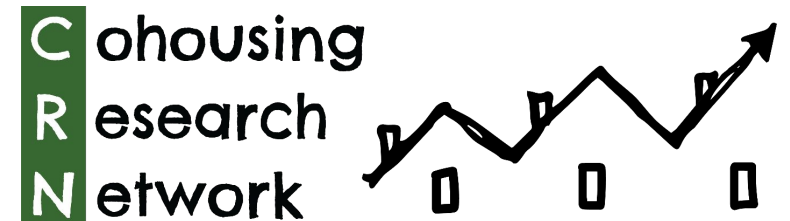


# Evidence-Based Affordable Cohousing: Taking the Next Steps

Presenters:  
Chuck MacLane  
Jane Nichols

Conference on Affordable Cohousing



# Contributions by CRN Steering Committee:

Heidi Berggren, Chuck MacLane,  
Diane Margolis, Jane Nichols, and  
Angela Sanguinetti, Chair, Neil Planchon, Host



# Cohousing Research Network

## The CRN is:

- Research arm of Coho/US
- Global resource center for cohousing research
- Hub for connection and collaboration among researchers
- **The CRN:**
  - Conducts Nation-wide surveys of cohousing communities and residents
    - Every 5 Years, starting in 2012
  - Has most comprehensive and representative data on US cohousing
  - Plans to include longitudinal panel study starting in 2022



## Goals for this session

- Provide participants an overview of cohousing affordability approach through survey data, research, and individual expertise.
- Engage participants to compare and critique present and potential affordability models so that they can envision how to move ahead

According to the 2017 Community Level  
Survey conducted by the Cohousing Research  
Network...

**31 (59 %)**

...of the 52 responding communities included  
affordable housing units

## Number of Affordable Units By Source of Subsidy \*

Non-government  
t sources (e.g.,  
foundations,  
churches,  
charities):

**8 (16 %)**

Privately subsidized  
(financially assisted  
from within  
community sources):

**43 (25%)**

Publicly subsidized:

**63 (33%)**

**114 total units**

\*All 31 communities with affordable units responded to this survey item (2017 Community Level Survey). All items in this survey are based on reports given by an expert representative of the participating communities.

# Equal Treatment and Equal Participation

Number of Communities where Residents of Affordable Units have Full Decision-making Rights

❖ **23 (92 %)\***

Number of Communities where Residents of Affordable Units Participate in Voluntary Community Activities at the Same Level as other Members

❖ **18 (72 %)\***

\*25 out of 31 communities with affordable units responded to this 2017 Community Level survey item. All items in this survey are based on reports given by an expert representative of the participating communities.

# Comparison of Cohousing Property Values with Local Real Estate Market

- **Percentage higher than local market** **38%**
- **Percentage about the same as local market** **44%**
- **Percentage below the local market** **7%**



# “Diversifying Cohousing: The Retrofit Model”

- Cohousing remains a niche market for white, highly-educated, middle-to upper class, liberal individuals.
- Retrofit cohousing is more accessible than traditional cohousing to groups with fewer available resources (such as less financially well-off individuals, young persons, students, minority racial groups, renters and singles.)
- The cohousing movement continues to face ideological obstacles, such as perceived connotations to 1960-70’s communes.
- Terminology of “cohousing” may itself present a barrier to mainstream acceptance
- Sanguinetti, A. (2015). *Journal of Architectural Planning and Research*, 32:1, pp. 68-88.

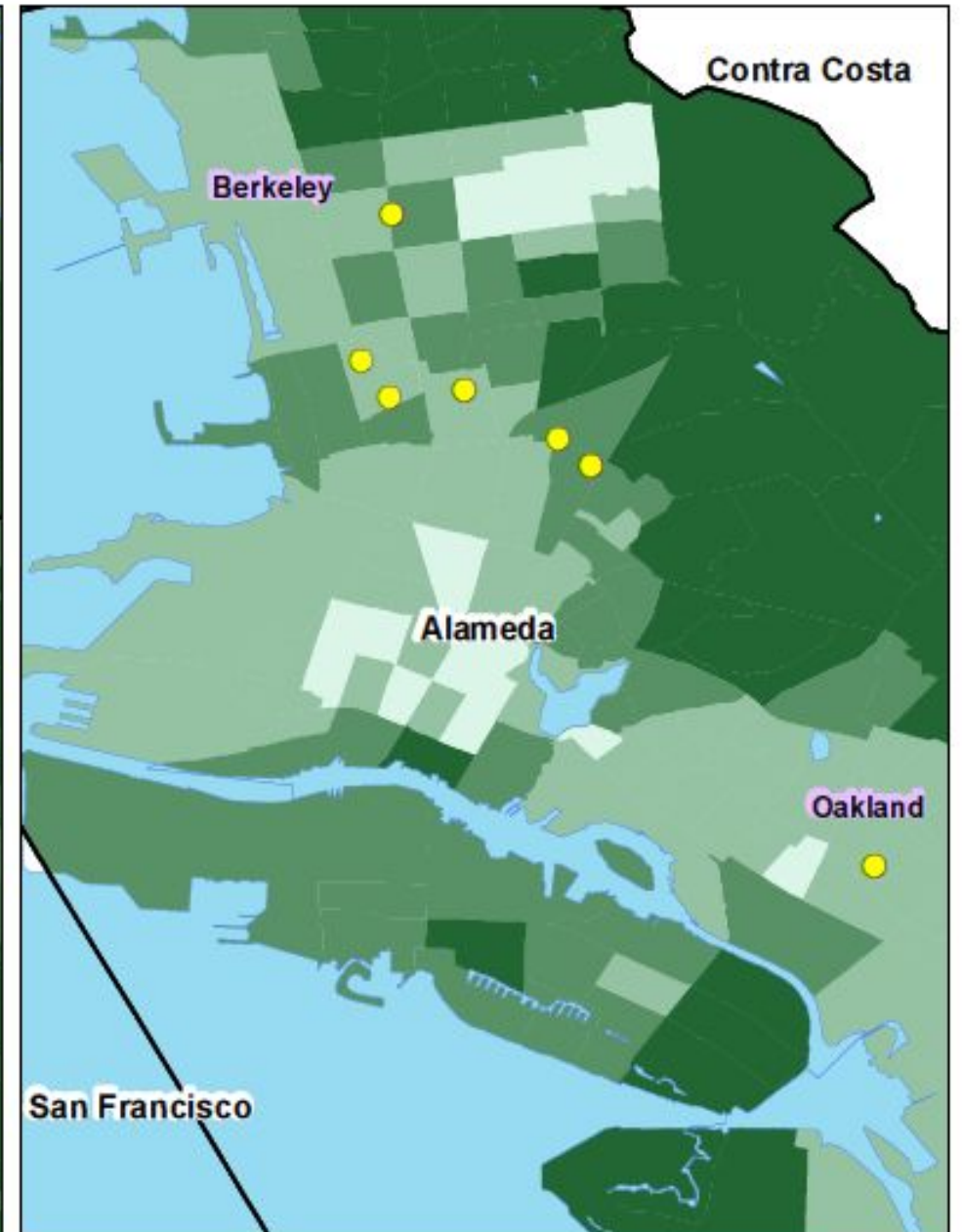
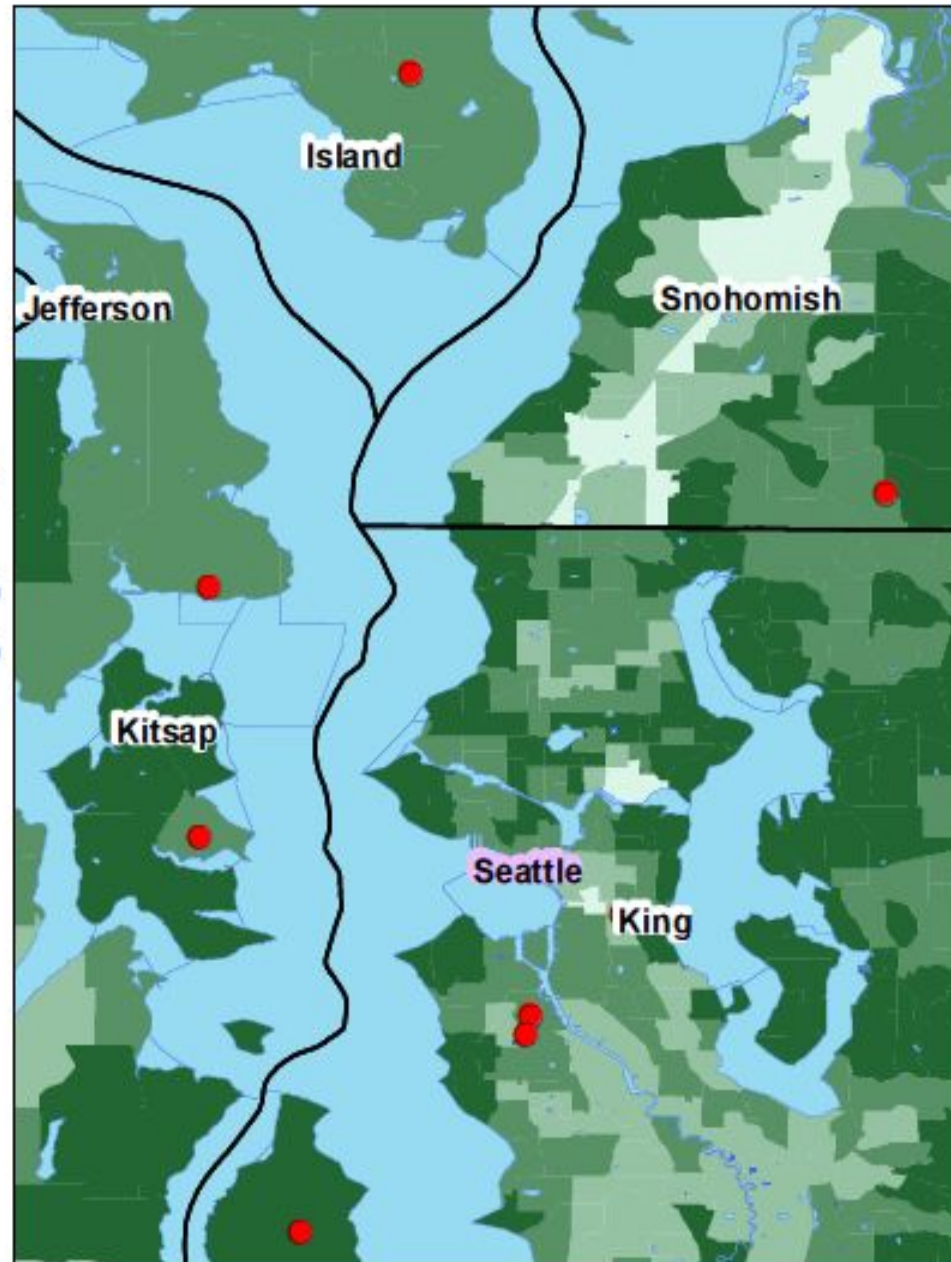
# WA New Build and CA Retrofit Cohousing Developments Relative to Median Household Income

Counties  
Cities

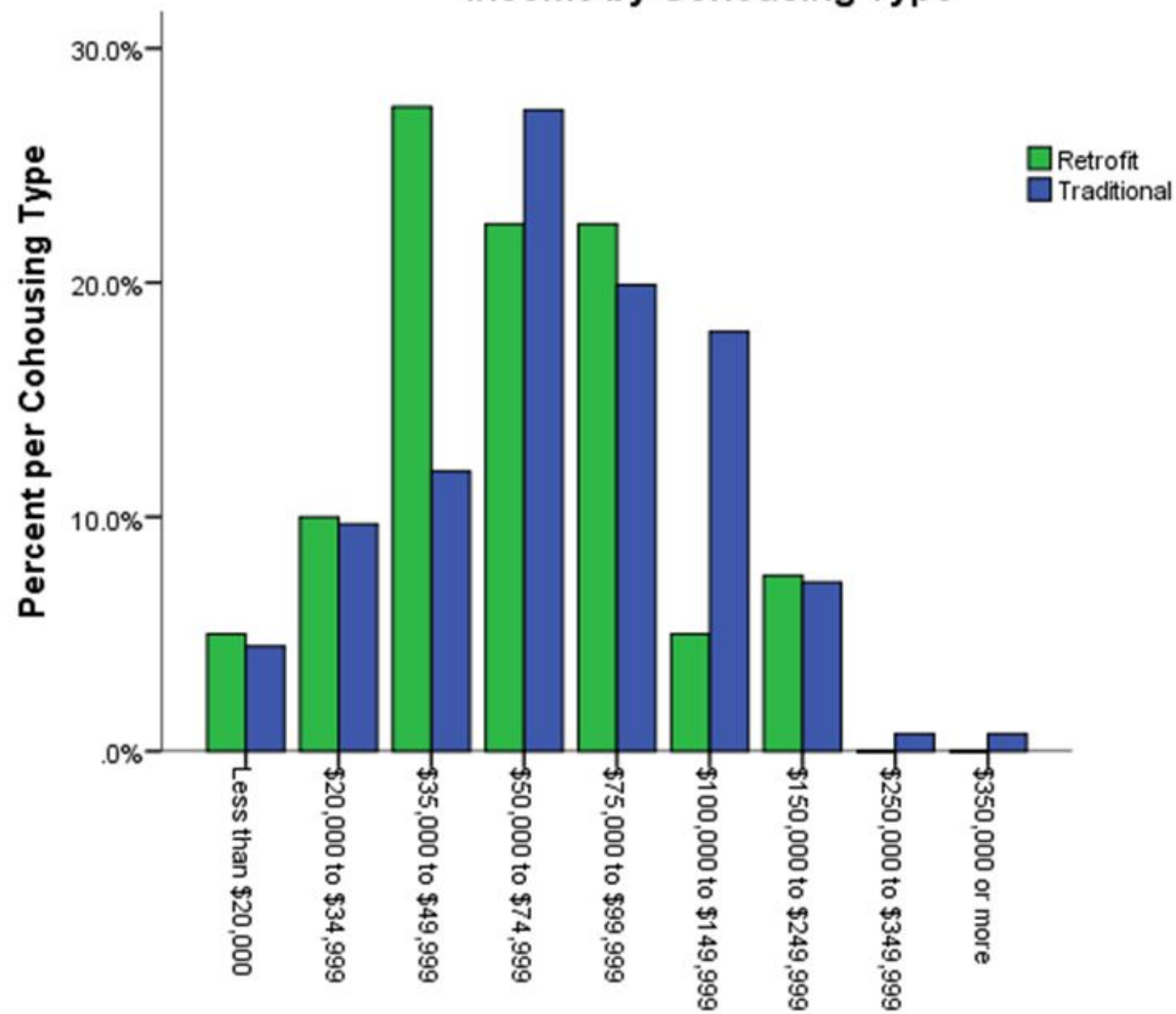
- New Build Cohousing
- Retrofit Cohousing

## Median Household Income

- Less than \$25,000.00
- \$25,000.00 - \$49,999.99
- \$50,000.00 - \$74,999.99
- \$75,000.00 and greater



Income by Cohousing Type

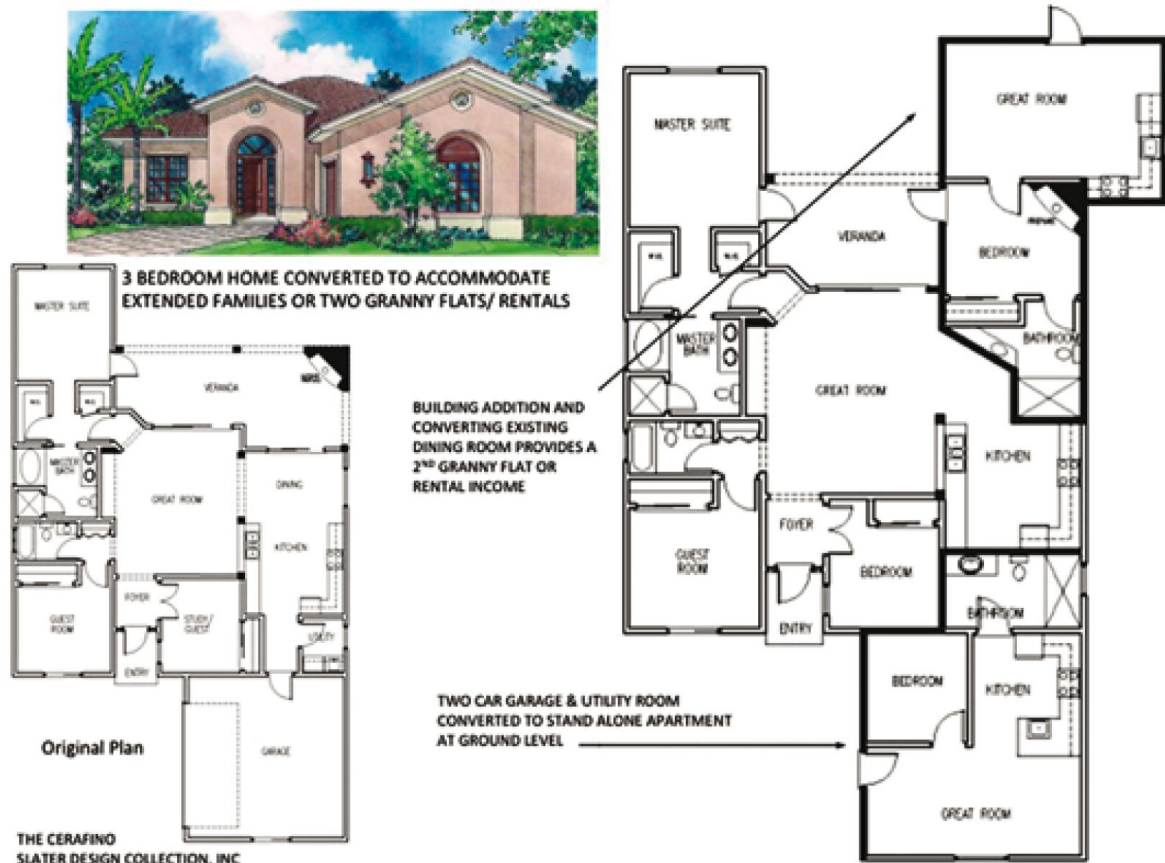


# Building for Affordable Cohousing

## *What are some alternative models to explore?*

- Retrofit - The FLEX-NEST model: Converting Single-family to Multi-family homes in existing neighborhoods.
- Modular or Prefab: Factory-built = cost-savings, *if* the finishing is done by the resident. When the residential community finishes together, sweat-equity forms neighborly bonds. (*Historical reference: Barn-building model*)
- House Kits and Tiny Homes: Reducing square footage = cost savings, with additional long-term savings in energy and maintenance.
- Container Homes: Modularity can achieve needs for different sizes and cost points. Single units can later convert to doubles or triples.



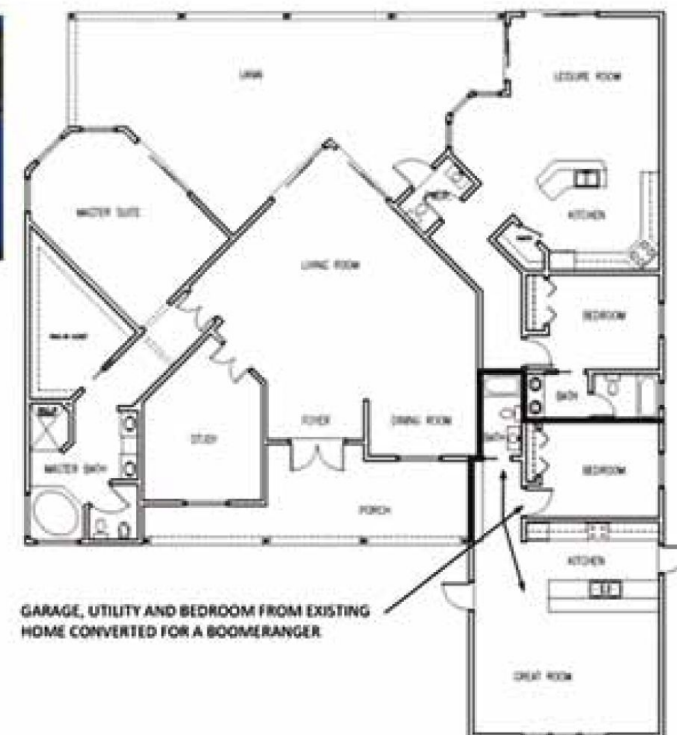


**The Flex-Nest: The Accessory Dwelling Unit as Adaptable Housing for the Life Span**  
 By Jane Nichols & Erin Adams  
*Interiors*  
 Volume 4, Issue 1  
 pp 31-52

**Retrofit:** The *FLEX-NEST*:  
 Converting existing housing  
 stock from single-family to  
 multi-family homes.



3 BEDROOM HOME CONVERTED TO TWO BEDROOM HOME WITH GRANNY FLAT GARAGE CONVERSION



# Modular Housing with Finishing Done by Community: Building Sweat Equity = The Secret Sauce V.2

The cost to build a modular prefab home is approximately **\$110 per square foot**. Of the three types of fabricated building structure options, modular homes are the most expensive, with a 2,400-square-foot home costing around **\$264,000**.

## COST TO BUILD A MODULAR HOME

Level	Cost Per Square Foot	Features
Base	\$50	No customizations or alterations.
Custom	\$60	Base price and selected options and upgrades.
Delivered	\$65	Custom price and delivery.
Finished	\$110	Delivered price and site prep, foundation, porch, etc.

### What is Sweat Equity?

Sweat Equity is managing the completion of your modular home. Put the money you save by managing your job into your pocket rather than the general contractor's pocket.

### Advantages of Sweat Equity and Modular Home Packages

You will find the savings on your new home to be around 10% to 30% by choosing our sweat equity packages. Some of the attractive features of our sweat equity packages are as follows:

- 1.) You choose the subcontractors and see what they are charging! Modular Home Place will help you locate subcontractors and even go over the estimates with you if needed!
- 2.) Most homes (once set) are about 75% to 95% complete. Leaving very little onsite work left.
- 3.) Our turn key manual is available free to all of customers. This manual answers a lot of questions and goes over the basics of being your own general contractor.







## ARK SHELTER

[Ark Shelter](#) was created by architecture students from Belgium who “desire to reinvent how people live their lives.” On the inside, you’ll find a built-in platform bed adjoining a large picture window, plus a fireplace, table for two, full kitchen, and bathroom. The floor-to-ceiling windows on either side of the structure offer plenty of natural light. Also, with sides that fold open, the home becomes an extension of nature. Not only does this prefab come fully furnished (with everything from appliances to kitchen utensils), it can also be shipped and installed practically anywhere. Plus, you can make it completely sustainable with their rainwater collection system (that filters water 3 times) and solar power panels. BASE PRICE: \$59,000.

## WEEHOUSE BY ALCHEMY

The [weeHouse](#) was inspired by sustainable design principles such as building small and efficiently. Their architects can work with sustainable energy experts to customize your weeHouse with greener materials and systems using active solar, geothermal, [green roofs \(more on that here\)](#), and other sustainable solutions. They range in size from 450 to 2,000 square feet and include steel or wooden siding, low-e glass, stainless steel appliances, and in-floor hydronic heating. BASE PRICE: \$80,000



## ALLWOOD EAGLE POINT

The [Allwood Eagle Point](#) is a 3 bedroom, 1 bath 1108 sq/ft home constructed from durable, dense grain, and slow grown Nordic Spruce. The kit comes in at a very low price point because it’s just the “bones” of your home – leaving you in position to add all the sustainable features you wish. While some of their smaller homes can be easily built yourself in 2-3 days, since this one is 2-stories, they recommend hiring a professional crew. BASE PRICE: \$46,900



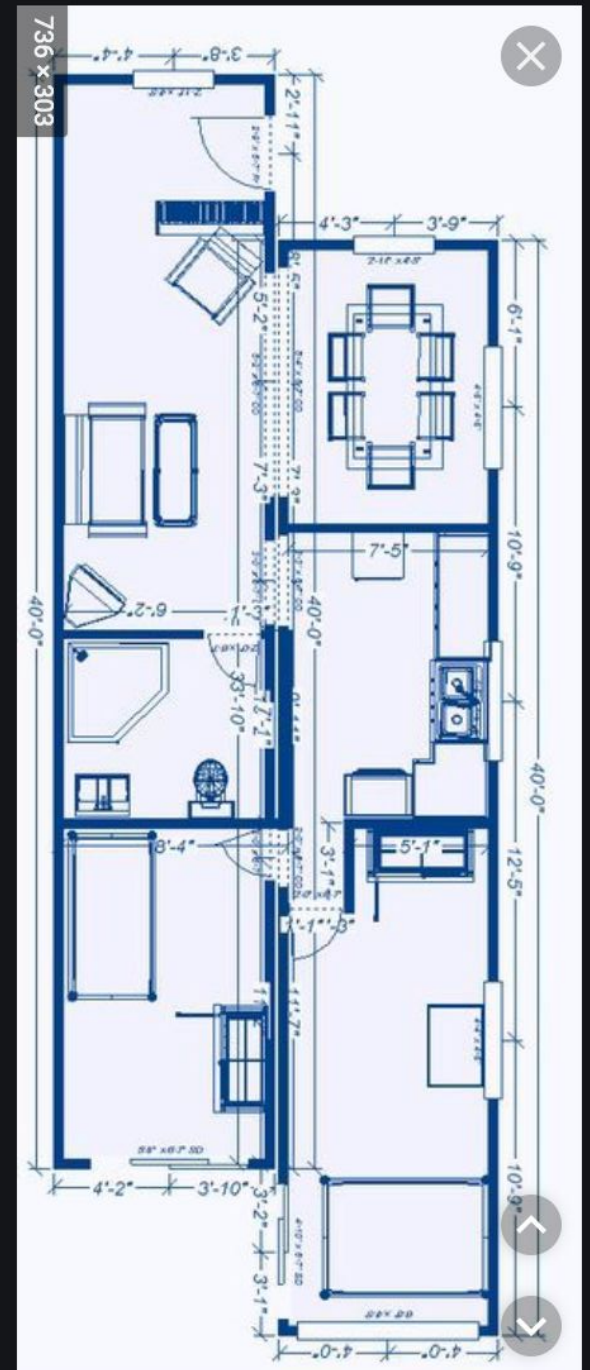
**House Kits: Tiny Homes and more, making the dream accessible**



# Cost to Build a Shipping Container Home

You can also finish out a shipping container for about **\$60,000 to \$90,000**. A large home built from shipping containers can cost between **\$150,000 and \$175,000**, which is generally about half the price of a traditional home of the same size. Shipping container houses take about 30% less time to build than a traditional home. The following costs are related to turning a container into a home.

- Container - **\$5,600** for a 40-foot container
- Foundation - **\$550–\$5,900**
- Insulation – **\$1.75 to \$3** per square foot
- [Drywall Installation](#) – **\$1.60–\$2.35** per square foot
- Additional Interior Finishing – **\$40,000**
- External Finish – Stucco cost **\$6 to \$10** per square foot and timber costs **\$2 to \$3** per square foot





# Housing in Crisis

- **There is a national housing crisis of still unacknowledged depth with increasing numbers living in substandard lodging.**
  - **Lack of affordable housing affects homeowners across economic spectrum**
- **Further, public health is threatened because of its close ties to deficient housing quality.**
  - **Public health based 20% on GENETICS, 20% on HEALTH CARE, 60% on Social, Environmental, and behavioral factors<sup>1</sup>.**

# The Case for New Models of Cohousing

- **The responsibility of public and business sectors in providing affordable housing.**
  - **Given the current and future housing crisis ( and that there will be a government sensitive to the needs of low-income groups), the US public sector will be pushed to invest resources in affordable housing.**
  - **With the difficulty of accessing attractive urban land in America, the business sector may also find itself investing (Amazon example) money so they can build in desirable locations.**
- **Data from cohousing residents gives us evidence of the factors critical to living positive lives in community.**

# What Facets of Cohousing do Cohousers Value Most

(Included in a survey of 502 cohousing residents )

**Nine Primary Facets of Cohousing Life**  
(Facets involving interactions among residents in **red**)

Monetary cost

**Multi-generationality**

Placement of dwellings and common spaces

**The help residents give each other**

The work residents do for the community

**Opportunities for social relationships**

Opportunities to live a sustainable life

Location (urban/suburban/rural)

**Sharing of goods and services**

Facets predicting *How much Cohousing Has Contributed to Your Satisfaction with Life*

All Residents

**The help residents give each other**

**Opportunities for social relationships**

**Sharing of goods and services**

# One Model for Affordable Cohousing

- 1. Cohousing professionals and interested parties will come together to work out designs for apartment buildings/small houses that incorporate features designed to promote cohousing among the residents. Other professionals and cohousing experts must also develop processes for on-boarding future residents from a pool of eligible applicants. The processes will seek to identify individuals more likely to fit with the cohousing approach.**
- 2. When a public or business entity is ready to provide substantial financial support for an affordable housing project, cohousing stakeholders can be ready to offer a proposal.**
- 3. When the cohousing proposal is accepted, building the cohousing units should begin. At the same time, the processes for on-boarding residents from the eligibility pool should also begin.**

# Affordability and Savings Related

Number of communities that:\*

- Have whole-unit rentals - 28 (59 %)
- Hire qualified members to work for the  
Community - 23 (50 %)
- Include members with home-based businesses - 28 (62 %)
- Spend less on household utilities than surrounding  
Neighborhood - 35 (76 %)

\*All items in this survey (2017 Community Level Survey) are based on reports given by an expert representative of the participating communities.

# How Has Cohousing Impacted Your Cost of Living?

- **Sharing meals.** spend about 5% less over all
- **Sharing of material resources is very helpful** - snow shovels to washing machines... and much more
- **Shared maintenance** . savings for reserve have helped minimize unexpected house repair and maintenance costs
- **Skill Sharin g.** help each other in many ways such as a neighbor checking out a problem before calling a professional and/or fixing it
- **Support** . Cohousers give each other lots of rides, meals, plus lodging for visiting friends and relatives, pet sitting - thousands of little niceties that normally you would either have relatives provide or have to pay for someone to provide (taxi, hotel, meal delivery, etc, etc, etc)
- **Entertainment.** entertainment expenses are reduced because fun and games are more readily available in the community.
- **Transportation.** drive less.
- **Utilities.** Utility bills are about 1/4 what others pay

## Potential Questions for Discussion

**How much can these approaches contribute to encouraging affordability on a national level?**

**What are the challenges that each presents?**

**What could be done to make them more effective as models that move cohousing forward?**

**What other models are available?**