



Top 12 Characteristics of Cohousing Communities

Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, the husband and wife architectural team who brought cohousing to North America, identified four characteristics of cohousing communities in their book: CoHousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves.

1. ***Participation by the future residents*** in the design and planning of their community.

2. ***Intentional site design*** that encourages a sense of community.

Pedestrian friendly streets

Clustered and/or attached housing

Soft edges used in transition from one use to another

Active parts of the house face onto the community

Private parts of the house face away from the community.

3. ***Extensive common resources and facilities***.

A Common House which houses many of the facilities and resources of the community. Some possible resources/facilities a CH may contain are:

Dining room and kitchen (always!)

Guest room(s)

Children's play areas
Workshop for adults
Lounge or living room
Hot tub

4. ***Resident management.*** Community is completely managed by the residents.

Chris ScottHanson, in his book The Cohousing Handbook, identified four additional characteristics:

5. ***Optimum Community Size.*** Like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, not too small and not too large -- just right! Or "right-sized." This arguably ranges from 6,8 or 12 to 20,24,28 up to 32 units. Larger communities feel their number is just right, too!

6. ***Purposeful separation of the car.*** Cars are relegated to the periphery of the community to encourage interaction among the residents. Exceptions are made for handicapped individuals, elderly or for some other need.

7. ***Shared Evening Meals.*** A top priority for cohousing groups is sharing an evening meal together. Residents can choose to cook at home or join fellow residents for a shared meal in the Common House. The community decides the frequency of the meals and the planning, cooking, and clean up is performed on a rotating basis.

8. ***Varied Level of Responsibility for the Development Process.*** Responsibility for the development process runs along a continuum from complete control with the group acting as its own developer to limited input by residents who simply purchase the final housing product.

Added by Ann Zabaldo:

9. ***Cooperative decision-making.*** Fundamental to the cohousing process, so integral a part of the expression of community, it's often simply assumed that cohousers will use a consensus process. Consensus decision-making is counter-intuitive to how we normally make decisions and how we relate to each other in today's society. Yet, consensus decision-making is the very process which is changing the way we are in the world together. It is the fundamental building block of learning to work cooperatively together to build a community. In consensus decision-making, "each person has a part of the truth." (Caroline Estes)

10. ***Cohousing communities are non-ideological.*** The group has no affiliation with any other idea or organization. There are no charismatic leaders. (McCamant & Durrett)

11. ***Cohousing is non-heirarchical.*** Although some members of the group will assume more responsibility than others, each person is as equally empowered and responsible as the next person.

12. *Cohousing is characterized by spontaneous support.* Like the idealized village of yesteryear, members of a cohousing community do, in fact, help each other out with great frequency.