

4 October 2006

The Roseto Study

“Roseto is a small Italian-American community in east-central Pennsylvania. Despite the heavy, lard filled diet, smoking, drinking and exercise habits, the inhabitants were relatively immune to heart disease. Most of the men worked in local quarries, most of the women worked in local blouse factories, all in unhealthy conditions. They were strikingly tenacious in adhering to Old World values and customs. Family, neighbors and the community as a whole were very close and mutually supportive. When these traditional values and relationships were abandoned by the rising generation, the death rate from heart disease climbed toward the American norm. The fifteen year study concluded that **unconditional interpersonal support counteracts life stress and thus preserves life.**”

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Co-Housing in America.

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Suburban sprawl common to cities, led to commune living, the New-Urbanism movement and is now the feeding ground for Intentional communities.

HISTORY

Intentional (collaborative) communities - The earliest example of this type of planning goes back to 1925, with the development of the Amalgamated, a limited-equity cooperative in the Bronx, NY. Still thriving, it consists of eleven buildings, with 1443 units. The members receive no profit and are involved with all of the decision-making through appointed committees. Amenities were created to accommodate the needs of the owners, and have changed over the years to accommodate the new owners.

Co-Housing - In the 1976, Sunlight, in Portland, Oregon, a co-housing condominium located on 15.5 wooded acres, was developed by a group of people wanting to save energy. Independent of any models from Europe, they designed and built a planned community, and included passive solar systems in their plans. They divided the cost of the land, community house, and maintenance and each owner paid for their own home and the land it sits on. They have recently sold eight acres to a co-housing group.

In 1988, architects Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, impassioned by their experiences they had visiting and studying co-housing in Denmark, published *COHOUSING: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*, describing “a new housing type that redefines the concept of neighborhood to fit contemporary life styles.... housing that combines the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of community living. This has become the inspiration of the co-housing development in America today.

Building Co-Housing Communities

In this article we will be exploring co-housing in America as it has since developed, in newly built and reuse of built communities, introducing the first two elder co-housing communities and discussing the possibility of co-housing for people with disabilities.

Charles Durrett estimates that only about a third of the groups that start talking about creating a co-housing community actually get to construction. But, of all the co-housing communities in the United States, as around the world, not a single one has failed. (*AARP*, March/April 2006).

Forms of co-housing

Cohousing combines private home ownership with shared community facilities, activities and decision-making. Social and supportive services, such as child and elder care, and rental units may be included. The residents govern and maintain the housing, with an emphasis on community. Most contemporary co-housing is ecologically mindful and includes sustainable design in their construction.

Elder co-housing; also known as senior co-housing, is especially for active adults, 55 and above, and designed as described above.

Congregate housing – support services such as cooking and cleaning are available from a staff to help residents, often with disabilities or elderly. Living units are small: some have private baths or partial kitchens. Also in the same building are common spaces for group activities and meals. This type of housing is usually developed with both private and public agencies.

Shared housing – several people renting or buying housing together. Each person has a private room and shares the rest of the house. Shared housing is subleased or owned by a private or public agency; home sharing implies residential ownership or rental.

What are the defining characteristics of co-housing?

To be considered a co-housing community the future residents participate in the design of the community so that it meets their needs; the intention of the design is to create a strong sense of community; common facilities designed for daily use are an integral part of the community, and are always supplemental to the private residences typically including a green space, kitchen, dining area, sitting area, and other areas as designated by owners; residents' management, and maintenance; and decisions by consensus. The community is not a source of income for its members.

Co-housing can combine private ownership of housing units, or have rental agreements, but all share community resources. Ownership types are decided on at the time of formation. It could be a traditional home ownership, condominium, stock cooperative, and limited-equity housing cooperatives.

Case histories

“The ties that bind are the ties that heal: living in a strong community can prolong your life”....David Morris, Vice President of the Institute of Local Self Reliance

Eastern Village, Silver Spring, Maryland

U.S. Green Building Council LEED® Silver-level Certification

[2006 Green Roof Award of Excellence](#) - [Green Roofs for Healthy Cities](#)

The Eastern Village Condominiums (EVC) structure is an adaptive reuse of an office building constructed in 1957 in Silver Spring, Maryland, abandoned for several years, and now transformed into 56 condominium unit housing, structured as co-housing, within a thriving urban community. To take advantage of tax incentives and share in the expenses there are affordable apartments within this community and privately bought condominiums for offices space. EVC is close to Washington DC, and is within walking distance to two major train stations.

The design objectives were to reduce property flooding, reduce energy costs, and create amenity space. The project incorporates green technologies that include low-flow water fixtures, high-efficiency lighting, and low-VOC finishes, and an award winning roof top garden.

Adaptive reuse of the existing structure and use of recycled materials played an important role in the design. Residents have been involved since the beginning of the project. EVC features a “common house” with a large kitchen and dining room, which facilitates resident friendly interaction.

There are no illustrations

Illustration 1a: roof garden

Illustration 1b: common room

Illustration 1c: exterior

Takoma Village Co-housing- Washington DC

U.S. Department of Energy - Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy *Star*® certified

Takoma Village Co-housing, an intergenerational community, broke ground on Oct 1999, and had its first occupancy in 2001. Located in northwest Washington, DC, the community consists of 43 one to four bedroom attached flats and townhouse units plus a 4,800 ft² (450 m²) shared common house and surrounding common green space. It is the areas first co-housing project for HUD's PATH (The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing) program, through which all 43 units were awarded Energy Star Homes Certification. This program is dedicated to accelerating the development and use of technologies that radically improve the quality, durability, energy efficiency, environmental performance, and affordability of America's housing.

Takoma Village is located near a major train station. Rear parking allows community green space to front

the dwelling units, and on-site bicycle storage is provided. Shared facilities in the common house, including a large dining room for optional shared meals, an office, a workshop, a children's playroom, two guestrooms, a music room, an exercise room, and laundry rooms, help residents live in smaller units.

The writer met with a representative of Takoma Village and was able to interview some of the owners. One problem arose in our interview. Single, without children and a fervent believer and advocate of co-housing, she disliked the idea of sharing the cost of a family for baby-sitting, water, and electricity and was thinking of looking into co-housing that was geared to either single or elder communities. This was the only sore spot that I have been able to uncover.

Again, no illustrations

Illustration 2a: Entrance with center courtyard

Illustration 2b: Common hall living area space

Illustration 2c: Interior common hall dining/kitchen

Swan's Market Place. Oakland, California

Architect: Pyatok Associates

Associate Architect: Y.H. Lee

Owner: East Bay Asian Local Development Corp.

Allan Rothman Mixed Use/Mixed Income

Located in the Old Oakland Neighborhood, Swan's Market Place, encompasses an entire city block. After years of success as a thriving shopping destination, it closed in 1983. Through innovative financing and other means, developers have revived the old landmark by creating a mixed-use development. Retaining 75 percent of the original structure, the first story of the building is devoted to restaurants, fresh food markets, and other specialty retail. The second floor includes 18 one and two bedroom affordable rental units, office space, a children's art museum, and 20 market rate condominium apartments. The loft-style condominiums were developed as co-housing units, with residents sharing a central "common house."

In addition, an outdoor courtyard is open to the public for events and performances, helping to fulfill the developer's intention of creating a place that serves as a gathering spot for the many ethnic neighborhoods that surround the market.

Illustration 3: Swan's Market Place common hall

Elder co-housing

Glacier Circle in Davis, California and **The ElderSpirit** community in Abingdon, VA are the first two elder co-housing communities in the United States.

ElderSpirit, the second completed elder co-housing is the outcome of haunting experiences of former nun Dene Peterson when working with elderly public housing residents in Chicago in the 1960's "The elderly were dying ... and they were anonymous." The idea of a retirement community of mutual assistance and late-life spirituality was conceived and nourished by a committee called FOCIS FUTURES, part of the Federation of Communities in Service (FOCIS), in 1995.

"People finding meaning in their lives, acknowledging ways to give up the ego and grow the soul" are the main draw for the new owners. A non-profit, tax-exempt corporation, Trailview Development Corporation, was set up and was able to apply for and receive grants, low interest money, and funds from a variety of foundations. There are a total of 29 units, 16 are subsidized affordable housing. The rental units consist of six one-bedroom and six two-bedroom apartments, with half targeted to households earning no more than 50 percent of the area median income (AMI) and half to be rented to households earning no more than 80 percent of the AMI. There will also be four efficiency-style apartments, affordable to people earning no more than 50 percent of AMI. These units will be part of a common house. In addition, 10 two-bedroom and three one-bedroom single-family units were sold for market prices. Eventually there will be a small meditation hall and the common house with a large kitchen, dining room, meeting rooms, craft spaces, library, office, and visitor room.

Some extra features added to ElderSpirit and Glacier Circle to assure aging in place are universal design, easy access and recreation for all levels of physical ability. Studio residences in a community's common house to provide apartments to home health aides, whose services may be shared by several residents, are also featured.

As of February 2006 there are 25 more elder co-housing communities being planned in the United States, and more are expected. On December 12, 2005 at the White House Conference on Aging, Resolutions 14

“Expand Opportunities for Developing Innovative Housing Designs for Seniors Needs” and 18 “Encourage Community Designs to Promote Livable Communities that Enable Aging in Place” were written to be presented to the President and to Congress. This is the beginning of making the government aware of the need and could make it easier for elder housing co-housing to develop.

Illustrations?

Illustration 4: Glacier circle site plan

Illustration 5: ElderSpirit exterior

The Future – A Dream – Co-Housing for People with Disabilities: This writer feels that it is very possible to create a community, within a livable community, that can accommodate most people with disabilities so they can live as independently as possible, within an integrated setting, without the fear of displacement, and shuffling around that currently exists under government sponsored housing programs. Using the Olmstead Act, that legally assures that people with disabilities can live within an integrated setting, and creatively combining several forms of co-housing community concepts can make such communities possible.

On September 18, 2006 I was invited to attend the first meeting of parents of children with both mental and physical disabilities. They were all dissatisfied with the housing that their children were placed in. They all wanted independent housing units in non-institutional settings, with or without personal assistance, with green space and common meeting areas, and without Federal programs dictating their housing.

I introduced the concept of co-housing and we are researching its viability. This would be a first in the US. The parents will be the pioneers. I will just try to pave the way and maybe see the glitches before they happen.

There are more than 90 co-housing communities across the United States, not including retrofit communities, where members are transforming existing buildings into co-housing neighborhoods. Approximately 100 co-housing communities are currently under development. The time may be ripe to develop new “Roseto” communities around the county, a benefit for our children and for ourselves.

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