

## What to look for today...

The chance you have today is to focus on the physical aspects of cohousing, to "see, touch, and feel" the homes, the common house, and the whole site. So today is your chance to ask questions like "How well does the kitchen work during common meals? What would you change?" or "How well does the proximity of the homes work in relation to the common house and parking?"

Since our time is limited on each site, your community tour leader may steer group conversations toward the more physical aspects of cohousing and away from details regarding how things are done—especially if these details are available online on the cohousing listserv cohousing-l or at [www.cohousing.org](http://www.cohousing.org). Questions regarding common meal policy, child-care arrangements, etc. aren't forbidden, but the tour is your chance to focus on getting information you can't easily get otherwise.

### Programming

What makes cohousing unique is that a group of residents have come together with ideas in mind of what they want, and these ideas are incorporated into an architect's design—rather than "guesses" by a developer as to what will sell in the marketplace.

To this end, most cohousing communities have had "programming" sessions for three specific areas of the community: the site, the common house, and the individual residences. In creating the program, the future residents consider questions such as "What should these places feel like? What activities do you envision in these spaces? What special spaces should be created for these activities? And how do these spaces relate to one another?" For example, one group put as a thought for their common house: "Should be friendly to adults, kids, and families with and without kids." They envisioned kids playing and making noise (as kids will), and adults being able to carry on quiet conversations. The spaces that these activities would take place in included a kids' play room and a dining hall with good acoustics—and the relationship between the two was dictated as "close enough to hear if a child is in trouble, but far enough away that we don't hear the rambunctious noise." An architect then takes the program and creates the actual drawings, incorporating the desires of the resident group as to the desired spaces and their relationship to one another. Today is your chance to see the physical manifestation of that programming, and see what works and doesn't work.

### The Site: Things to notice, questions to ask

- How would a conventional builder have built the site? Where might he or she have put the homes, the cars, the common areas without having talked with future residents (which is what usually happens)?
- What are the areas on the site (homes, common house, parking, storage, workshops, open/wild space, gardens, paths, etc.)? Where are they in relation to one another? Why might they have been placed where they are? How are people more likely to connect with one another on this site compared to a "typical" housing development? Are the spaces being used for the activities intended? What spaces are under-used or overused?
- What kind of access do cars have to the site? Where are the cars in relation to the homes? The common house? How does this placement affect the adults' and children's flow through the site?

- Where do kids spend most of their time? Where do adults spend most of their time? What attracts them to these spaces? How does the placement of these spaces enhance or detract from easy participation?
- Where is the common house in relation to the homes? How much of a direct view of common areas does each home have? How might this affect the adults' and children's flow through the community?
- How do the architectural aspects affect the feel of the community? Are the homes stand-alone or attached? How does this choice affect the feel of the Community?
- What would the residents have done differently regarding the site plan? What do they really like about the site plan? Which of their expectations were met or exceeded?

### **The Common House: Things to notice, questions to ask**

- What is the flow through the common house? What do you notice about the flow of people in and out of the spaces?
- Where do people end up spending most of their time, and why? Where is the dining room in relation to the other spaces? Where is the kids' room in relation to the rest of the house? How well does this work?
- What would the residents have done differently regarding their common house? What do they really like about their common house? What expectations were met or exceeded?

### **The Homes: Things to notice, questions to ask**

- What is the orientation of the spaces in the homes in relation to the public areas outside? How well does the design use the "soft edge" principle (where there is a gradual flow of the spaces from public to semi-public, semi-private, private, and very private)? How is sound/noise transition between units (ask before you test this!)?
- What cues do the residents use to respect each others' privacy? How does the design of homes offer privacy to the residents?
- What would the residents have done differently regarding their homes? What do they really like about their homes? What expectations were met or exceeded?



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