Intentional communities take many unique forms and are found in virtually any type of neighborhood environment. Cohousing, as a philosophy, focuses on the establishment and cultivation of “community” while reducing the residents’ dependence on individually-owned material goods. However, both the physical form and the cohousing culture can result in a variety of relationships with their immediate neighborhood. This is an investigation into three separate cohousing communities and the ways in which they include or exclude their individual neighborhoods.
Background Information:

Cascadia Commons Cohousing began as an idea in 1992. A statement of intent and vision was drafted which later formed the basis of the articles of incorporation that formed the Cascadia Commons, LLC in late 1995. By early 2000, the land had been purchased, the architects had completed working drawings, the construction loan had been acquired, and the contractor had been hired. The purchased land included an existing 13-unit apartment complex, which was to be adapted to its new use, and an adjoining parcel of wooded land for a total of 3-acres. By July of the same year, six homes were ready to be occupied and the remaining buildings were completed by May 2001.

Although membership has fluctuated over the years, currently there are approximately 50 occupants living in the 26-unit complex. Though predominantly white, middle-classed Americans, there is a range of ages and lifestyles represented in the Cascadia Commons community.
Cascadia Commons Cohousing: Portland, Oregon

Building Form and Site Design:

Cascadia Commons consists of 26 dwelling units and a common house divided into two clusters by a wetlands stream. The buildings are a mixture of two- and three-story structures that adhere to a similar color scheme. In addition to the standard amenities, every dwelling unit enjoys its own modest front porch and small garden. The two clusters are designed so that their constituent buildings face inward towards their common green space. The common house contains a 50-person dining hall, a communal kitchen, a lounge, a small library, two guest rooms, a yoga/dance studio, laundry facilities, and office space. There is a shared garden and a children’s play structure located in the northern cluster, and a workshop space located in the basement of a southern cluster building. Parking lots are included with each cluster and utilize “grasscrete” rather than asphalt for stability. Concrete sidewalks and a wooden footbridge spanning the wetland stream help connect the community.
The Cascadia Population:

Membership has fluctuated over the years for a variety of reasons, including job needs, financial necessities, and personal comfort. Varying residency proves to reduce the cohesiveness of community spirit, as there are semi-frequent newcomers. Additionally, although Cascadia Commons does attempt to function as a community, the lack of “rules” and “boundaries” allows for much variation in interpretation. Variation, by nature, creates valued diversity, but does not seem to strengthen community spirit.
How do neighbors feel about the community?

The opinions of neighbors regarding Cascadia Commons include a wide spectrum, though most seem to be apathetic with the occasional hostile neighbor. One neighboring family, for example, has attended several Cascadia Commons events and appreciates that their children are able to have nearby playmates. On the other hand, a different neighbor derisively referred to

The parking lot and its relationship to the neighbors across the street.

The dwellings are separated from the parking lot by an elevation change.
How stable is the Cascadia Population?

In short-term standards, most residents have jobs outside the intentional community. Communal dinners and the communal garden help to bring the members together, but other shared work responsibilities have never been adequately defined.

Long-term, members have come and gone over the years, even during the initial incorporation stages, such that the founding members have been in residence since 2000, while others have been there less than a year. Most reasons for leaving appear to be financial or work-related.
Are non-residents welcome to visit?

The community does invite some of its neighbors. It is not clear, however, how that takes place and whether it is an all-inclusive invitation. There do not appear to be public events (e.g. classes or lectures) or any sort of business venture that acts as a connection with the public.
Yulupa Cohousing:  
Santa Rosa, California

Background Information:

Yulupa Cohousing is located in Santa Rosa, California and was built in 2005 by the architecture firm Michael Black and Associates. The goal of the community is to mutually help one another to overcome social isolation and reach towards their highest aspirations. They seek to provide mutual support, inspiration, warmth and openness to each member in a way that nourishes many generations.
Yulupa Cohousing:  
Santa Rosa, California

Building Form and Site Design:

Yulupa cohousing has 29 homes on 1.6 acres. The land used to be the Mayette Swim Center, but the site was developer driven and the Planning Commission and the Architectural Design Review Board praised the design both for its "superior architecture, a delight for residents and neighbors alike" and its "sustainability and humaneness."
Building Form and Site Design:

The site has apartments and a nursery school to the north, single family residential on the south and east sides and to the west Yulupa Ave. with apartments and duplexes on the other side. The community contains a common house with a lounge, multi-purpose room, kitchen, children’s room and laundry. There is a separate guest room, exercise room, and workshop and an outdoor common space which will accommodate flower and vegetable gardens and act as a social space.
Yulupa Cohousing:
Santa Rosa, California

The Yulupa Population:

There are 46 adult members, 13 child members and 1 non-member resident. Most of the people in the community work and have jobs in Santa Rosa. Some of the older members have retired and spend most of their time in the cohousing unit. Children attend classes at the local public school, but some attend a private school in the city. Occasionally community events are held in the common house. Currently there is a community facilitator intensive series workshop planned for the upcoming weekend.
Yulupa Cohousing:
Santa Rosa, California

How much does Yulupa rely on the larger community for survival?

- Percentage of Food Grown: 1-5%
- They have a small vegetable garden.
- They are looking into buying 1 acre of land next to their lot that contains a grove of fruit trees and are planning on expanding their garden to the extra lot.
- Most members of the community work in the city.
- There are on-site parking restrictions for more than one vehicle in the smaller units, encouraging people to own fewer cars.
- They have a commonly-owned electric vehicle for local use.
Public Improvements:

- Reconstructed deteriorating sections of Yulupa Ave.
- Completed a half street slurry seal
- Installed new street lights
- Placed existing overhead wires underground.
- Replaced existing sidewalk/ tree wells with a new sidewalk and planter strip.
Street Interaction:

- Façade has a bold and colorful design
- Because of its distinctive architecture, it is well known in the greater community.
Yulupa Cohousing:
Santa Rosa, California

Entry and Skybridge:

- The bridge has flying buttresses over it to support a sound wall.
- The design also acts a way to block sound to the residents from the busy street.
- The main public entrance is on the west façade.
- The entrance leads one under the bridge and into the courtyard.
- Parking is located on the north side along the fence.

Different views of the skybridge and its decorative buttresses
Background Information:

The Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV), founded in the early 90’s, is located in the two-block neighborhood of Bimini and White House Place in downtown Los Angeles. Their goal is to demonstrate how to become a healthy and sustainable neighborhood socially, ecologically and economically. Instead of constructing a new community they decided to heal their pre-existing neighborhood. They hope that with the example being set, they can influence city dwellers everywhere to establish more cooperative and ecologically sensitive living.
Los Angeles EcoVillage: Los Angeles, California

Building Form and Site Design:

Currently, the EcoVillage owns .5 acres, but has plans to eventually possess all 11 acres that make up the 2 block neighborhood they consider to be part of the village. Over the past decade, CRSP (the non-profit organization that started LAEV) has purchased two apartment buildings (48 units of housing, including two common units) which they are slowly eco-retrofitting. With intentions of creating a car-free or at least car-“light” community, intersections and alleyways have been reclaimed as plazas, gardens and other social areas.
Los Angeles EcoVillage:
Los Angeles, California

The ecovillage Population:
Because of the downtown location and the number of amenities located in and around the eco-village, people (both residents and non-residents) are constantly coming and leaving.

Left: Green space in front of building is open to public street and acts as a transition zone between public and private as well as a space to interact with other residents and non-residents.

Above: An ecological park located in the neighborhood. The concept for the park was initiated by community members.
Los Angeles EcoVillage:
Los Angeles, California

How do neighbors feel about the ecovillage?

Due to the fact that there are about 75 participating members living within a neighborhood of about 500 people, it is important that the eco-village has a good relationship with the non-participating residents and neighbors in surrounding areas. In order to keep up this relationship, LAEV welcomes these people to meetings and keeps them updated on current events. Although many people are not participating, most appreciate what LAEV has done to make the neighborhood safer and friendlier.
Los Angeles EcoVillage:
Los Angeles, California

How stable is the ecovillage population?

The majority of the eco-villagers incomes are received from outside sources. This means that they leave the community to go to work. It is the intention of the community that eventually everyone in the area will be employed in or near the neighborhood.

Are non-residents welcome to visit?

CRSP functions as a community transformation center. Neighbors drop in to get information on a variety of interests and needs. Bi-weekly dialogue groups bring speakers to the neighborhood to facilitate dialogue on sustainability issues in Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese. There is a monthly newsletter, a tree steward group, weekly open-houses, and monthly community meetings. The current emphasis on community organizing is helping to build friendships, trust, and leadership skills among neighborhood residents.

Case Study

This bicycle repair shop is an example of the community businesses that allow residents to work near home.

This board informs community members and neighbors of upcoming events.
Is there a public element to the ecovillage that brings people in?

- Many children, including non-resident children, come through the community because of the youth center, tot lot, and schools located in or near LAEV.
- The community areas act as a venue for all kinds of events, many about issues of sustainability.
- Community dinners are open to other neighbors, friends, and relatives. This helps glue the community together.
- LAEV is a public demonstration of sustainable community development sharing their processes, strategies, and techniques with others through tours, talks, workshops, conferences, public advocacy and the media.
- The multi-service community center, operated by the Bresee Foundation has a computer room that is open to the public for a $5/year charge. The foundation operates programs for young people and a community health clinic.
Los Angeles EcoVillage:
Los Angeles, California

How much does the ecovillage rely on the larger community for survival?

Food Production-
LAEV has several community gardens, but currently only produces roughly 1-5% of their food. The rest has to be purchased, but they try to buy locally. It is the intention of the community to one day be able to grow a much larger percentage of their food.

Goods and Supplies-
- Retrieved from outside sources.
- Implementation of bartering system allows for trade between residents.

Left and Below:
Two examples of community gardens within the eco-village.
Los Angeles EcoVillage:
Los Angeles, California

How much does the ecovillage rely on the larger community for survival?

Energy Production-
LAEV does not create all of its own energy, but solar panels located on the roof are put to use.

Off the Grid-
While residents all do their best to conserve energy, one resident actually took himself off of the grid completely. He developed a small biological living machine in his bathtub with small plants, animals, and a 20-gallon closed loop shower with filter and pump. The same 20 gallons would re-circulate all day long so the water from his morning shower would be clean by the time he returned home in the evening. He also had a composting toilet that used no water, and used solar power for all of his electrical appliances.
## Public Element: Does the public visit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Visit Status</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cascadia Commons</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulupa Cohousing</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA EcoVillage</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>- The community areas act as a venue for all kinds of events&lt;br&gt;- Community dinners are open to other neighbors&lt;br&gt;- The multi-service community center, operated by the Bresee Foundation has a computer room that is open to the public for a $5/year charge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Reliance on the Greater Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cascadia Commons</th>
<th>Yulupa Cohousing</th>
<th>LA EcoVillage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food:</strong></td>
<td>Home-grown food accounts for very little of overall consumption.</td>
<td>Community grows 1-5% of its own food. Plans to rent old adjacent orchard.</td>
<td>Community grows 1-5% of its own food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goods &amp; Services:</strong></td>
<td>Some internal bartering</td>
<td>Shared material goods.</td>
<td>Occasional internal bartering/trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy:</strong></td>
<td>100% externally-supplied</td>
<td>Some PV panels.</td>
<td>Some PV panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transportation:</strong></td>
<td>Nearby public transportation, Bicycles</td>
<td>Shared vehicles, Nearby public transportation, Bicycles</td>
<td>Shared vehicles, Nearby public transportation, Bicycles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Gateways

Cascadia Commons

Cascade Commons is removed from the street and is buffered by the two parking lots, making it less accessible by their neighbors.

Yulupa Cohousing

Yulupa has a main entrance off the street, but is gated and acts as a private entrance. Perimeter fencing divides Yulupa from their neighbors. Other secondary entrances are intended for resident use only. The driveway curves substantially hindering the view through to the residents’ vehicles, which makes public parking less welcome.

LA EcoVillage

Situated within an intensely urban, built-out neighborhood, LAEV is closely interconnected with its neighborhood. There are no large fences keeping people out. Instead, the more private residences are mixed in with public schools and commercial spaces.
## Public Gathering Places

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cascadia Commons</strong></td>
<td>Invited guests are welcome to some dinners and events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yulupa Cohousing</strong></td>
<td>Courtyard available to the public during special events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LA EcoVillage</strong></td>
<td>The main public gathering places in the EcoVillage are the two units used as community rooms. These units are located within the apartment buildings. Also, outdoor spaces, such as the courtyard and alleyways where the asphalt is being removed serve as spaces for community members and neighbors to interact. In 1993 when the project began, there was little to no interaction between neighbors and most were fearful of each other. Now, there are many places and activities that bring people together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- There are many ways in which functional cohousing communities view their role in the greater community.
- Physical design can play a large part in isolating the residents from their greater neighborhood environment.
- The philosophical design of the intentional community helps to define the community’s relationship to their neighbors.
- Without a sense of greater belonging, a cohousing community will not likely embrace its larger community.
- Some intentional communities hope that their efforts will percolate through the greater community, thereby effecting change.
- Pre-existing, adapted neighborhoods can function successfully as a “neighbor” since they are already part of the common fabric, and can develop organically over time.
- Having a philosophy that invites the larger community to participate in the day-to-day living, such as meetings and meals, as well as the special events, makes for a greater sense of community.
Cohousing and the Greater Community:
A look at how intentional communities interact with their neighborhood

Sources:

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http://www.ic.org
http://www.mblackarchitects.com/yulupacohousing.html
http://www.yulupacoho.com

LA EcoVillage:
26 August 2003, California Materials Exchange (CalMAX)
http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/ . November 03, 2004
http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC35/Arkin.htm