

Cohousing communities are small residential developments designed and managed w/ significant input from the residents, creating a very close, supportive community and could be called “the old-fashioned neighborhood of the future”. It's fairly straightforward to describe the nuts and bolts of what co-housing is. Accurately capturing the heart and soul of co-housing is more challenging. We'll start w/ the nuts and bolts to give a framework to understand the fuller picture.

Most are intergenerational, though some are for adults only. There are about 175 completed communities across the US, with dozens more in some stage of development. Most have about 35 households, which may represent close to 100 or more individuals.

Each household has their own private lives, income and home with traditional amenities; typical legal structure is a Condo Association. Extensive shared facilities usually feature a common house with recreational spaces and a kitchen and dining area large enough for the whole community to gather for voluntary shared meals and events. Shared outdoor space may include nooks to gather and chat, open space, and organic gardens. Each community is unique and includes what they desire and can afford.

Cohousing provides a safe, secure, housing situation for all ages. Neighbors gather for parties, games, movies, workdays or other events. It is easy to organize carpooling, child and elder care and there is always a willing neighbor nearby in the event of an emergency. Seniors can share care-givers; everyone can practice co-care, to whatever extent they agree on.

It typically attracts those with a deep concern for social and environmental issues. Most groups choose as many sustainable features as possible, e.g.:

- Smart-designed dwellings are usually clustered, saving energy and open space.
- Homes can be smaller as common houses may include living rooms, guest rooms and laundry facilities.
- Many employ solar or geothermal technology.
- Low-maintenance native and/or edible plantings.
- Shared equipment may include gardening, mowers and other tools (think one or 2 lawn mowers/weed whips for the whole community rather than each home owning one:)

Common Characteristics:

- Neighbors commit to being part of a community for everyone's mutual benefit.
- Designed for the community you want and the privacy you need. Residents balance each by choosing their own level of engagement.
- Decision making is participatory and most often based on consensus. Most groups employ training in group process work and conflict resolution, so everybody feels heard and cared for.
- Part or fully self-managing the community empowers residents, builds muscle in practicing cooperation, and saves money.

- Parking is normally limited to the perimeter, creating a safe, semi-enclosed courtyard-like area for kids to play; homes usually face in, so many eyes are often available to keep tabs. This feature also promotes spontaneous social interaction between neighbors.

One benefit of this housing model is the ability of a like-minded group to have and achieve things that would be out of reach as individuals; e.g., some have gourmet kitchens in the common house; some have pools and exercise rooms or yoga studios; some use the common house to bring in speakers or host workshops, including the larger community. Most are market-rate, some are subsidized for low-income households; many are a combination. Unique to cohousing, you may find larger, high-end units and tiny homes in the same development.

As you might imagine in a collection of 35 households, there will probably be some who share different gift and interests than you. You can't fix your bike, but you are a terrific baker. Need help getting your computer to work? Love fresh produce but don't know the 1<sup>st</sup> thing about gardening? Have a honey-do list but no mechanical aptitude? Older and unable to perform physical labor but love looking after someone else's kids for an afternoon? How about a village coming together to have it all work out. Cohousers believe, not only does it take a village to raise a child, it is essential to be a part of a village in any phase of life.

Great segway to focus on the heart and soul of cohousing. The "co" is a little word with big meaning because it's the community you build together, the family you choose and affirm over and over. Each community has a life and a character as unique as the people who co-create it.

We are intentional in how we show up - to ourselves and with each other. We acknowledge our interdependence, our need for belonging, and our inherent connectedness. These are the foundations of our life together, forged not of rugged individualism and separation, but of possibility, support, and relationship.

Within co-housing, freedom is not a state of being unburdened and unconstrained by others or systems. Instead, it's freedom viewed more expansively through the lens of both the individual and the collective, striving to ensure that we each have the things we need to flourish.

Co-housing requires courage, thought and deliberation. The destination is always changing because life isn't static. Instead, we journey together, sometimes stumbling (and learning to help each other back to our feet) and other times sure and steady, as we continuously reinvent family, friendship and community. Most importantly, to quote author and activist Mia Birdsong, it's really about "how we show up."

For more information, see <https://www.cohousing.org/> (brand new – the old site has more content @ <http://oldsite.cohousing.org/creating>) or email [info@centralohiocohousing.org](mailto:info@centralohiocohousing.org).

**Central Ohio Cohousing**  
Neighborhood Redefined  
8/2020