

Cohousing Communities: honouring both privacy & community

What is Co-housing? The following article is a good starting point. It's a revised version of a regular news column by David Weston, originally published in Vancouver Island's second largest newspaper, The Nanaimo Times, on 14th Nov. 1995.

From <http://www.cohousing.org.uk> – the network of co-housing projects in the UK

Do you ever feel lonely, even when you are in a crowd? Do you distinguish between loneliness and aloneness? Do you ever feel you would like to be around people who are friends and acquaintances, but will leave you alone if that's how you want to be? Do you ever feel you would like to live in a place where you can find some people to be with at a moment's notice -- with the option that you can dive back into your private space if necessary? Would you like the choice of eating each evening with friends and acquaintances, or just by yourself at home? If so, then a CoHousing Community might be what you're looking for.

CoHousing Communities are resident-developed mutually beneficial neighbourhoods where individual households are clustered around a Common house with shared facilities such as a dining room, an area for childcare, workshops and laundry. Each home is self sufficient with a complete kitchen, but resident cooked dinners are often available in the common house for those who wish to participate.

These developments are also unique in that they are organised, planned and managed by the residents themselves. By redefining the neighbourhood concept to better address contemporary lifestyles, CoHousing Communities can create cross-generational neighbourhoods for singles, families and the elderly.

CoHousing Communities were "born" in Denmark over 20 years ago out of a desire to create pedestrian oriented, community designed collaborative housing (CoHousing), with amenities for all residents of all ages, that satisfied the needs of changing lifestyles. CoHousing Community developments in Europe range in size from six to eighty households, with the majority between 15 and 33.

This form of community development was taken to North America in 1988 by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, a wife-husband design team based in Berkeley, California. In Canada and the U.S. over 150 groups are in various stages of development with twenty projects completed to date. CoHousing is based on democratic principles, that espouse no ideology other than the desire for a more practical and social home environment.

Among one of the many compliments paid to the CoHousing community living was: "I know I live in a CoHousing Community because it takes me half an hour and two beers to get from my car to my front door."

In Canada, the first Canadian CoHousing Community project, the 17 unit Cardiff Place CoHousing Community in Victoria on Vancouver, held its opening ceremonies in September '94. It consists of two sections: an older building which houses a community workshop, a laundry, a guestroom with washroom, and an indoor storeroom; the new built section houses a community living room, the

main dining room for up to 30 people, and a community kitchen. There is also a kids' playroom, a pantry, a semi-washroom, and a bike storage room. Living units range from bachelor to three bedroom. Currently there is only one two-bedroom unit for sale.

In the lower mainland the Windsong CoHousing, completed in 1995, is North America's first "third generation" CoHousing community. The term "third generation" refers to the evolution of CoHousing Community designs in Denmark, where observers have noted a progression over the past two decades from courtyard designs to pedestrian streets to glass-covered pedestrian streets. "Fourth generation" CoHousing Communities, of which there are now three, are 'villages' of several CoHousing Communities.

Windsong's 34 home community in Langley, BC, is planned on a 5.8 acre site. Two-thirds of the property, including a fish-bearing creek, will be preserved as green space. One to four bedroom homes are being built in two wings flanking a common house. A two-level glass-covered pedestrian street will link the homes and provide year-round gathering, gardening and play space. "Imagine," explains group member Miriam Evers, "In the middle of a winter downpour, how nice it will be to stroll down to the common house for afternoon tea or dinner without having to put on your coat and boots."

The arrival of CoHousing Communities is the future becoming the present. It works, it's human scale, and it's people and environmentally friendly. {moscomment}

The birth of the co-housing network

At a National Cohousing Convention held near Sheffield on 15 May 1999, Stuart Crawshaw of the Divercity Group in London offered to set up a UK Cohousing Website. This, he suggested, would facilitate the sharing of expertise and experience amongst the UK groups, aid recruitment and create a stronger sense of a national cohousing community. Others took up this proposal and the idea of a 'Cohousing Network' developed, centred on the website.

Letters were sent out to all the known UK cohousing groups (14) asking them to pay £60 p.a. to become the founding members of the UK Cohousing Network (UKCN). Eleven groups responded positively to this proposal and so the Network was formed and the website launched. The groups are listed on the UKCN home page.

The Developing Network

The subscriptions pay for the professional hosting and the monthly maintenance and updating of the Cohousing Website.

The website gives individuals and groups a platform and they are able to put forward proposals very easily. It is important that those at the cutting edge of cohousing are able to say what kind of help they need. That is why 'the Network', owned and paid for by the member groups could have a very important role to play.

Other projects could include, for example, the joint commissioning of professional advice, from accountants, solicitors, architects, etc. or the setting up of national or regional meetings where people with experience or expertise can tell us in detail how they did it or how it should be done. But everything depends on you. Please support us and help us to shape the 'Network' into something useful to us all that will have a real impact on the progression of cohousing in Britain.

