippers, dressing gowns, paint-splattered jeans, hoodies, sort of thing?

A social street code would be stretching it, I suppose. You know - no spitting, no scowling, cheery greetings only, knowing everyone's first name.

I realise this might be discriminatory, but why not filter out the physically and mentally impaired, the aged, the ethnically different, heretics, eccentrics, hermits, and adherents to dodgy religions and political philosophies.

I'm also wondering if there's something I've missed lately about tenants. Some real estate agents seem shy about telling you the new neighbours will be renters.

Lawyerly input would be needed for all this to ensure you didn't accidentally rule yourself out, because frankly, deciding what's ideal for your street is a minefield, even for people as tolerant as me.

Accommodating the homeless pales into a minor concern.