

BYRON COHOUSING GROUP

KEY POINTS OF COHOUSING

1. a sense of community
 - mutual support
 - multi-generational
 - shared celebrations
 - community projects
 - shared social activities
 - connection with the wider community
 - less reliance on cars → greater likelihood of social interaction

2. harmony with the environment
 - sustainability (organic garden; recycling water, waste)
 - cars (parked on perimeter - car pooling)
 - solar power
 - caring for the land

3. safe and nurturing environment for ourselves and our children
 - balance between social connection and private lives
 - physically safe for kids (cars removed)
 - know your neighbours - a safe and supportive neighbourhood

*Interested in finding out more? Please call Michael or Simone (855 723)
Denise or Bryant (853 379)*

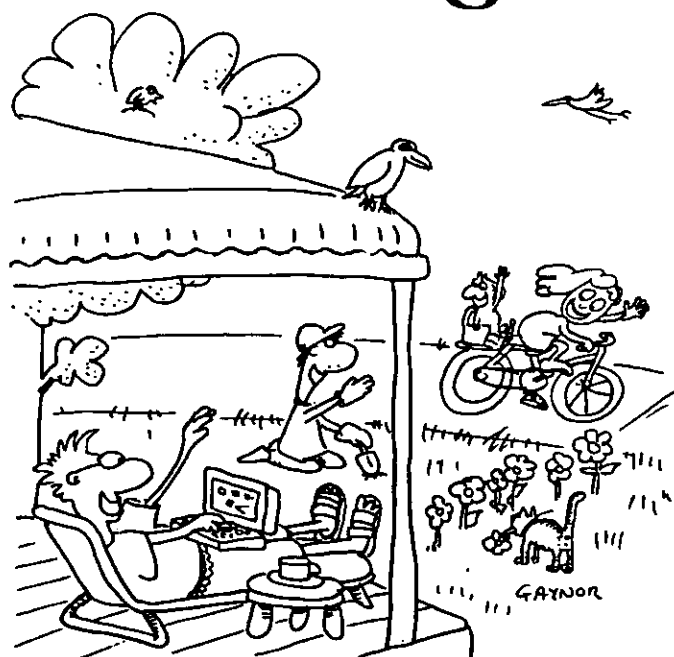
*You are most welcome to attend our next meeting this Sunday,
please ask for details*

Live in a neighbourhood where you belong, and still maintain your privacy?

...what about CoHousing?

CoHousing is a "tailor-made" neighbourhood, planned from beginning to end not by a developer, but by the people who live there.

CoHousing is akin to a traditional village. The physical design will reflect the balance between community and private life and will appeal to various ages and lifestyles, including children and teenagers.



The School of Architecture from the Queensland University of Technology will be supporting us in the design process.

CoHousing features...

- Environmentally sustainable characteristics including on-site sewerage treatment, recycled grey water and solar power;
- Community House with **optional shared meals** and facilities including TV room, library, childcare & more;
- Pedestrian paths, instead of roads linking the houses;
- Orchard and community vegetable garden;
- Individual dwellings ranging from small units to large family homes;
- Strata or community title ownership;
- Prices expected to start around \$120,000

**We're about to
design our community...**

**...are you interested
in joining us?**

For an 'Information Pack'...

Phone Michael or Simone (02) 6685 5723.
Or write to:
Byron Shire
CoHousing Group
P.O. Box 102
Byron Bay
NSW 2481.



WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT COHOUSING?

OUR GROUP IS HOLDING A SPECIAL FOLLOW-UP MEETING AFTER TODAY'S DISPLAY FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE COHOUSING CONCEPT.

WHEN? SUNDAY 12 JULY 1998 10.30AM TO 12.30PM
 (CHAT & MORNING TEA)

WHERE? DUDGEON'S LANE, BANGALOW:

AFTER LEAVING BANGALOW TOWN TOWARDS LISMORE GO TO THE TIMBER YARD (ABOUT 2KMS) THEN TURN RIGHT (THIS IS DUDGEON'S LANE) - GO OVER THE TRAIN LINE - PAST THE SEWERAGE WORKS - RIGHT TO THE END OF THE RD (ABOUT 1KM) - THIS IS MARGARET'S HOUSE. PH: 6687-1978

IF YOU INTEND TO COME PLEASE BRING SOMETHING TO SHARE FOR MORNING TEA LIKE A CAKE OR BISCUITS OR FRUIT.

FREQUENTLY ASKED COHOUSING QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS COHOUSING?

It is the combination of autonomous, private houses and shared common facilities (in particular a *common house*) creating a small scale community. The idea, in its contemporary form, was pioneered in Denmark during the 1970's, and later adopted in other northern European countries.

Cohousing combines the autonomy of single family housing with the community advantages of cooperative living.

2. IT SOUNDS INTERESTING, BUT WHY WOULD MY FAMILY AND I WANT TO CHOOSE IT?

For some or all of the following reasons:

- *Community - people often feel isolated in conventional houses. The automobile has severed the links between families in neighbourhoods. Cohousing offers community life and conviviality.

- *Enhanced Environments - Cooperative decision-making, efficient land use, and economies of scale can often lead to better environments at the same (or less) cost than typical single family residences.

- *Mutual support - single parent and dual-income families often find their lives stretched to break point. Cohousing provides a structure within which multi-family cooperation works to reduce this tension.

- *For your kids - Cohousing provides a safe, nurturing environment within a surrogate extended family.

3. EACH FAMILY HAS ITS OWN HOUSE - RIGHT?

Yes, everyone!

4. YOU MENTIONED A COMMON HOUSE, WHAT IS A COMMON HOUSE?

The common house is a separate building, designed to be the focus of the community, built along with all of the private houses, but jointly owned and used by all residents. It houses facilities that are used continually by everybody. These may include the following: children's playroom(s), workshop, a guest suite, a well equipped laundry, a library or TV room, a music practice room etc.. But most importantly, a common house can have at its heart a large common dining room and kitchen where week-day evening meals are prepared, in rotation, by a couple of residents for the benefit of all.

5. ME COOK A MEAL FOR 40 PEOPLE - YOU'D HAVE TO BE JOKING!

Think about it cook once every three weeks instead of every night. Think what you could do with the time that you didn't have to cook. Think of the relief. Think of community dinners as pleasant social occasions filled with interesting discussion. You might actually enjoy cooking a really big meal only once in a while.

Cooking for 40 people may seem like an enormous job, but in a spacious, well equipped kitchen it's much easier - just 10 times as much of everything. It is certainly far less daunting the second time than the first - you only need one recipe because three weeks later everyone is ready for your curry again.

6. WOULDN'T IT BE MORE EXPENSIVE TO BUILD A WHOLE EXTRA COMMON HOUSE AS WELL AS PRIVATE HOUSES?

Not necessarily. Private houses in cohousing arrangements are usually slightly smaller than they would be if they were entirely unsupported by a common house. Typically, each private dwelling is 10 - 15% smaller with the difference going to the common house. For example private dwellings might be 120 m² instead of 140 m².

In a cohousing community of 30 households $30 \times 20 \text{ m}^2 = 600 \text{ m}^2$ of common house. Furthermore, with availability of a common house, private houses can have simpler kitchens, smaller living rooms, and perhaps no laundry at all.

7. SMALLER HOUSES?

Only slightly smaller, and only if you want to save the money. Cohousing allows you to build a smaller house without loss of amenity. The common house makes up the loss and more - it's your answer to being cooped up in a small house during the wet season and it's a venue for children when household tranquillity is sought.

8. SHARING SPACES WITH OTHER FAMILIES SEEMS A LITTLE FOREIGN TO ME.

We share a local library, why not a common house? In both cases we need common agreement as to the terms. If that can be achieved, think of the potential. You own 1/15th of something, you have 1/15th of its cost and maintenance, but - by arrangement - you have 100% of its use when you need it. If you are each only committing to 1/15th of the cost, you and the group can afford items of better quality - things that are more enjoyable to use, produce better results, and which last longer (even under the conditions of shared use).

9. WHO CLEANS UP THE COMMON HOUSE - HOW DO WE AGREE ON THAT, FOR INSTANCE?

Everyone - according to an agreed routine. A cohousing community typically assumes the entire management responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of their buildings and site - just as private households do across the country. Self-management is a growing phenomenon in corporate and community life. Responsibilities like cooking and cleaning are typically divided among work groups in which all residents participate.

10. THERE ARE BLOCKS OF UNITS ALL OVER THE PLACE WHERE THE RESIDENTS REFUSE TO COOPERATE. WHY WILL THIS BE DIFFERENT?

That's true, but those residents were not active participants in the design and development of the project in which they all live. Experience has shown that active participation of intending residents from the early stages assures the subsequent success of the cohousing community. Therefore, a fundamental characteristic of this form of housing is the phenomenon of people joining together to design their community. It is the joint accomplishment that forms the personal bonds necessary for successful operation of these common spaces.

11. SO PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY?

Yes, it appears to be. Research shows that when residents are not involved in the planning process they use the common facilities less frequently and usually require assistance in management. Building a community requires collective appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of individual members. The "shared struggle" - active participation in the development and design process - is an opportunity to discover oneself as a functioning community. It is empowering, challenging and exciting.

12. HOW DOES A GROUP OF AMATEURS BECOME PROPERTY DEVELOPERS? THAT TAKES A LOT OF EXPERIENCE?

The challenge is exactly the same as that of a single family working with an architect to "develop" a private dwelling, and that happens all the time. Here the scale of the project is larger and the client body is more complex, so certainly it is not without difficulty. But, as with all such projects from houses to schools, there are competent and committed professionals who are prepared to consult on the client group's terms, or the group may share responsibility with a developer committed to co-housing development and the group process that entails.

13. WHAT HAPPENS IF I WANT TO SELL MY HOUSE IN A COHOUSING COMMUNITY?

Typically you would have no trouble. Experience so far is that dwellings in US cohousing communities hold their value or appreciate faster than the market as a whole.

14. YOU MEAN I CAN SELL TO WHOMEVER I WANT?

More or less. European experience (and recent American experience) is that resale of houses is handled much the same as the formation of the group in the first place: by word-of-mouth. Often there is a waiting list. Again, this means cost savings since there need be no realtor fees. Covenants, deed restrictions and the like, aimed at narrowing the market, are generally anathema to cohousing groups who usually strive to increase the diversity of their immediate community.

15. WHAT ABOUT AFFORDABILITY?

Here are some ways that co-housing has the potential to reduce costs?

1. 'Preselling' the houses. The resident-developers are the buyers and they come first - since forming their cohousing group is the beginning of the process. This takes the sting out of marketing, and removes some of the financial burden (the Realtor's commissions, and interest payments over 2 or 3 years of building and waiting for buyers).

2. Building less space means spending less dollars. By re-examining what must be private and what can be used in common with a group of known and trusted individuals, residents can build smaller private dwelling units, supported by the common service and recreational spaces, for a net saving in space without loss of amenity.

3. Building a supportive, caring, and cohesive micro-community means some potential for lowering living costs. Bulk buying is possible. Cooperation between neighbours lessens the stress of childrearing and daycare, distributes the responsibility for family maintenance, makes life more manageable for working parents, and reduces childcare costs. Its even possible to share cars or to locate near transit, so that second cars become unnecessary (a big saving!).

4. Allowing for "sweat-equity" (owner-building).

Equally important, the economics of scale presented by 10-20 families together makes it likely that higher quality sites and/or higher quality homes would be likely at a competitive cost.

16. WHAT IS "SWEAT-EQUITY"?

Building all or part of your own dwelling is an excellent way to save, but it can be difficult to accomplish alone. Cohousing provides a structure within which mutual self-help building becomes a neighbourhood possibility. There are many possible degrees of involvement.

17. HOW CAN AMATEURS REALISTICALLY DO THAT KIND OF WORK AND DO IT PROPERLY?

If you can share a common house, you can share a work supervisor. And not everyone is an amateur - many people have basic building skills, and groups of 15 households often have skilled tradespeople in their ranks. Cohousers bent on sweat-equity can band together and employ professionals to guide them and to help them get the best value for their personal efforts. This isn't for everybody but at least the opportunity and structure is there.

18. IS CLUSTERING HOUSES IMPORTANT? WHY NOT KEEP HOUSES SEPARATE FROM EACH OTHER?

Don't forget that these are micro-communities that have chosen themselves. They are groups that have worked together on a project - the development of their own housing. They are close-knit groups before they move in. Clustering creates the kind of pedestrian environment that facilitates human interactions, like a village and allows more land to be left open for gardens, recreation, and nature. Clustering around a common house helps households get the maximum value from a common house - particularly in cold wet climates. Some places actually roof the "street" between the houses. It provides a splendid sunspace, and allows year round passage between home and common house without reaching for raincoats and umbrellas.

Tightly clustered housing is a natural consequence of cohousing.

19. IF HOUSES ARE CLOSE TOGETHER WHAT DOES THAT DO TO PRIVACY?

Privacy is important, not only to the family/household unit, but also to the individual within the household. Providing a gradation from private to public (community scale) spaces is

important to successful cohousing. But privacy is different from isolation. Privacy is guaranteed when people have clearly understood and universally respected signals - such as a closed door, or a drawn shade. Privacy involves people respecting each other's needs more than it does situating oneself in a isolated corner of the woods. In some ways privacy can be better secured in these clustered, pedestrian environments than it can in suburbia.

20. "PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT" WHAT ABOUT THE CAR?

Your car is still there, though maybe a little further away, and a little less frequent a visitor to your front doorstep. Consolidating parking means constructing less parking area and drainage, which saves money and reduces the feeling of housing dominated by the automobile.

21. WHAT ABOUT OCCASIONAL NEEDS AND ACCESS FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLES?

Emergency access is required, and therefore guaranteed, by building codes. Such access is usually achieved by stabilising grass and/or by constructing pedestrian walkways strong enough and wide enough to support the weight of these vehicles. Limited access for drop off can easily be planned in.

22. WHAT ABOUT HOME OCCUPATIONS?

Cohousing has a particular value in nurturing domestic entrepreneurs to incubate small business growth out of home-offices. It is easier to avoid the isolation which is so much an occupational hazard of the domestic workforce. The common-house facilities can include "supplementary" rooms which can be leased to temporarily expand the space needs of residents. Such inexpensive space close to home is ideal for an expanding home-office or workshop. Such spaces could also be used to house an infirm relative, long term guests, or a teen who needs to get out of the house.

23. HOW DOES COHOUSING ASSIST ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE?

By tightly clustering housing, service infrastructure is concentrated. Renewable energy technologies such as central solar heating with seasonal storage, and solar aquatic wastewater treatment become more practical. Cohousing offers the opportunity for open (farm) land preservation through the concentration of development rights on a small portion of a larger parcel. Open land can support a farm operation if the interest is there. Compost piles work better with more than one family contributing to them. You actually get a pile big enough to maintain microbial activity.

24. WILL BANKS LEND FOR THIS TYPE OF HOUSING?

A cohousing development is essentially 100% "pre-sold". It is an enviable position for a developer to be in, and one which should not be lost upon a lending institution. But still, in Australia so little is known about cohousing, lending institutions may be wary to begin with.

26. HOW MANY FAMILIES (OR HOUSEHOLDS) DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A COHOUSING COMMUNITY?

Danish and American experience is that between 15 and 30 households is ideal. It is small enough to retain the feeling of an intimate community, but large enough so that if you don't like some one it's not going to ruin your life. Of course there are some that are larger, and many that are smaller.

Many thanks to Bruce Coldham, Amherst MA, (the architect and resident-founder of Pine Street Co-Housing community) for providing the bulk of this text.