

## Retrofitting Cohousing into Existing Streets

A workshop and bus tour: Key learning points & summary of communities visited.

US Cohousing Annual Convention June 2012:

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### Common themes and strands of learning from the experience of 'retro-fitting cohousing' into existing streets in the US;

- Often initiated by a visionary leader with a connection to place and/or property, with access to finance to initiate.
- Tend to be smaller communities that start up small and grow.
- Often property purchase costs are accessible/affordable and/or property is acquired following a bankruptcy or other type of market failure.
- Development costs are stretched over a longer period of time and involve a high degree of sweat equity.
- Shorter lead times from conception to move in.
- Trend of postponing the common house whilst repair/ refurbishment of private accommodation is prioritised. Puts common house at high risk of being inevitably deferred.
- Attractive to residents that can look beyond the existing condition of the neighbourhood and the potential to create community.
- Organic development means that it is difficult to vision over a twenty year period. Whilst there are pros to this type of development especially in the accessibility and speed of establishing community; a negative reported by some founder members was that opportunities had been missed.
- Rentals are a great way to grow. Landlords of properties are attracted by high tenant retention and stable rents. Common arrangement was for the cohousing community to hold the master lease with a landlord and sub-let to community members.
- Young people that lack equity are able to access and benefit; this age group adds energy (cook meals, complete community tasks) and are idealistic therefore suitable to cohousing and community living (debateable!!).
- Need to find equitable balance between visioning, inertia, seeking the ideal property and assessing financial capacity.
- Organic evolution resulted in few communities having to raise large sums of finance.
- Residents switching homes for more space or to downsize is a reoccurring story.
- N-Street Cohousing decision making model designed to prevent members using blocking methods to hold the community to ransom
- Issues with accessibility in using older buildings.
- Red flag warning for people trying to get a similar project off the ground is when people have over-concern about home aesthetics at the expense of building community

**Examples of retrofit communities** (most of the community names link to further information.)

### [N Street Cohousing](#)

*Waiting for pictures from Gilo (all mine feature me and beer!)*

- 75% of community rent, 25% home owners
- Community evolved during the 1980's from the starting point of four homes and by removing backyard fences.
- Renovated a garage to create a communal facility.
- Two pioneers initiated, took early risk of buying up property and coached community.
- Currently 19 households.
- Attracting a lender to finance collective purchase and renovation of new common house proved difficult.
- Works on the philosophy of 'your house your yard' – each household is collectively responsible for immediate space outside homes but there are agreed shared common areas of garden and the common house.
- Community members must acquire planned development permission from the cohousing community to carry out external home improvements and the deeds have been amended to prevent owners from erecting fences and / or restricting access across each others yards.
- Community vision is to increase accessibility through lower purchase prices and to achieve a 50% home owner, 50% renting balance.
- Making own wine!
- Rich diversity community members, income, gender, age, ethnicity.
- Within community two households are shared cooperative houses providing accessible entry points for young people to join the community
- Interesting correlation between people living in shared cooperative houses and setting up home in the community when older.

### [Temescal Creek Cohousing](#)



- 1999 small development of 4 apartments put up for sale (owners still living in one of the apartments). The short-term vision was to condonise and to build a new common house.
- Following a large fire in a neighbouring property the footprint of the land was used to locate the common house.

- Community instigated a meal programme from the outset and have maintained this throughout the evolution of the community.
- Currently 11 homes, 20 adults and 10 children. They believe that the size of community and low turnover is sufficient to maintain vibrancy but also to have an ease in relationships.
- 10 homes owner occupied and one home for rent (*I think this has changed during 2013*).
- Finances have worked ok so far; with annual assessment of community fee's
- Difficulties include process of agreeing a hot tub – took 6 years!
- Wished: they had tighter agreements between members to finance installation of Solar panels and other energy saving measures
- Community contributes to local organisations
- Recommends creating community annual traditions and customs
- Amazing landscaping demarcating private space, communal gathering 'nodes', community food space and orchards with novel raised beds constructed from recyclable material and local straw.

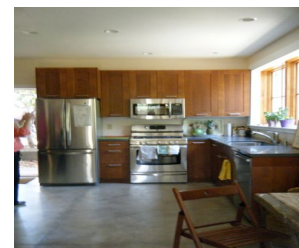
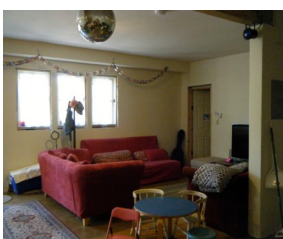
### Kingfisher Cohousing (previously known as Eastlake Cohousing, Oakland)

- Community took over two apartment blocks with existing tenants; gave the community an income stream from the outset to develop.
- Vision is to gradually take over all apartments gradually as existing residents move on.
- Design of the property suits cohousing use; with the two apartment blocks facing each other and open communal gardens in the middle.

Genesse Gardens, Lansing, Michigan Also see [Cohousing Directory](#) insert for more information

- 'Burning soul' pioneer sent letters around neighbourhood asking people to sell! 5 people responded.
- Now 12 homes and 17 residents.
- Common house with downstairs shared facilities and accommodation to rent on the first floor.
- Multi-racial.

### **Orchard Cohousing** ( no web link!)



- 17 residents, 6 children.

- Purchased 5 homes using an inter-community loan from a neighbour to close the deal.
- Other intentional community/ cooperative housing developments are in the vicinity.
- Common house carved out of downstairs space. Just large enough to eat, cook and relax!
- Residents are undertaking most of the renovations to meet the tight budget.
- Downstairs adapted apartment/ lifetime home.
- Super welcoming, open and engaging community nestled in a regular neighbourhood.
- Elder of the community has a vital role.
- Multi-cultural bilingual community.

**Mariposa Grove** Also see [US Cohousing Directory](#) insert for more information



- Visionary leader bought several properties and gifted to a community land trust, to provide permanent low/middle income housing.
- Eat together 2 times a week.
- 16 community members – multi generational.
- Organic renovation of common space! Time and money permitting.
- Different plum tree's – feature of this community.

### **LA Ecovillage**

- Established during the 1990's as a non-profit and purchased 2 buildings comprising of 48 units. In last couple of years purchased a third building. Now 50 households.
- Community founded on low environment impact values.
- Evolving community over time – eclectic mix of community initiates.
- Community land Trust mechanism used to maintain affordability.
- Many aspects reflect cohousing principles; such as the non-hierarchical and consensus decision making structure and eating together.
- Redesigned public realm to close off public vehicle street access, to create a safe community entrance and to facilitate interaction between residents.
- Louis Aitken instrumental in vision and delivery

### **New Brighton Cohousing**

- 11 or 12 townhouses purchased in 2007 as tenants in common.
- Older building used as a common house; long term aspiration to renovate as funds are diverted to bringing private residencies to good standard



- Consensus decision-making

### Berkley Cohousing



- Quasi retrofit – don't think that there are/were existing residents in the properties when they were purchased as a job lot.
- Refurb of properties to adjust internal layout to maximise private living space and more the public functions of a home for example kitchens moved to the front to overlook common gardens.
- Common meals are opt out (not 'opt in' as is common in many cohousing communities).