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February, 2019

Cohousing Now!

What's in a Common House?

We know a common house is a definitional feature of a cohousing community, but what makes for a great common house?



To start with, it's useful to consider the central purpose of a common house, which is to support relationships, connection and time together. One measure of success in cohousing is the number of common house person-hours, with a general understanding that more people spending more time in the common house is good for community. When considering design or changes to a common house it is wise to ask ourselves, "Will this increase the time people spend together in our community?"

For those who haven't lived in community yet, this can be a shift in thinking. In most public spaces (think a museum or a gym) we tend to prefer not to be crowded by other people. For most of us it is fairly easy to imagine that we could use a laundry, media room or guest rooms as an alternative to maintaining comparable spaces in our own homes. It is a bit more of a stretch to think about walking into a media room, finding someone else already there, and being glad for the connection of watching a movie together rather than watching your own choice alone. Veteran cohousers tend to value both the availability of resources and the relationship building that comes of sharing them. It is wise to hold this perspective when planning spaces.

A common house generally includes a dining room and a kitchen and these are usually the most used and most valued spaces particularly with communities with robust common meal programs. The bigger challenge in design comes around the other spaces. Here are a few ideas to consider.

Incidental engagement - Will people who come to (or walk by) the common house for one purpose be aware of others in the common house and be drawn into conversation? This will have a lot to do with the flow of the common house as well as uses that encourage short daily visits like mail collection or recycling. Those accidental conversations are some of the most powerful relationships builders in community.

Differentiation - While our relationships benefit from being more aware of one another, that concept doesn't extend to a teen foosball tournament sharing space (even auditory space) with a yoga class. You will want ways for very different kinds of activities to happen at the same time without disturbing one another.

Versatility - The range of activities that will want to happen in the common house will (hopefully) far exceed the number of spaces available. Odds are the same space that is used for common dinner (tables and chairs) on Wednesday is also used for a

general meeting (no tables, big circle and a white board) on Thursday and a glorious dance party (open floor space, sound system) on Friday. It pays to be thoughtful about how and where the furnishings and equipment will be stored when not in use. Can wall art that makes lovely ambiance for a meal be set aside to make space for chart paper or yogi handstands?

Variability - Your community will change and the common house will be used differently over time. From year to year a given space may be used as a teen hang out, and then a yoga retreat, and then a homeschool classroom . . . Building spaces that can be used in different ways is one piece of this. The other is holding “ownership” of spaces loosely and periodically reviewing use and needs, expecting to make adjustments. Having these conversations often reinforces the idea that change is a normal part of community life.

Policy - Welcoming and empowering policy may be more important than the structure itself in determining how much your common house is used. You will want to find a balance between asking people to clean up after themselves and avoiding having people feel they are being policed. Some structure helps people to know what works and how to use the space collaboratively and safely. Too many rules or too much enforcement can discourage people from using the space at all. As in so much about community, balance is key.

Events



Top Ten Reasons to attend the National Cohousing Conference in Portland May 30 - June 2:

10 Portland is beautiful and is known for its parks, bridges and bicycle paths

#9 [Pre-conference offerings include taking a full day tour, a half day tour or two half day tours](#)

#8 You can experience the famous Portland food trucks

#7 [Pre-conference Intensives allow time to dive deep into a topic](#)

#6 Portland is also known for its eco-friendliness and its microbreweries and coffeehouses

#5 [There are many amazing conference Sessions to choose from on Saturday and Sunday](#)



Wed, March 6 **Grace Kim** **Common House Acoustics**

Frustrated by the acoustics in your common house? Learn the basic design principles and best practices.

Wed, March 13 **Karen Gimnig** **Facilitation: Contracting**

Learn how clear contracting within your community can make meeting more efficient and effective.

Wed, Mar 20 **Crystal Farmer** **Housing Segregation and Its Impact on Cohousing**

Location is a huge factor in recruiting people to a cohousing community. Unfortunately, the United States has a long history of discriminating against home buyers based on race. We'll discuss this history and how your site search may unintentionally leave out people of color.

#4 The weekend will be all about cohousing, all the time

5pm PT, 6pm MT, 7pm CT, 8pm ET
<https://zoom.us/j/202941610>

#3 [Courtney Martin is the Keynote speaker](#)

Full Webchat Schedule

#2 Cohousing helps to create community, one neighborhood at a time

and the #1 reason to attend the Portland conference

[is to find out: "what's with the bird?"!](#)

Register HERE!



How are you going to spend your National Cohousing Open House Day this year?

Are you seeking a community or forming one? Take a look at the list of participating communities and visit one!

Do you live in a community and would like to open your community's doors, welcome people in and show them how great community life is? Become a participating community!

Click [here](#) for more info!

Blog



How does a blog become a blog?

Anyone is welcome to submit a well-written and informative blog for publishing on our website. We hope you will share your cohousing stories and learnings with other communities. Submit to: karencohous@gmail.com



History of Fair Oaks EcoHousing

by Marty Maskell

I started Fair Oaks EcoHousing because I want to live in a friendly community where neighbors know and care about each other. I think we need more neighborhoods like that!

It was Love at First Sight

In Fall 2003, I visited my friend Don's home in downtown Sacramento. When I looked out his kitchen window, I saw a number of other homes facing each other, all with porches, and all facing a beautiful shared green. One of the homes was much larger. My mind was blown. I asked my friend to explain. He said he lived in cohousing. I said "Co-What?"

[Read More](#)



Purpose of a Work Day

by Karen Gimnig

Does your community have work days? Why?

That second question matters and may be worthy of review. In the broader culture of the US, there is a lot of focus on tasks, work and material accomplishments. This is good. We like beautiful flower beds, roofs that don't leak and clean common house kitchens. The work does need to be done. But why do it together? Why not hire it out? Why not let each person contribute on their own schedule?

[Read More](#)

In the News



Novato residents pitch 'cohousing' village in



'New solutions' to housing crisis

Hamilton

by Will Houston of Marin Independent Journal

A group of local families in Novato hoping to build a more connected community from the ground up is pursuing a Danish neighborhood design known as cohousing.

"When I came to Marin and couldn't find housing myself, I discovered cohousing and I realized there is such a deep yearning for belonging and community and safety and security in Marin," said Novato resident Judy Slater, project co-founder. "So cohousing just seemed like the right fit. It's a place for a simple, affordable, environmentally friendly lifestyle that helps you really get to know your neighbors."

by Future Learning staff writers from Victoria University of Wellington

CoHousing. It's not about cults, although the real estate agent one Wellington group bought their property through seemed to think it was. And, despite the suspicion of a Whanganui group's neighbours, it's not about communes. Think of a CoHousing development as being more like a "high-functioning neighbourhood".

Along with being self-organised and community-led ("a version of local direct democracy"), CoHousing should incorporate sustainability – "in the social sense, the cultural sense, the economic sense and of course the ecological sense", said LaFond.

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Classified Ads

Forming Communities



Fair Oaks EcoHousing
Fair Oaks, CA



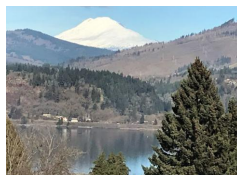
Ralston Creek Cohousing
Arvada, CO



Washington Commons
West Sacramento, CA



Prairie Hill-Iowa City Cohousing
Iowa City, IA



Adams Creek Cohousing
Hood River, OR

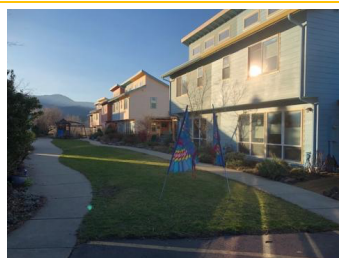


Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing
Eugene, OR

Homes for Sale



2 Bed/1.5 Bath with Garage
Pleasant Hill



3 Bed/ 2 Bath
Ashland Cohousing



Light/Bright 1 bed/1 bath
Daybreak Co-housing
Portland, OR

Cohousing, CA



**Building Now in Rocky
Corner Cohousing
Bethany, CT**

Ashland, OR



**Sunny 3-Bed
Jackson Place
Seattle, WA**



**Homes in Nubanusit
Neighborhood & Farm
Peterborough, NH**



**Large 4 Bed/3 Bath
Pleasant Hill
Cohousing, CA**



**2 Bed/1.5 Bath
with Carport in
Pleasant Hill
Cohousing, CA**

Cohousing Professionals

[Caddis Architecture](#)

[Fitch Architecture & Community](#)

[McCamant &](#)

[Design | Home - Community -
Planet](#)

[Durrett Architects:
The Cohousing Co](#)

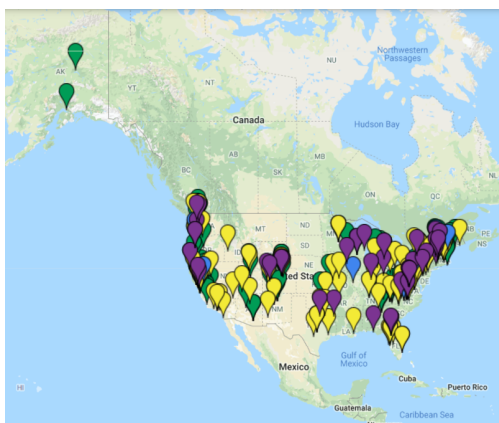
[CoHousing Solutions |
Sustainable Neighborhood
Consultants](#)

[Linda Herman Consulting](#)

[schemata workshop |
architecture & planning](#)

[Mary Kraus, Architect](#)

Directory - Find your community now!



[Click Here for the Cohousing Directory](#)

Do you see your community listing? If not, please get your community listed (contact me if you need assistance). karincohous@gmail.com

Cohousing Now! will post twice a month!

Not only does our monthly Cohousing Now! eNews have a new look that is based on our new website (making its debut in 2019), we have also added a mid-month mini-eNews edition. See archived issues [here](#).

Thanks for reading

[Cohousing Now!](#) provides news and events on Cohousing... Now! provided by The Cohousing Association of the United States. Please forward to your friends, communities, and other lists to spread the word about cohousing!

The Cohousing Association is funded by donations from people like you. Thanks so much for your support.

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karincohous@gmail.com
www.cohousing.org

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