Community Gathering Space

Case studies and observation of what brings a community together

the common house
soft edges
outdoor space
design schemes
case studies

Allyson Foster    Matthew Crawford    Erin Kirkpatrick    Frank Tea    Tuan Vu
Every cohousing community has some variation of a common house. The common house supplements the individual dwellings and provides a place for community activities. Each community decides what role the common house will fill. The larger the community, the more varied functions the common house might provide.

“It’s through the activities in the common house that we get to know each other and are able to keep in touch.” -- Sun and Wind resident

“Cohousers believe that it’s more readily possible to live lighter on the planet if they cooperate with their neighbors, and their lives are easier, more economical, more interesting, and more fun.” - Charles Durrett

“Community living is not about eliminating differences to find the joy; it’s about living joyously with differences.” - Laird Schaub

The extensive shared amenities provide space and opportunity for the community members to explore their interests and satisfy their social and practical needs.

Extension of individual homes.

Hub of activity.

Public living room.

Eat, socialize, celebrate, hang out, relax.

The common house is the heart of the cohousing community.
the common house

Almost every common house includes the following basic functions:

1. A large dining area and community gathering space. This room is used for parties, dances, community videos, and more.

2. A children’s play area, visually connected but acoustically isolated from the dining area. In a larger community, this might be divided into toddler’s space, children’s space, and teen’s space.

3. A common kitchen designed for at least two cooks at a time. Although its primary use is for preparing community meals, the kitchen might also be used at other times for juicing, canning, and cleaning/sorting of community-grown vegetables and foods/other goods purchased by a community buying co-operative.

4. Mail pick-up locations, with bulletin boards and other arrangements for internal communication.

5. Restroom areas.

Other rooms that might be found in a common house:
- laundry facilities
- game room
- meeting room
- exercise room
- music room
- library
- workshop
- craft room
- community store
- photography darkroom
- guest rooms
- offices
- lots of storage
Specific activities, such as attending common dinners, using the laundry facilities, or picking something up from the cooperative store, bring people to the common house and the design should allow them to see if other people are there.

There must be places in the common house both for a few people to gather informally and for the whole community to meet.

One difficult design problem is to create an intimate atmosphere while at the same time provide for the needs of a large group.

Location between children's room and dining room is also important because parents want to be within hearing distance of their children but they also want to relax.

Nearly every community wants more space in their common house, but building costs can prohibit the size. The best way to create a successful common house is to make sure and utilize all the space available and make rooms multi-purpose.
the common house

The location of the common house greatly affects the frequency of its use.

Three sometimes conflicting requirements for the location of the common house are:

1. That residents pass the common house on their way home.

2. That the common house be visible from each house or from outside it.

3. That the common house be equidistant from all dwellings.

The location of the common house greatly affects the frequency of its use. “It’s through the activities of the common house that we get to know each other and are able to keep touch. And that carries over outs adding life to the street scene.”

Passing the common house on their way home, residents can see if anything is going on. If residents can see the common house and its terrace from their own homes, they are more likely to join in when there is activity.

For the common house to be an integral part of community life, residents must pass it in the course of their daily activities.
soft edges

a comfortable resting place inbetween the home and the common area

“If these transitional spaces are not well designed, there will be missing links and fewer opportunities to develop the relationships that make a group of houses into a community.”
- Cohousing, McCamant & Durrett, 179

“Soft Edges” Include:
- Plantings
- Pavings
- Furniture
- Gardens
- 8 ft maximum depth

“Soft Edges” Should Avoid:
- Corridors
- Level Changes
- Doors
- Harsh Edges
- Fences
soft edges

- Pedestrian path used as a buffer from the common space and private areas.

- Individual yards minimize the common area and leave little privacy for outdoor living.

- House fronts are flush
- Harsh edge between courtyard and house.
- Shared front yard
- Step out into public
- Forces people into backyard for privacy

- Maximum public
- Minimum private

- Offsetting dwellings create alternating separate private spaces.

The building pattern creates division of private spaces among residents and eases the transition from public to private.

- Individual units
- Creates more private space but less chance for spontaneous interactions.

(Jystrup Savvaerket)

(Mejdal II)

(Bondebjerg)

(Lbsgarden)

(Sun and Wind)
larger cohousing developments can be subdivided into smaller units to create a gradation in the size of public open space.

houses open to the central core to emphasize the interior of the complex and keep the open space private.

the open space should be bounded by housing units it serves, maintaining privacy of use for the residents.

entry points into the outdoor space from a public street or sidewalk should emphasize that the area is not a public space, utilizing thresholds, gates, landscaping, etc.

there should be clear boundaries and easy access between what is private (housing unit, patio, yard) and what is shared.

dimensions and height to width ratios of the buildings to the outdoor space should create a human scaled setting.

less programmed space, or outdoor space not requiring intimacy.

open space requiring privacy i.e. playground.
programmed outdoor space

open space requiring more security or privacy are usually bounded by dwellings, such as terraces and playgrounds.

other programmed space that does not require as much seclusion usually lie on the boundaries of the community, including sport courts, gardens, sheds, barns, and open or unprogrammed field.

- housing units
- playgrounds and terraces
- gardens and sports facilities
cohousing attributes

- within dwelling community
- separate parking
- clear boundaries
- human scale
- casual social interaction
- accessibility from dwelling units
- public/private spaces
- surveillance (security)
- open spaces
- use during day/night
  (attractive night-time lighting)
design schemes

Central:
- Common Ground: Aspen, CO
- Pioneer Valley Cohousing: Amherst, MA

Radial:
- Winslow Cohousing: Winslow, WA
- Muir Commons: Davis, CA

Linear:
- Windsong Cohousing: Langley, BC
- Valley Oaks Cohousing: Chico, CA

Legend
- Common House
- Large Open Space
- Kids Play
- Housing
- Parking
Ithaca Ecovillage

Brief Guidelines:
- Foster the formation of a sense of community, both within neighbourhoods and within the village as a whole, while maintaining residents' privacy
- Support sustainable relationship among residents
- Establish sustainable relationships between human habitation on the land and the living matrix of plants and animal life
- Maximize open space
- Neighbourhoods will surround an open, vehicle-free village green
- Create a dynamic, village atmosphere through activity, people, and movement
- Open space incorporating a fountain, sculpture, water, playground, bandstand, amphitheatre, planting, gardens

FRoG (First Resident Group)  Kids' Sandbox near path  SONG (Second Neighborhood Group)

FRoG Common House
Common Goals of Common Facilities:
1. Balancing need for privacy and community
2. People owning their own homes and a place to gather or shared resources
3. Financial management or common areas

Extensive Common Facilities:
1. Designed for daily use, supplementing private living areas (dining room, lounges, library, workshop, childcare, recreation, kitchen, meeting rooms).
2. Creating strong sense of community.
3. Educating community members through a sequence of activities stimulated by the common spaces (library, media room, childcare, amphitheater, meeting rooms, playgrounds, etc.)

Cases Study:
1. Nyland Cohousing, La Fayette, CO.
2. Corvallis Cohousing Program, OR.

Nyland Cohousing, La Fayette, CO

General Information:
- Common spaces include daycare, vegetable garden, outdoor recreation facilities
- The 2.5 acre prototype village cluster community that contains gardens, orchards and preserved natural areas. Natural state left by clustering buildings?educate people to preserve integrity and beauty of natural world

Landscape setting at Nyland Cohousing, La Fayette, CO

The stages of "becoming at home"
Nyland Cohousing, La Fayette, CO

Cohousing offers social opportunities. You can have wonderful and meaningful interactions with your neighbors just by sitting on your porch or walking to your car.

Cohousing is a supportive place for kids to grow up. Kids not only have the opportunity to make friends with other kids but also with adults of all ages. You also know other adults in the neighborhood will be there for them in case of need.

Cohousing meals provide a way for neighbors to spend time with each other on a regular basis. The conversations at community meals are a key ingredient in building community as neighbors have the opportunity to learn about each other, hear what is going on in other lives, and discuss ideas.

Cohousing creates a sense of togetherness and belonging. You will be a part of something that is more intimate, supportive and a model for a better way to live.

Cohousing creates a way to share ownership of items. Communities often share amenities like workshops, play structures, tools, library, gardens, etc.

Cohousing creates a sense of togetherness and belonging. You will be a part of something that is more intimate, supportive and a model for a better way to live.
Mission Statement:

“Our intention is to educate independent thinking people who meet life with courage and respond with initiative and creativity to the needs of the world and their fellow human beings.”

To make our community as environmentally sustainable as possible, while still providing affordable housing. It weighs long-term environmental impacts as it decides how to create the village. It supports each other in making sound day-to-day living choices that reduce our impact on the earth.

CoHo is committed to creating a diverse co-housing community. It embraces diversity in race, age, income level, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethnicity and physical ability. It honors differences and support the uniqueness and growth of each person. It respects individual beliefs and encourages diverse traditions, celebrations and explorations of the spirit.

People are a part of the interconnected parts of life, so it strives to treat the natural community with responsibility and respect. It creates and maintains habitats for native plants and animals.

It values the riches that being part of the Corvallis community. It seeks healthy interactions with our neighbors, with the Corvallis community and the larger state and global communities. It strives to be an inspirational resource locally, and a bridge to other communities in the world at large.
sources

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