

Cohousing Now! Know Your Neighbors



Living in Close Quarters with My Neighbors Taught Me These Important Lessons About Getting Along With Others



*reprint of article by By KATE MADDEN YEE
appearing in Real Simple November 2018*

When you live in a cohousing complex, you choose to share space. One member reflects on what she's learned about being a good neighbor...

Twenty years ago, when I was 28, my husband and I helped start a cohousing community in Oakland, California. We had lived in shared rentals since college, even after our marriage. It had not only made chores easier, but also sparked supportive friendships. So we were delighted when we found a group of folks at our new church who also longed to interact more intentionally with others in their community. We developed a condominium complex from the ground up with five other families and moved in three years later.

Cohousing-in which a group of people come together to deliberately create a neighborhood, both physical and relational-is a small movement but one that's been on the rise. Right now, there are 168 established communities in the U.S., with 140 in the early planning stages (acquiring land, finding members), according to the Cohousing Association of the United States. Most consist of apartments, townhomes, and houses built around a common area that may include laundry and usually a kitchen and dining area for regular events. In my community, we gather for two meals a week and meet for monthly "yard parties" to maintain our communal outdoor spaces. We make decisions together as a co-op would.

It's certainly true that we've chosen a way of life that many would not. It's also true that cohousing has taught us to skillfully deal with others. Because let's face it: No matter how you live, you still have to get along with your neighbors. Here are five hard-won lessons we've learned.

The problem is...me?

It's far easier to judge others' behavior than to consider one's own, a truth I realized soon after moving into our community. I was incensed when Neighbor A forgot to take the trash cans to the curb, when Neighbor B took too long to get rid of stuff she had stashed under the stairs, and when Neighbor C left a pen in the dryer.

But over time I began to remind myself of things I'd done. Thinking they were weeds, I ripped out new plants a fellow cohouser had put in the garden. I'd said insensitive things at meetings. I sometimes find myself thinking, Why do I live with these jerks? Then it dawns on me: Oh, I can be a jerk too.

Acknowledging this tendency toward judgment and taking the bigger view—we all mess up sometimes—have also helped me cope better in a variety of situations outside my community, from long lines at the supermarket to that one irritating coworker.

Respect others' values

One evening, I arrived at a community meeting full of righteous indignation: In my mind, our communication about rescheduling an upcoming meeting had been inefficient. All those emails going nowhere! No one taking responsibility for closing the loop! And why were we trying to adjust the meeting time anyway?

As we talked, it became clear we were operating under different priorities. My neighbor Cheryl Gärlick had suggested changing the meeting time so that people could go to a concert some neighbors were giving the same night. What I'd interpreted as a disorganized process, she'd seen as a way to support our creative efforts.

"It was a classic example of how we all have different ways of approaching an issue, and if we don't take that into account, there's conflict," Gärlick says.

We ended up rescheduling the meeting so both goals could be accomplished, and I was reminded that a key part of relationship harmony is an awareness of others.

Find common ground

Living well with your neighbors means everyone is a friend, right? Not necessarily. You can work effectively with others without making everyone a buddy. During my years in cohousing, I've had the opportunity to practice this again and again. When one of our renters threw a fit after I'd reorganized the storage in our common house—accusing me of thoughtlessly throwing out books she'd been saving—I had to work hard not to react in a way that would have made the situation worse.

"We're typically attracted to people who are like us," says development consultant Kathryn McCamant, who along with architect Charles Durrett, her husband at the time, helped introduce the concept of cohousing to the U.S. in the 1980s. "But it's worth trying to cultivate an appreciation for those we wouldn't necessarily gravitate toward. The person who tends to drive you crazy could also be the one who never forgets to water the garden."

Tackle problems directly

When it comes to neighbor relations, we often feel like tamping down our frustration when there's a problem. But sometimes exasperation can help groups find solutions. This was a lesson our community learned the hard way.

After about 10 years of living together, we discovered that some of us were behind on our monthly homeowners' dues—by thousands of dollars. Many of us were sapped by the demands of raising children. It was a victory to manage a shower in a day, much less track dues deposits. Those who had been paying were understandably angry at those who hadn't. The situation could have splintered our community, but we found a way to audit ourselves and settle up. How? Through many meetings, during which we decided that working together was easier than breaking apart.

With big conflicts, it can be helpful to bring in a third party, such as a mediator who holds the various perspectives on a disagreement while the group hashes it out. Call an expert when it's clear you can't be impartial.

Ronnie Rosenbaum, a mediator and facilitator based in Golden, Colorado, who specializes in cohousing and family issues, works with clients to identify the problem, ensure community members feel their concerns have been heard, and help them move from taking sides to finding common ground. She uses tools like communication agreements that outline ways to hold discussions respectfully. And she emphasizes the importance of making time for the process. "Don't just meet at the mailbox," she says. "Set a time and place to discuss the issue."

Let in joy

Sure, dealing with other people can be frustrating. But the rewards are great: After years of living together, my community has an ease and a closeness in our relationships that make life better, richer, and more interesting. This ease comes not just from working through conflicts but also from witnessing one another face challenges, like major illnesses and the vicissitudes of parenting. Acknowledging the ways in which the hard work of living together pays off keeps us going.

On a recent sunny afternoon I found myself sitting with six of my neighbors around the courtyard picnic table, sharing wine and cheese and joking about our kids. In that moment I felt grateful for this life I've chosen.

As McCamant says, this growth happens when we share our lives with others. "We just don't mature in isolation," she says. "We mature in relationships with others."

Conferences & Events



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Classified Ads

Homes for Sale



[Beautiful Home In Stunning Prescott Arizona](#)

Community for the Health of it

2019 National Cohousing Conference
May 30 – June 2, 2019 Portland, Oregon

Something for everyone —
those exploring the idea, newly forming groups or
existing communities.

- Cohousing Bus Tours & Open Houses
- 2-days of Pre-Conference Intensives
- Multiple Tracks of sessions: Build It – Live It – Sustain It
- Facilitated Discussions
- Networking Opportunities

Registration will officially open in January
click [here](#) for more details



The Cohousing Association of the US is teaming up with our cohousing professionals to bring people together to talk about cohousing. Each WebChat is a zoom call open to all. The presenter shares 10-15 minutes on a named topic and then answers questions from participants about the topic or other topics within the presenter's expertise.

Please join us for the next WebChat.

click [here](#) for more details



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Seeking Members



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National Cohousing OPEN HOUSE

Saturday April 27th, 2019

Save the date and stay tuned for more details to come!

[Sacramento!](#)



[Ralston Creek Cohousing Seeking Members](#)



[Riverside Living in Eugene, OR](#)



[Skagit Cohousing has land in Anacortes, WA and is seeking members](#)

Cohousing Blogs

Kids and Seniors Make Great Community

~ Karen Gimnig of East Lake Commons



For most families it is easy to imagine the benefits of sharing a cohousing community with other families with kids the same age. Naturally the kids will play together, the parents will have peers moving through the same stages together, and carpooling to activities is likely.

I want to take a moment to write about the benefits for a family sharing community with people who do not have young

children. Like so many things about cohousing, it can be hard to imagine multi-age community because it is so far outside our life experience, even though it was very much a part of life for most of human history. From daycare centers to schools to churches, our current norm is to separate children into same age groups and we tend to maintain those divisions throughout life.

click [here](#) to read more

Workshare, Play or Pay, Getting the Work Done

~Sharon Villines of Takoma Village

From the first thought of really living in cohousing, an essential requirement is being able to depend on each other to share the work. It's a collaborative effort and requires all hands on deck. If you don't know how to do something, learn. Even if your group is can afford to hire a development company, there are still many things that no one can do for you. Decision-making is one of the hardest because there are so many of them to be made. The "co-" in cohousing is "collaboration."

click [here](#) to read more

Cohousing Professionals

[Caddis Architecture](#)

[CoHousing Solutions | Sustainable Neighborhood Consultants](#)

[Fitch Architecture & Community Design | Home - Community - Planet](#)

[Linda Herman Consulting](#)

[Mary Kraus, Architect](#)

[McCamant & Durrett Architects: The Cohousing Co](#)

[schemata workshop | architecture & planning](#)

In the News

Co-housing hopes to create new style of Tulsa neighborhood



by John Klien - Tulsa World

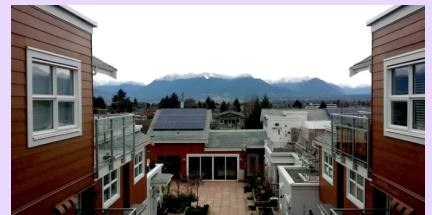
Tulsa could soon be the home to the state's second co-housing neighborhood, a concept originated in Denmark but introduced to the U.S. in the 1980s with more than 160 developments around the country.

"It is privately owned homes around common spaces," said Claudia Vandiver, one of the original investors. "It is a neighborhood that shares in responsibilities, activities and life. You are involved as much or as little as you like. But it is a shared neighborhood where you may wake up and be invited in for coffee by one of your neighbors. Or share a walk."

Heartwood Commons, a 32-home co-housing neighborhood, is currently in the zoning process for a 4.8-acre site near 71st Street and Riverside Drive.

[click here](#) to read more

Co-housing could make cities more sustainable



by Cheryl Gladu - The Conversation

Wednesday, November 21, 2018, 1:00 PM
- The idea that technology will fix complex and systemic problems like climate change, poverty, the housing crisis or health care is simplistic to say the least. We need a radical shift in how we live , and designing for environmental and social sustainability cannot simply be about applying new technologies to our existing models of living . We need to support models of living that can both improve our actual well-being and reduce material demands on the planet.

Existing models of urban development that can achieve these goals are taking hold across North America. One example is collaborative housing or cohousing.

[click here](#) to read more

Village Hearth Cohousing breaks ground



by Lainey Millen - Qnotes

Co-founder Pat McAulay said, "It took many of us a lot of time to come out; many

Foster Parenting in Cohousing

~ Laura Fitch of Pioneer Valley Cohousing



This story was written in 2003 and first published in David Wann's book Reinventing Community: Stories from the Walkways of Cohousing. We are republishing it here with permission because it is such a great example of how cohousing communities nurture and support beyond the community itself.

We've been living with foster children in our house for nine months. In many ways this experience has served to remind us just how supportive cohousing can be to those who live there and how far its influence can reach to improve the lives of people beyond our immediate neighborhood.

I have to start at the beginning-the first decision. It was the week before Christmas and an e-mail message from my neighbor to our community read, "Two children in Wildwood School need emergency placement in a foster home." I tried to retrieve my senses and quickly delete the message, but I hesitated just a bit too long. I'd been looking for some way to act locally, especially with feeling so powerless about the world situation and an imminent war in Iraq. Little did I know that my husband, Lyons, had already read the message, picked up the phone, and called the school to get details on the children.

click [here](#) to read more

Call To Action

Why support a cohousing association?
by Karen Gimnig

When I think about non-profit organizations, I mostly think of helping those who cannot help themselves - those suffering in some way from poverty or illness or both. So why would I support The Cohousing Association? Isn't cohousing about the place you live? Aren't most of the people who live there middle class or above? Why would I want to be part of an organization like that?

The answer is the same as any organization. We join because we are stronger together, because we can accomplish things as a group that we cannot achieve alone. Cohousing is about the place I live, but it is also about the places other people live and the impact we all have on the broader world. Cohousing is about the things we learn by living together and the ways we take those lessons to those who will never live in cohousing themselves. Cohousing is about community living and community life, and it is about so much more that we can become when we are supported by community.

Often as we do the tremendous work of creating a cohousing community the word "cohousing" comes to mean simply the community we are building on our one piece of land. It makes sense as a sort of shorthand for the huge package of things that have to come together to make it all work. At that same time, cohousing is so much more. Cohousing is a community not only of 20 households, or even 50, but of thousands of households that live this way of life and thousands more who aspire to community living.

In that sense, cohousing desperately needs the work of The Cohousing Association of the United States to bring us together. When we connect, we inspire each other, nurture each other, and prop each other up when we get discouraged. We share resources. Maybe most important of all, we help each other spread the word so the world can learn about the amazing power of cohousing to build strong, joyful, healthy communities and so that those who are already believers can find each other.

Perhaps that is why Katie McCammant recently told me that "every cohousing group, forming or built, should be supporting the organization financially." Katie has been working with cohousing communities for decades. She knows how much support we can get from each other and how important it is to have a connecting foundation like the Cohousing Association.

Community contributions can be budgeted ahead with a suggested amount of \$25 per household per year.

Individual monthly contributions of as little as \$5 can help spread the social movement of cohousing across our country and into our world

Make your donation [here](#)

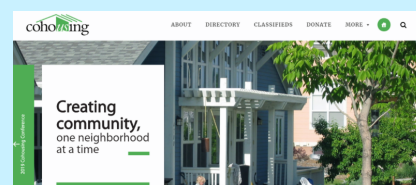
or send a payment to:
CohoUS
4710 16th St
Boulder, CO 80304

LGBTs wind up going back into the closet to safely get the care they need as they age. We want to be able to live comfortably, without having to hide any aspect of ourselves." Village Hearth is the first LGBTQ-focused ages 55 plus cohousing community in the U.S.

The group will build 28 accessible, single-story, attached, environmentally-friendly homes, clustered on one end of 15 wooded acres, creating a pedestrian-friendly village for residents. Floor plans include one- and two-bedroom homes, ranging from 650 to 1,150 square feet, each with a fully equipped kitchen, living, and dining area in a vaulted ceiling great room. The development also includes a centrally-located clubhouse and other shared amenities. Construction is expected to begin in November with an anticipated move-in date in late 2019. Twenty-four of the 28 homes are already spoken for.

[click here](#) to read more

Resources



You may have heard that a new cohousing.org website is on its way. The website is a central part of the services The Cohousing Association of the US offers. As a clearinghouse of information and connector of people and communities, our website is one of our most effective tools for doing what we do.

The new website will be even more effective at bringing community together in several ways. The new look will be more inviting, attracting more people to learn about and fall in love with cohousing. We're adding new content about the hows and whys of cohousing. Improved navigation and organization will make it easier to find what you are looking for while still inviting you to unexpected gems. [click here](#) to read more

The Cohousing Directory

Additions to Directory:

CohoUS Notes

CohoUS 2018 Annual Report

It was fantastic to have so many people tuning in to our 2018 Annual Report webinar ! There were 38 different communities from 4 different countries listening as well as dozens of folks creating cohousing! We presented the association's budget, showed off a few pages from the new-under-development website, talked about how you could become involved in the association and gave dates and details for upcoming events. click [here](#) to watch the video

Cohousing Directory Metrics

Established Communities = 168
Forming Communities = 144

That's 312 cohousing communities with an average of 24 units equals 7488 units. Assuming an average of 2 people in each unit that is nearly 15,000 cohousers in the US! Together, we can 'create community one neighborhood at a time'



Like receiving eNews? Please support Coho/US, serving as a clearinghouse and connector to grow and nurture cohousing across the country.

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Thanks for reading

Cohousing Now! provides news and events on Cohousing... Now! From **Coho/US**, the Cohousing Association of the United States, Cohousing Now! is emailed monthly. Please forward to your friends, communities, and other lists to spread the word about cohousing!

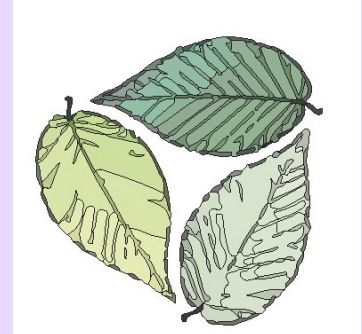
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Sunnyside Village

A Cohousing Community



[Sunnyside Village Cohousing](#) in
Marysville, Washington



[Living Tree Cohousing](#) in Moretown,
Vermont



[Cohousing ABQ](#) in Albuquerque, New
Mexico

We at CohoUS are working earnestly to make sure these Community Directory listings are as up to date as possible. Please review your listing and make edits as needed. Thank you!

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