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THE FUTURE OF HOUSING THE MARKET, THE MORALS, AND THE POLICY OF NORTHWEST HOUSING

TRIBUTE TO DAVID GULASSA

THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF PUGET SOUND SUZANNE BRITSH PYATOK, PART II MICHAEL PYATOK
SHOULD BE BUILT PROJECTS MICHAEL LUIS URBAN CENTERS AND TRANSPORTATION LUCY STEERS



Photo courtesy of Arellano - Christofides Architects

COHOUSING TAKES ROOT

By Grace Kim and Mike Mariano

Often confused with the hippy communes of the 1960s, cohousing is easily misunderstood by Americans, and dismissed by many as a viable housing option. Pioneered by the Danes in the early 1970s, cohousing developed due to the lack of choices in housing and the perceived isolation or impracticalities of 20th century single-family houses and apartments. For the very same reasons that the Danes began their investigation of communal living, Americans—including some in Western Washington—were drawn to the re-establishment of a community focused lifestyle.

Winslow Cohousing on Bainbridge Island, Washington (Ed Weinstein Architects, 1992) was one of the first in the country to involve its owners from inception through construction. Since its completion, about 18 other such communities have been constructed in Washington State. The period of time between formation of a group and the physical construction of the project is not predetermined; it can vary from two to ten years. Second only to California, Washington has the greatest number of cohousing communities in the nation.

Strong shared beliefs among the members of the community, such as environmental concerns and religion, have often served as the basis for the formation of a cohousing group. Many groups establish a mission or list of community values as a means to focus their efforts and attract new members. As an increasing number of Americans becomes dissatisfied with the isolation of their suburban lifestyles, they find a sense of community as the compelling reason to seek cohousing. Groups attracted to an alternative way of living are increasing in number and diversity, and incorporating broad, inclusive language into value statements that they use to design their communities.

Common concerns about cohousing include the fear that a this lifestyle results in loss of privacy and autonomy, forces unwanted social interactions, and creates a burden of raising other people's children. Thoughtful design that provides both public and private spaces allows for a balance of both social and personal time. Realistic expectations and open communication among owners, as well as participation at the early stages of design helps to establish both physical and psychological boundaries between public/private spaces. Amenities such as vehicles, workshops, studios, computers, and kitchens, can all be shared. When families don't each bear the financial burden of supporting their own sets of these resources, the personal and financial benefits of cohousing become evident.

At Ciel (Arellano-Christofides, 2000), a new cohousing community in West Seattle, one resident explained that, as a single mother, her attraction to the model was based on the fact that her son would be able to interact with and learn from other adults and children after school and mealtimes.

Started by grassroots organizations of concerned individuals, cohousing is proving to be a profitable market niche, attracting developers of larger projects. One such developer is Wonderland Hill Development Company of Boulder, Colorado, building 33 cohousing units on 1.3 acres as part of a larger 30-acre development in Boulder. In Seattle, Michael Pyatok of Pyatok Associates is designing a large urban development named Hiawatha Place with a cohousing component planned for 1.25 acres in the Jackson Place community near the International District.

Information about cohousing in the Puget Sound region can be found at www.cohousing.org.

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1 McCamant, Kathryn and Durrett, Charles. *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*. Ten Speed Press, 1994.