

A PROPOSAL TO ALLOW JOINT MEMBERSHIPS

For some time the Membership Committee has been discussing the concept of Joint Membership. This would be an option available to married couples regardless of membership class, except for honorary, special, and auxiliary members. A Joint Membership would give equal status to both married members rather than one of them being an auxiliary member.

Because this is a new concept for the Erie Yacht Club, we are seeking membership input prior to asking the Constitution and By-Laws (C&B) Committee to draft proposed changes to the C&B. This article addresses a series of questions that the membership is likely to have.

WHY IS A JOINT MEMBERSHIP BEING PROPOSED?

There are two separate but related issues:

1. Our current membership model (member/auxiliary member) was common when the Club was founded in 1895 and through the middle of the last century; however, society has changed considerably since then. Think about how things have changed since the founding of the Club:

- In 1895 men were the primary breadwinners in most families and women were homemakers. According to the Journal of Economic History, only 5.6% of married women were in the labor force in 1900 and women were generally considered subsidiary to men in the marriage. By comparison, a 2023 Pew study found that today males are the sole breadwinner in only 23% of households, and in egalitarian marriages husbands average 44.2 hours working per week while wives average 41.1 hours per week.



From the Membership Committee



- It wasn't until 1982 that the EYC C&B were changed to remove restrictions on women being allowed to become members; however, the membership model remains as it was (member and auxiliary spouse).

2. It has been difficult for the Nominating Committee to find members willing to run for office. One need look no further than the most recent election where the Committee could only find one member willing to run for Fleet Captain. While this candidate was an excellent choice, having a limited pool of people willing to run is not in the best interests of the Club. A joint membership could expand the pool of eligible members by approximately 350 people.

Previous Nominating Committees have had trouble filling the slate with candidates, showing that this is not a one-off problem. One obvious issue is that a full term on the Board, then the Bridge (a normal progression for flag officers), is an 8-year commitment. Even finding candidates to run for the Nominating Committee has been difficult. Some of our current auxiliary members have the desire and talent to help alleviate this problem, and several have expressed interest in running for office. Under our current C&B, however, auxiliary members are ineligible to hold office.

WHY SHOULD WE CONSIDER CHANGING OUR MEMBERSHIP MODEL?

- This proposal will not change our membership model, but instead will allow married couples in each class of membership to have the same rights and privileges, including the right of regular members to hold office.

- Use of the term "auxiliary" member does not reflect the equal status of most married couples today. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary defines an auxiliary as "giving help or support, especially to a more important person or thing."

- Currently, many auxiliary members are very active in the Club, and some do as much or more for the Club than their spouses and most regular members. For example, one auxiliary member has won the Thompson Trophy for all she has done for boating and the Club, but she cannot attend the Annual Meeting, vote, or run for office.

In another example, an auxiliary member who is very active expressed interest in running for office. She inquired about switching regular/auxiliary membership with her husband in order to qualify, but under current rules if they switched membership class and she became the regular member, she would have no points and the couple would be at risk of losing their slip. A third example concerns a member who gave up her regular membership when she married her husband, who was also a regular member. It didn't make sense financially for the husband and wife to both continue on as regular members, but one of the spouses had to forfeit rights to attend the Annual Meeting, vote, or run for office. All three of these unwanted scenarios can be remedied by joint membership.

- If the member is unable to attend a membership meeting, they are unable to vote on resolutions. A joint membership would allow either spouse to vote for the couple.

- Prospective members moving to Erie are generally surprised by the current membership model given that a majority of U.S. yacht clubs allow joint membership (see below).

- Yacht clubs across the country are struggling to recruit younger age groups. In the 1960s the average age of a member joining the EYC was 32; today it's in the upper 50s. Moreover, younger women today are less tolerant of a structure in which they don't have a formal voice in governance, which undermines member recruitment. In spite of membership being open to women, for historical reasons the majority of regular members are men, and the auxiliary members are mostly women. This means that most women are not eligible to run for office.

WOULD WE HAVE OUR CURRENT MEMBERSHIP MODEL IF THE CLUB WERE BEING FORMED TODAY?

- It's hard to know for sure; however, a search of yacht clubs in the U.S. that post their Constitutions and/or By-Laws online shows that 82% have some form of joint membership. EYC is part of the 18% that does not.

HOW WOULD JOINT MEMBERSHIP BE STRUCTURED?

- In addition to the current membership classes, we would have two membership types – individual and joint – and members would be free to choose which type of membership they want. It would be one membership co-owned by two married people, with one initiation and dues/assessments.

- Joint regular membership would be treated the same as an individual membership when assigning slips for regular members.

- Both regular members would be able to attend regular member meetings, although there would be one vote allowed per couple.

- Both regular members could run for office, but only one could serve in elected office at a time.

- Both members of any class would have to be approved by the Board of Directors (for current members transitioning from individual to joint membership, the Board would have to approve the transition).



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Joint Membership Proposal

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WHY ARE ASSOCIATE AND OTHER MEMBERS INCLUDED IN THIS PROPOSAL, AND DOES THIS MEAN AN ASSOCIATE MEMBER COULD VOTE?

• Spouses of associate and other members may not want to be viewed as “auxiliary” for reasons discussed above. There would be no changes to the rights and privileges (including the right to vote) of the current membership classes (regular, associate, etc.) The type of membership (individual or joint) would be in addition to the class of membership.

HOW WOULD DIVORCE OR DEATH BE HANDLED?

• When a married couple applies for joint membership, they will be required to submit a declaration stating who will have rights to the membership in case of divorce. For all membership classes, the declaration will state which individual will retain the membership. The other individual will lose membership rights effective as of the date of the divorce decree, or earlier if both parties agree. If he or she wants to remain a member, he or she would have to request a change from joint to individual status and pay an initiation fee unless both members already paid their initiation fees (for example, if two members got married after joining the Club). For regular members, the declaration will also define how accumulated points will be distributed in the event of divorce.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT MY MEMBERSHIP TYPE TO CHANGE?

• For a variety of reasons, some people may not want to have a joint membership. This is why joint membership would be optional, much like a decision over joint vs. separate checking accounts, car titles, or home titles. Current members who do not apply for joint membership will be classified as individual members.

IF I WANT TO CHANGE MY MEMBERSHIP TO A JOINT MEMBERSHIP, WHY WOULD MY SPOUSE HAVE TO BE APPROVED BY THE BOARD?

• Currently, all membership applications must be approved by the Board. If a married couple who are not already members apply for joint membership, both spouses would have to be approved by the Board. The same logic holds for all current eligible members who want to change to a joint membership. This is similar to the current requirement that members obtain Board approval to transfer membership class. The Membership Committee anticipates that current members requesting to transition to joint membership will be routinely approved by the Board.

HOW WILL VOTING AT ANNUAL MEETINGS BE HANDLED?

• In the case where paper ballots are used, only one ballot will be distributed per couple. Voice votes can only be taken in cases where it is clear that there is little objection to the motion. If the vote is close there are potential solutions to this such as a division of the house or electronic voting, but paper ballots are likely to become more common. The exact method will be determined by the Board (as is done now).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE AUXILIARY CLASS?

• Nothing will happen to the auxiliary class itself. Over time, as younger members elect joint membership, the auxiliary class will likely be smaller. While not an intentional outcome, it will be a new reality.

• The most active group of auxiliary members are the spouses of Past Commodores. That group will remain active and viable irrespective of what it is called.

WHAT'S NEXT?

This is where you come in... We want your input on this proposal.

- Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea, and why?
- Do you have any specific suggestions that would make the proposal better?
- Is there something we haven't thought of?

Please send your comments to:

<https://www.erieyachtclub.org/leave-a-comment>

Thank you for your time and consideration.

We plan to publish a second article recapping member input and updating you on this planning process!

