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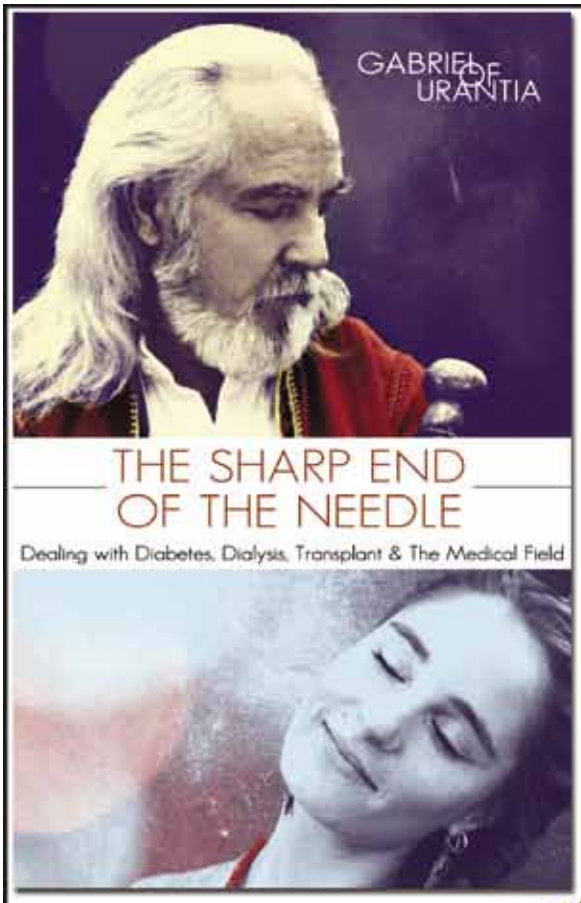

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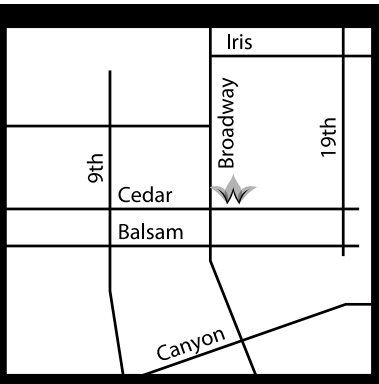

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VOICES

ON THE COVER

A view of the SONG neighborhood in Ithaca, New York, taken a few years ago when the planted trees were smaller. It is even greener today.

Photographer James Bosjolie has been documenting the people and surroundings of EcoVillage at Ithaca since 1996. He has watched people and neighborhoods change over time, becoming more of a community in the process.

COMMUNITIES
Life in Cooperative Culture

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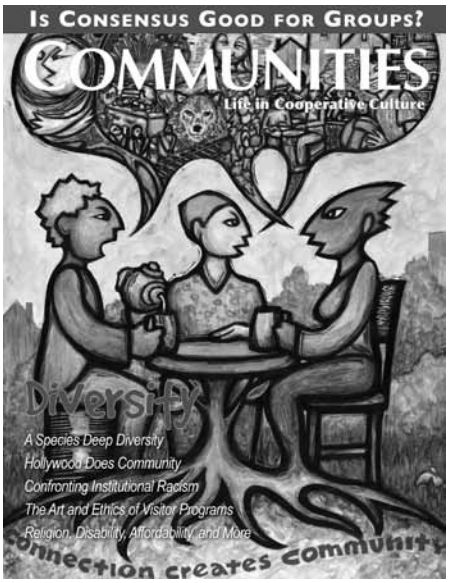
LETTERS



Becoming Realistic about Consensus

I appreciate the thoughtful comments of community-based consensus trainers Laird Schaub, Ma'ikwe Ludwig, and Tree Bressen in response to my article, "Busting the Myth that Consensus-with-Unanimity is Good for Communities" (COMMUNITIES #155, Summer 2012). I hope our articles will stimulate dialogue about these issues among members of existing and forming communities.

I appreciate Laird's emphasis on the importance of choosing members wisely, and these authors' advice to cultivate good relationships in communities—especially when they make decisions by what I'm calling "consensus-with-unanimity" (100 percent of the people, excluding stand-asides, must approve a proposal before it can pass). I also appreciate their common sentiment, as Laird expressed it, "What needs to change is how you handle conflict."

However, Laird described my point of view in a way that isn't quite accurate: "Diana seemed to argue that most members of intentional communities don't care *that* much about relationships." Actually, I think most groups absolutely *do* care about relationships. But frequent blocking (or worse, frequent implied threats to block), seem to *reduce* community members' willingness to spend meeting time processing emotions in order to restore their former good relationships. I've found this particularly true in cohousing communities, where many people just want a pleasant, congenial neighborhood—and in communities like Green Meadow, where people may have experienced blocking-related conflict and demoralization for so long that they feel actual antipathy towards many other members, rather than a desire to heal relationships. This can be true whether a member sees the "problem people" as those who consistently block (or threaten to), or as those who feel compelled to make proposals.

I believe that these authors and I share the hope that community members will have harmonious, mutually satisfying relationships. I think how we differ is that they believe consensus works well and groups with these problems need to improve their conflict resolution methods, or, as Tree advises, "Give a different response."

In contrast, I believe that the consensus process *itself* is part of the problem, because it allows people to have complete control over the group (quoting Caroline Estes), without requiring enough commensurate emotional maturity and communication skill to handle this privilege responsibly. I think it's more effective to just switch to a governance and decision-making method that regular people can use, and which has a proven track record in communities as fostering good will, harmony, trust, and well-being, such as Sociocracy, Holacracy, or the N Street Consensus Method.

By the way, in Ma'ikwe's analysis of the article's dramatic opening scene, she noted that after the blocking person's extreme behavior, other Green Meadow members didn't attempt to connect with her. Ma'ikwe also asked, "What is this group's commitment to conflict resolution?" (And also, what is its commitment to consensus training?)

In this instance, many people at Green Meadow had consistently attempted to understand and connect with this member for the last 12 years—both as individuals and several times as a group. Tree wrote, "Healthy groups build a spirit and culture that honors new ideas and alternatives rather than shooting them down." Believing this also, at one whole-group "Heartshare" meeting with this member she was asked to

be more collaborative and cooperative—to not just stop proposals that most others wanted but also work with others to co-create a new version everyone could live with.

"I'm sorry," this member said quite sincerely, "but I don't know how to do that."

The next year after the incident described in the article, this member was asked to stop attending business meetings for a year and get outside healing help to seek resolution of the underlying reasons for some of her meeting behaviors. She stayed away two years, then returned. She had not sought any outside healing help.

Regarding the group's commitment to consensus training, after their seventh year they began requiring consensus training for new members. And this member, who had joined many years before, is one of the community's consensus trainers.

Yet I think this member contributes to only a part of the difficult situation at Green Meadow. "When someone does these problematic behaviors," Tree asks in her article, "how does the rest of the group respond?" When they (typically) do conflict avoidance, she says, "this makes it clear that the community is co-creating the problem."

I think so too. I believe that the discouragement and demoralization that can result from too-frequent or personal blocking and implied threats to block are as much the responsibility of the (usually silent) other members as the one(s) who do the blocking. And...communities need to become more realistic about the possibility that some members are so emotionally distressed they may not be able to manifest the collaborative, cooperative, good-will, trust-filled attitude and behaviors that consensus-with-unanimity requires.

Diana Leafe Christian
Ecovillages Newsletter

A Breath of Fresh Air

Dear Diana,

Your article "Busting the Myth" in Communities #155 is a breath of fresh air.

Please stand your ground. Community and consensus consultants are going to feel threatened by this discussion. But for me it offers hope of liberation from our 22 years of misery under the tyranny of consensus–with-unanimity (I had taken to calling it operating by one-person veto).

Our community was founded more than two decades ago in '60s idealism, with 20 members in 12 households on 3 acre lots embedded in an old tobacco farm.

All we knew about consensus was "everybody must agree." One of our members put together a three page consensus process that included 1) discussion for 100 percent agreement, 2) blocking, 3) calling in a professional mediator, and 4) only after the mediator, an 80 percent super-majority vote.

One or two dominant personalities led us away from the process and we forgot we had ever agreed to it. Two years ago I resurrected it and people were astonished that it ever existed and irate that it included the nasty word "voting." Both the idealists and the blockers became emotional about the word "vote."

We were founded in love, trust, and generosity. At one fateful meeting, realizing that we could never get bank financing to buy land, we decided, against the advice of our aghast lawyers, to just trust each other and put all of our money in one pot to buy the land. It brought an amazing sense of relief and community; we knew buying the farm was going to happen. For me that was the high point of our community.

Twenty-two years later, the land is still beautiful, we all have nice houses, and our meetings are a dysfunctional nightmare. Where we had love, generosity, and trust we now have paranoia, suspicion, and fear, thanks to what I had also begun calling "dictatorship of the minority."

Our process, increasingly over the years, has run like this: someone proposes an idea, and we work on it over a series of monthly meetings, in some cases for up to two years. Finally we come to the decision meeting. There is great tension, anxiety, and fear. Someone raises an objection (usually one of the three regular blockers); we realize the worst is happening again; we say "there it goes" and dissolve into helplessness, frustration, and anger, two more years' work lost.

Three years ago I put together a committee to try to change our consensus process to something more like what you recommend rather than unanimous agreement. Facing resistance from both the idealists and the blockers, the committee finally presented to the group a document that sounds close to what you advocate. The community has avoided even looking at it for five months now. I'm thinking about forcing the issue by blocking everything to MAKE them look at it (some community spirit!).

My mouth was hanging open as I read your article. "This is what I have been saying!" I wanted to shout; I wanted to cry. It has been such a lonely battle. It is such a comfort to know that someone else is talking about it.

Our income levels run from hand-to-mouth day jobs to at least one family in the "one percent." The blockers are in three of the four high-income families.

Any teacher (including my wife) will tell you that the luck of the draw can give you a class of 20 students with very different group characteristics from last year's draw of 20 for the same class and same teacher. Our draw gave us three blockers out of 20.

Our blockers block for personal reasons, not for the good of the community. Our blockers use passive blocking (passive-aggressive blocking?), with indirect blocking statements such as "I cannot agree to that." There have been at least two cases of "well if we are not doing it my way we are not doing it at all."

An unspoken tenet of consensus, that I remember from the '60s, is that everyone in the group is wonderful. Somehow that background forbids us even suggesting that anyone might have a flaw insurmountable for harmony in group process. Changing

(continued on p. 73)

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue, as well as letters of more general interest. Please send your comments to editor@ic.org or Communities, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

COMMUNITIES is a forum for exploring intentional communities, cooperative living, and ways our readers can bring a sense of community into their daily lives. Contributors include people who live or have lived in community, and anyone with insights relevant to cooperative living or shared projects.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues. We also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about "creating community where you are."

We do not intend to promote one kind of group over another, and take no official position on a community's economic structure, political agenda, spiritual beliefs, environmental issues, or decision-making style. As long as submitted articles are related thematically to community living and/or cooperation, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interfere with its members' right to leave.

Our aim is to be as balanced in our reporting as possible, and whenever we print an article critical of a particular community, we invite that community to respond with its own perspective.

Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563-9720; 660-883-5545; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at communities.ic.org.

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What is an "Intentional Community"?

An "intentional community" is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based; others are both. For all their variety, though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE BY LAIRD SCHAUB

Echovillage Living

Unlike Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd—who did it the other way around in their 1985 movie *Back to the Future*—forward thinking communitarians are focusing on going Forward by referencing the Past.

In North America, the label "ecovillage" is used rather loosely to mean any group with a commitment to working toward environmental sustainability. There is no entity in charge of bestowing that label; groups self-select. As such, there's tremendous variety in how far along that path any particular group has journeyed. Some intentional communities that don't style themselves ecovillages have accomplished quite a lot in the name of sustainability; some groups that proudly label themselves ecovillages are just getting started.

Despite this unevenness, there is still plenty to take note of, and in this issue of COMMUNITIES we're taking a snapshot of the progress that ecovillages have achieved so far.

Picking and Choosing from the Past

In trying to create models of sustainable living, ecovillages are offering a thoughtful mixture of new technologies and ones that are echos of village life from yesteryear—"echovillages," as it were. On the one hand, no one is talking about doing away with the internet. On the other, Albert Bates (of the Ecovillage Training Center in Summertown, Tennessee) is excited about the promise of biochar to improve soil fertility and sequester carbon. This recent innovation is actually the rediscovery of stable agricultural practices pioneered by pre-Columbian indigenous peoples of the Amazon.

While there's a tremendous amount of literature devoted these days to experiments in group process that are both energizing and inclusive (there has to be *something* better than backroom politics and the posturing and polemics that characterize public hearings), the most popular form of decision making extant in the communities movement (including ecovillages) is consensus—with roots that extend at least 300 years with the Religious Society of Friends, and much farther than that if you look at the Iroquois Confederacy.

Many ecovillages have been tinkering with barter and alternative currencies as part of their effort to create economic resiliency. While some of this is brand spanking new and innovative, if you go back far enough in village life *all* exchanges of goods and services were accomplished through barter and local currencies.

While many of us are fully aware of the unsustainable nature of the mainstream food chain and are making a valiant effort to wean ourselves off the expectation of easy access to Mexican tomatoes in February, it was only in the last 50 years that anyone even thought that year-round fresh vegetables were *possible* in temperate North America. Many ecovillages are striving to develop diets that rely on local food production, and minimize exotic imports—evocative of what village cuisine used be before A&P, Safeway, and Walmart penetrated rural America.

When ecovillages go about creating models of a new village life, they are doing so with discernment about what elements to bring along from the past. Communities are not straight up retro in the manner of restoration villages. While they purposefully aim to establish a traditional sense of connection and belonging, they intend to accomplish that *without* simultaneously inviting hidebound social hierarchies and parochial prejudices to the party.

At their best, ecovillages are testing grounds for sustainable culture—practical, everyday ways of being in the world that yield a high quality of life in ways that can be sustained indefinitely, and don't yield fruit for some at the expense of opportunity for others.

Taking the Long View

Of course, no one attempts community with the intention of being *un*sustainable. Rather, some of us are taking a longer perspective than others. Think of it in terms of orders of magnitude, viewed from the perspective of someone drinking a late morning cup of coffee in June (which is when I wrote this). Being sustainable from now until dinner is not much of an accomplishment. Neither is being sustainable through next week, which is 10 times longer. Being sustainable through harvest is the next ring out; and brings into play the challenge of what it takes to grow your own food. Ten times more than that takes us to spring planting in 2014, almost two growing cycles distant, bringing into view how you're going to heat your home through two winters.

The next order of magnitude is being sustainable from now through when your baby grows up and leaves home—the entire span of your chance to influence your child's growth in the hope that the tree they grow into will have sustainable principles embedded in their heartwood . While that's a *long* time, seven generations is 10 times longer still. What, today, is built to last seven generations? What do we even *know* about building to last that long, never mind having the foresight and dedication to make the attempt?

Working backwards, if you figure a generation is 25 years, how much of what we're wrestling with today was anticipated by folks in 1837? Not much, I'll wager. Here are some historical highlights of what happened that year: Old Hickory (Andrew Jackson) was the US President, Texas was recognized as a republic (separate from Mexico), Chicago was incorporated as a city (with a population of 4,170), Canada gave blacks the right to vote, Charles Goodyear obtained his first rubber patent, Queen Victoria ascended to the throne of England at the tender age of 18 (an assignment she'd retain for the remainder of the 19th Century), and there was the first commercial use of the electric telegraph. How quaint will our reality look from the hindsight of 2189?

The Shrinking Window for Shift

Facing unprecedented climate change, the past may not be much of a guide for how to proceed. Can we turn the ship fast enough to have a decent chance to survive two more generations? After an orgy of expansion and acquisition, and a 236-year national history dedicated to the pursuit of bigger, faster, and more, we need a complete rebuild of our cultural engine—not just an oil change—if we're going to shift to lifestyles that approach sustainability.

Though small in numbers, ecovillages are important outposts on the frontier of cooperative culture change. This is where folks have their boots on the ground trying to create practical models of what it will take. These are the people who are pioneering vibrant lifestyles based on per capita energy consumption and a carbon footprint that's, at least in some cases, one-tenth the US average.

The progress is not smooth, and much remains to be done. There is urgency because we're not sure how wide the window is for voluntary experimentation. At some point in the not too distant future—if we don't make enough progress downsizing fast enough—the window will close and we'll be facing forced limitations and the social and economic chaos associated with martial law. It could get ugly.

At their best, ecovillages are striving to create compelling lifestyle alternatives that people will be attracted to on merit—rather than because we *should*, or worse, because we have no other options.

The biggest challenge is not figuring out how to finance the purchase and installation of enough solar panels; nor is it being clever enough to get 12 things done on a trip to town instead of two. The largest change that needs to be effected is in the eight inches between our ears. It will be whether we can change our *mindset*, more than how much we have our mind set on change; it will be more about how much the drive to "succeed" is redefined and less about succeeding to drive less.

If we can imagine a future that is rich in spirit and relationship, then we can build one. If we can build one, then it will be possible to let go of the pursuit of material accumulation and its false promise of security. It will be possible to find depth and satisfaction in lifestyles that are an echo of village verve and vitality.

Happy Birthday, Dancing Rabbit!

This fall, shortly after this issue hits the newsstands, Dancing Rabbit, my neighboring ecovillage, will be celebrating its 15th anniversary on the land. They are now 50+ adults on their way to hundreds and an inspiration to us all. As they're located just three miles down the road, whenever I want to find out the latest on what they're up to, it takes me only an hour to walk over and find out.

Next summer I'll be on the faculty there helping to teach a 37-day immersion training in ecovillage education, giving participants a hands-on taste of village vibrancy. I tell you, they breed ideas there for new ways to experiment with and showcase sustainability like…well, like Rabbits. ❧

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm, an egalitarian community in Missouri, where he lives. He is also a facilitation trainer and process consultant, and he authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

The Cité Écologique raises the bar for sustainable living

By Brendan Prusik

Nearly a decade ago, a wave of awareness about the environment brought a group of 36 people together on 315 acres in northern New Hampshire.

In 2004, Michel Deunov founded La Cité Écologique of New Hampshire project in Colebrook, New Hampshire. New Earth Organic Farm is part of the project. The farm is run by five families who live as a community on three separately owned but adjacent properties. Some of the 36 members also own environmentally grounded businesses that share resources and help to sustain the farm. Five permanent buildings house the community's kitchen, dining room, food processing and storage, garage, shop, gym, homes, school, and more. Eighty percent, or about 250 acres, of the property is timberland; twenty five acres are being developed for maple syrup production. Agricultural lands, facilities and homes occupy the remaining 65 acres.

School is central

At the center of this project is the community's desire to teach kids differently. The Universal School of life, the community's private school, is the first building visitors encounter when they enter the property.

New Earth Organic Farm at La Cité Écologique, Colebrook, NH

"Students get their hands in the dirt, applying traditional academics in the real world," explained Pierre Forest. Forest is principal at the Universal School of Life, which emphasizes the importance of place-based education and hands-on learning. Forest said that even very young children have the opportunity to learn traditional academics outdoors.

For example, he said the school presents basic geometry in the garden where certain crops are grown specifically so the children can learn different shapes. Forest also uses curricula like Project Learning Tree, which he described as "my bible" as a way he brings his classroom into the forest.

The family farm

Besides being a classroom for children, the land produces much of the food used by the community. This production is supported by a 2.5-acre garden, greenhouses, high tunnel, and chicken coop. Vegetable production include lettuces, carrots, beans, scallions, peas, beets, broccoli, corn, peppers, zucchinis, garlic, onions, fennel bulbs, ground cherries, leeks, parsnips, edible flowers, kohlrabi, kale, cabbage, cucumbers, basil, tomatoes, potatoes, and more!

Strategically planned, this robust variety of plants not only supplies high-quality sustenance; in the proper configuration, but it also helps to control insects and diseases that commonly plague conventional monoculture production.

Though the vision of the New Earth Organic Farm community is to be a self-sustained "eco village, today we are more like an extended family farm," Forest explained.

"Years ago, farm families had lots of kids. Everyone pitched in to keep things running," he said. "With today's smaller families, we solve the problem by bringing multiple families together, making ample labor available to accomplish daily chores!

"Everyone has primary duties, but we all pitch in when there are big projects to be completed," Forest added. "Processing 500 pounds of carrots is quick work and piling ten cords of wood is easy. It is rewarding when the fruits of combined labor can be seen so fast!"

Alternative energy

With a clear direction in mind, the New Earth Organic Farm community is making steady progress toward being self-sustaining. For instance its reliance on fossil fuels is drastically reduced through the use of alternative energy like wind and solar. Wood, harvested on the property, is burned to heat buildings and domestic hot water.

All five buildings on the farm are supplied to some extent by alternative energy.

"One residence gets 90 percent of its electricity from photo voltaic panels (PV) and wind, while 80 percent of its heat and domestic hot water is supplied by passive solar and wood," said David Belanger. Belanger owns Smart Energy of New England and lived his formative years at Cité Écologique (Deunov's first project).

Conclusion

The La Cité Écologique sets the bar pretty high for folks interested in green living. Maintaining a long-term vision of sustainability and self-sufficiency, the community is implementing solutions for many of the challenges the group's vision presents.

Financial backing is provided by environmentally friendly businesses owned and operated by community members. Experience of what works comes from Cité Écologique and the community's willingness to try new technology. The community relies on local natural resource professionals to answer questions about timber and agricultural production, energy conservation, and production of heat and electricity. Labor to run the farm comes from combining the strength of multiple families. Through their day-to-day activities, children learn an ethic of sustainability, which prepares them as future leaders for the project. It is no wonder that the vision of Michel Deunov has remained viable and growing for nearly thirty years.

In 1984 Michel Deunov founded La Cité Écologique on 700 acres in Ham-Nord, Quebec. The project started out as a school built on cutting edge ideas of 20th century thinkers like Ivan Illich, Rudolf Steiner (i.e. Waldorf School), and Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov. This new line of thinking proposed a shift in the way western culture views institutionalized learning.

In 1998, ecovillages were officially named among the first United Nations' 100 listing of Best Practices, as excellent models of sustainable living." (citeecologiquenh.org 2011)

Today, Deunov emphasizes the importance of place-based education with hands-on learning founded on sustainability and respect for the environment. In short, children (not to mention their parents) need to get outdoors, apply classroom concepts and experience how it all fits together.

With a place-based school at its center, La Cité Écologique in Ham-Nord, Quebec began to develop natural-resources-based businesses where parents could work and children could learn. These businesses have grown to include organic food culture and processing, manufacturing of clothing, health care, crafts, and retail outlets. Many of these businesses are managed by graduates of the school. For more information about La Cité Écologique in Quebec visit our website: www.citeecologique.org. For two decades the successes of La Cité Écologique were honed, setting the stage for Deunov to imagine and found his second project in 2004, La Cité Écologique of New Hampshire in Colebrook. www.citeecologiquenh.org.

"Credit for the spring 2012 Timber Crier article: New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association (www.nhtoa.org) and article author Brendan Prusik, NH Coos Country forester for the UNH Cooperative Extension".

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Chris Roth

An Ecovillage Future

What is an ecovillage? Robert Gilman defined it as "a human-scale, full-featured settlement, with multiple centers of initiative, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future."[1] That's a mouthful, and for some people, "ecovillage" has come to mean simply an ecologically-oriented community, even an informally organized one.

In reality, few if any current ecovillage projects may entirely meet the more restrictive definition, requiring a "full-featured settlement, with multiple centers of initiative." Most contemporary ecovillage dwellers still need to go to a larger village, town, or city, or into cyberspace, to meet some of their significant needs. Furthermore, we don't know if *any* of our current ways of living, even in ecovillages, can be "successfully continued into the indefinite future." (Not only are many eco-living techniques and technologies experimental, but the future itself is uncertain.) So by nature, all "ecovillages" in the modern world are *aspiring* ecovillages, hoping that both they and the rest of the world can grow into indefinitely-sustainable ways of being.

In this issue of Communities, we've allowed a broad definition, letting groups self-identify as ecovillages, recognizing that in every case this is more a statement of intention than of full reality. Like Permaculture, "Ecovillage" is a concept-art-craft-science that can develop only through experimentation, exploration, and beginning attempts. It will take many smaller-scale efforts to develop more mature and robust ecovillages. These pages contain first-hand stories of some of these efforts. If the human species is to have a future, it will *need* to be sustainable in all the ways ecovillages strive for, and we or our descendants will likely recognize some of these stories as having been the seeds of that future.

• • •

As Laird points out in his Publisher's Note, ecovillages aren't only about the future. Many or most of our ancestors lived in settlements that would have met ecovillage criteria—otherwise our species would have fallen off an ecological and/or social cliff long before the modern age. And it's also true that modern civilization has veered almost unimaginably far off the path of sustainability that allowed indigenous cultures to survive for thousands of years. At risk are not only healthy human development and community but the habitability of our planet.

I'm beginning to believe that ecovillages are necessary not just for a functional social order and a livable planet—but, on some deep level within each of us, for the fulfillment of our evolutionary natures, even the health of our own souls. Over the past year-plus, with an aspiring ecovillage as a home base, I've been exploring different settings, different ways of living, different forms of community. And what I recognize, again and again, is that I feel most alive when I am in consciously cultivated, directly experienced community with both people and the earth.

The separation from both of those that much of modern living imposes is devastating to who we are as people, and to each of us as individuals. "Business as usual" in the modern world—each individual or family in its own set of boxes, designed to separate them from the rest of the world—is neither usual nor natural. Living close to the earth in community with others is not a wild experiment or aberration, a flight of fancy or a pipe dream of the impractical. It is what sustained our species since the dawn of time. To return to that way of being, we need each other; going it alone will neither get us there nor leave us a viable planet or civilization in which to practice it.

For the Earth, for our communities, and for our souls, we need ecovillages—in all the diverse manifestations we can imagine for that term.

Chris Roth edits Communities *and lives at Lost Valley Educational Center/Meadowsong Ecovillage outside Dexter, Oregon.*

[1] Robert Gilman, "The Eco-village Challenge," www.context.org/iclib/ic29/gilman1; and quoted by Diana Leafe Christian, "Robert Gilman on 'Multiple Centers of Initiative,'" www.ecovillagenews.org/wiki/index.php/Robert_Gilman_on_"Multiple_Centers_of_Initiative"

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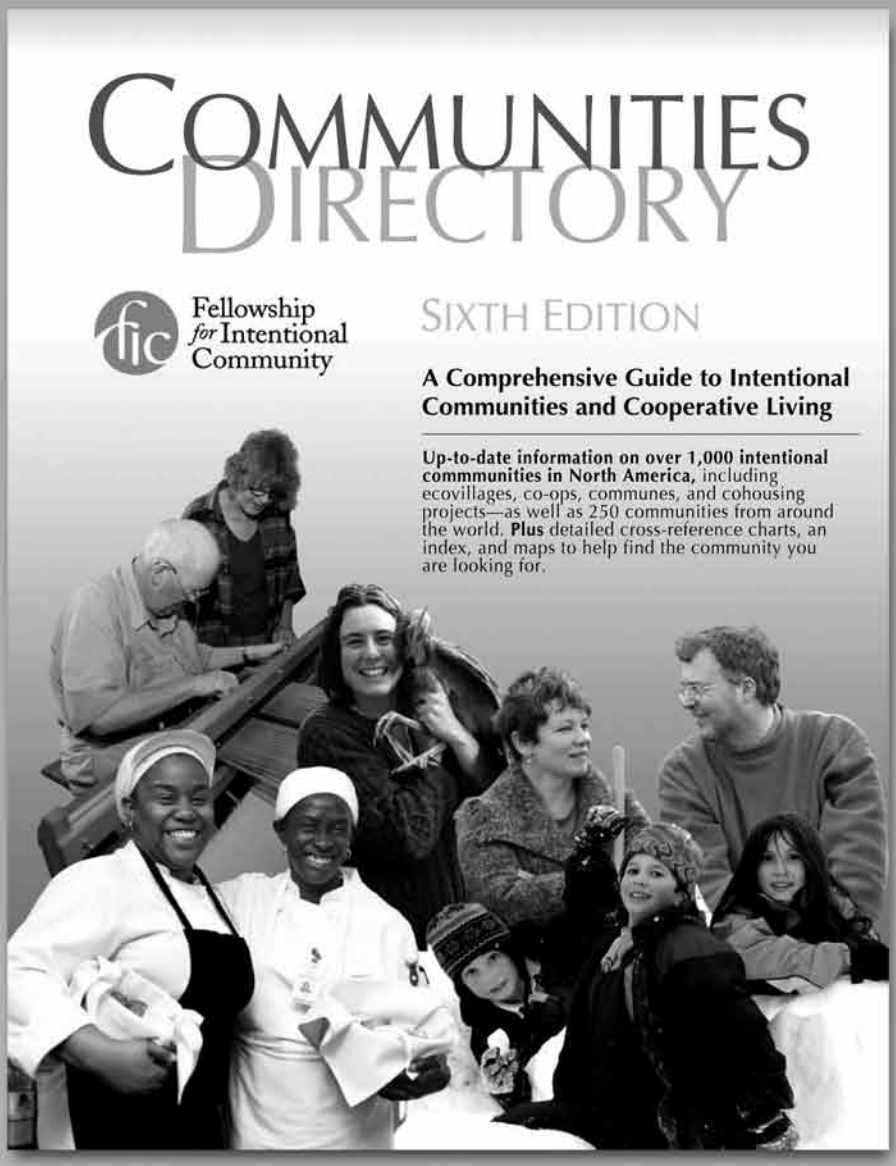

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Off the Grid and Out of the Trash Can

By Arjuna da Silva

At Earthaven in western North Carolina, and in a few of our neighboring communities, people are learning how to set up and live with modest photovoltaic systems, run gravity-fed water systems, reuse a majority of materials that pass through their lives, and reap the benefits of simpler living. In the center of Earthaven's property right before two creeks converge, there is enough flow volume and vertical drop of creek water to turn two small turbines in a micro-hydro station that powers infrastructure all of us and some of our neighbors enjoy. Assisted by a bank of solar panels, the batteries in this system can store enough energy to run our Village Center and several households and, even more amazingly, the woodshop and construction of its adjacent Village Arts Building.

Earthaven Ecovillage, where I've lived full time for the last 12 years, was founded on the broad principle of contributing to cultural transformation: reconnection to Earth, each other and, in some clear yet undocumented way, the Cosmos. Nothing in the earliest community documents, written before the site was ever chosen, said anything like "We shall create our own electricity!" or "We shall not deal with banks." While we were excited to take on alternative technology experimentation, we didn't intend to keep the banks out of it; it just turned out that way.

Founding Day, September 11, 1994: We agree to set up an organization that takes advantage of the lack of electrical poles on our property and to learn everything about living off the grid in ways we can afford. We also begin to draft bylaws describing a membership/ownership policy that will make it impossible for banks to finance members' investments. To own anything not portable at Earthaven is to be a "Full Member," a real person. We know we don't ever want to deal with a bank as part of our consensus Council.

Tribal Condo.

Photos courtesy of Arjuna da Silva

In the coffee table book *Off The Grid*, Lori Ryker lists five natural categories of technologies that support off-the-grid living: Earth, with its thermal mass, geothermal, and composting potentials; Wind; Sun, for its photovoltaic power and hot water applications (not to mention its heat); Water, as micro-hydropower and also in rainwater collection and grey water reclamation; and Fire. She also lists a sixth technological category—the gas generators, batteries, inverters, and other gadgets that make it possible to use the other five. Above all, it is personally a thrill and an honor to relate to the power of natural resources as gods, these presences much of the modern world calls "weather." When Earth, Wind, Sun, Water, and Fire help us use their power, they grant us much wealth.

Electric Power

There is one micro-hydropower station at Earthaven, centrally located and serving the Village Center (office, internet lounge, kitchen, and Council Hall) and the Village Arts Building, plus several neighborhoods in a small grid that includes solar panels. The station provides up to 24 kilowatt hours of electricity a day. Though cloudy weather and poor maintenance can challenge a photovoltaic system, hydropower doesn't depend on the Sun, and generally needs

less fussing. Water in our creeks flows night and day, all seasons. It can be disrupted if a flood washes out the intake or there's a break in the line, or if a crawdad decides to climb into it and gets stuck—in which case the upstream treks to repair a catchment become sought-for tales of local heroism. We envision a second micro-hydro station further on down the creek, below the confluence; it will eventually help provide electricity to several additional neighborhoods currently using only solar power. We already have the turbines we'll use, and I guess when the need and available funds and labor match up, we'll build a new weir and set it up!


Six trash cans.

Beyond the reach of our elegant micro-hydro "stream engines," everyone uses photovoltaics to power their homes and businesses. Many folks share power systems, either in multi-family buildings or between several small neighboring ones. Some folks manage with low battery capacity and small inverters (to power a light and a laptop), but most have upgraded to quality systems that allow modest to moderate use of power tools, audiovisual equipment, and appliances.

Success within Limits

Most Earthaveners started out with candlelight. My first utility upgrade was for hot water, not electricity. A neighbor installed a small on-demand propane heater in the trailer I owned and re-plumbed it with Pex pipe, which froze but never broke. It provided many, many showers through the years for friends and neighbors, and lots of hot dishwater—and still does via the current owner.

As we built houses, we learned to factor in larger systems, along with plans for earning, borrowing, or using savings to cover those costs. No matter how we paid (or are still paying), the hefty price tags make it essential to understand, maintain, and preserve our systems. We have to learn how to maximize battery life and to fathom meters and other component readouts. We may wind up grieving wasted money—and toxic materials going to landfills—as we discover our mistakes. Still, as we learn, we do get to celebrate arriving at the long-term system reliability we've been working for.

Wind, an excellent way to generate electric power, has not turned out to be dependable enough here, even on our ridge tops, to merit building towers and generating stations there. Sometimes the gods are busy elsewhere, or Wind and Water stay around fighting and we have a mess to clean up and a power shortage. Thus it turns out every now and then that bigger usages—particularly extended uses of power tools—may need to be postponed until the weather has been sunny, or augmented with a generator. Since oil products are still important to us as backup (not to mention for getting off of and back onto the land), we look forward to the day when some creative folks set up a methane generation system to offset propane and other gas uses.

Living off the grid doesn't require becoming an alternative energy expert, but I can't imagine doing it in isolation. Neighbors, and especially knowledgeable neighbors, help keep systems running. Meanwhile, we learn from them (and our conversations with each other) how to refine our systems and our use of them. Knowing how many amps per hour your system should provide becomes essential. Tuning in to system upgrade options through group purchases and even component trading becomes possible as the generations of various systems evolve.

On the subject of waste cycling, Earthaven members for the most part embrace the practice of making pee and poop available as fertilizer. Several neighborhoods have chickens, there is cow, goat, and sheep manure, and, of course, kitchen and other vegetable matter for compost. (Herein lies much of the fuel for methane digestion!)

SHRI house panels.

It took more than a decade for the first private flush toilet to be installed at Earthaven, and our public flush toilet went in two years ago at the insistence of the Health Department. Otherwise, folks poop in composting toilet buildings with rotating humanure chambers, in little buildings with 55-gallon drums, or in buckets they dump in drums or chambers. Several homes installed factory-built composting toilets, although I'd say the jury is out on whether these work well for us.

Besides ardent recycling, reusing, and refurbishing, we turn paper into mulch or compile it in "carbon dumps" along with stumps and roots and other non-reusable natural materials where it slowly turns back into soil.

Though we may have to work harder around home than we were used to "out there," we generally receive enough satisfaction from this "good" and "real" work to make it worth our while. I especially like telling people that our 70-person-plus-many-visitors population uses only seven or eight of the garbage company's giant canisters a week to contain all we create for the landfill and all our plastic, glass, and metal recycling too.

Design

In addition to active use of the Sun's power through photovoltaics, passive solar design is a soft Sun technology of its own. Once you've gotten the point—and particularly once you've spent time in a passive solar building—you will always wonder how anyone could have built any other way. I love how the walls (and the space within them) of my sweet, sweet house of earth, wood, and straw are heated by the Sun. In winter, the Sun's angled rays shine through my windows, warming floors and the ambient air. In a way, the Sun cools the house, as well, by the way it changes its angle in summer and doesn't shine in, so floor and walls stay cool. Simply by opening windows to the cool air of the mountains at dusk and shutting them again not long after sunrise, we can keep the house feeling cool and dry all day.

The Sun also heats a lot of the hot water people at Earthaven use. It is an awesome, marvelous generator! But despite the Sun's hot power, Fire for domestic use in heating and cooking is still significant to most of us. A wood fire in an efficient stove in a well-built structure warms the heart, dries a damp atmosphere, and supports the Sun's Big Fire warmth in winter, not to mention keeping the kettle on and letting the stew simmer effortlessly. Fire has also come back into popular use for creating fertilizer through biochar production.

Someone once asked me how we knew to build my house this way. I realized that it was just "in the air" when the time came to build. Permaculture having been central to the design conversation among members early on, the passive solar design message spread and was absorbed. By the time we were playing with sketches, orienting a building 14 degrees to the Southeast was an easy tenet to follow. Understanding why thick, thermally massive walls belong in the South, with thick, well-insulated walls in the North, was part of the local culture. Thinking about it, I see other evidence that we have already been transformed by the habits and practices we've adopted in our off-the-grid, out-of-the-trash-can lifestyle. "Occupy Earth!" could be our motto, not in protest but in literal intent.

Living off the grid doesn't require becoming an alternative energy expert, but I can't imagine doing it in isolation.

All of these efforts toward a modicum of individual and collective self-sufficiency are ways of insuring that our lives can remain productive and comfortable under a variety of future economic strains. The culture we are transforming and the lifestyle that is transforming us will have to turn away in so many ways from the cash economy as a dependable social organization. As Charles Eisenstein suggests in his book *Sacred Economics*, we are following the trajectory that leads to a culture where relationships are the currency of sustainability—never money. Relationships with neighbors near and even further away, those trying similar things and some who help solve and fix problems, build networks of support and knowledge—there's our ultimate wealth.

Arjuna da Silva is an inveterate optimist, certified alchemical hypnotherapist, group facilitator, and visionary. She is currently settling into her gorgeous new home and landscape at Earthaven Ecovillage (www.earthaven.org), while beginning several book-length projects about life in the 21st century. Arjuna can be reached at arjuna@earthaven.org.

Aspiring to the Working Class

By Lee Walker Warren

One-hundred-fifty years ago, 90 percent of people on earth were farmers. This meant that every person in every family knew how to survive. Men and women knew how to work a field, fix tools, build a house, feed themselves. They knew how to raise animals, tend a winter garden, preserve food, grind grain, bake bread, and sew.

And then there's the invisible stuff that is second nature to land-based people. How to make allies of neighbors, trade skills, watch for signs in nature, learn about the cycles of water, wind, cold, and heat in their bioregion, take care of each other, and—most of all—give thanks.

Children knew how to survive as well. It is said of the Amish community, even today, that children "break even" by age seven and "turn a profit" by 12. I know one Amish family in Pennsylvania whose two boys, ages eight and 10, run the entire dairy herd by themselves—50 head of cows.

We now live in a world where folks don't quite know what to do when a light bulb burns out. Or where taking out the trash may be the only significant physical labor they do all day long. When we're that disconnected from creating our built environment and our food sources, I believe it leaves us feeling helpless and full of anxiety. Our culture has come to value the intellect over physical work. Yet our animal selves know how far we are from the body knowledge that has kept us alive since time out of mind.

Photos courtesy of Lee Walker Warren

For 10 years now I've managed work-exchange and internship programs at Earthaven Ecovillage, an intentional community in the southern Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. Young folks love to be here. They sense there is wisdom in this life. They come here to trade their time for food, housing, and an opportunity to live at an ecovillage. When I put out a listing on our website or on idealist.org asking for help, I can get up to 10 responses a week from people wanting to experience this life. When they get here they are surprised to find that they are required to work in the

garden for hours, schlep building materials, and dig holes—things they'd never done in their urban or suburban lives. After a three- or six-month stint, I've had many of them tell me that the most valuable thing they learned was to work.

All of us at Earthaven come from the middle class. Some from the lower-middle and some from the upper-middle, but "wage-earners" all. We've all been educated and had significant choice about our lives. And we've been part of the generations-long move away from physical skill into knowledge-based work.

In order to live that way, we've had to rely on low-paid workers from across the globe who produce our cheap goods, and on "energy slaves." An energy slave refers to the human labor we'd need to support our modern lifestyle if we weren't relying on oil-based technologies (i.e. energy). I've heard it said that the average American uses 150 energy slaves. And because our energy slaves do so much of our work for us, nearly all of us grew up knowing nothing about simple physical skills.

I was raised as the grandchild and great-grandchild of European immigrants. They worked hard to make sure that I had a better life—a life that included education and opportunity. Even though my parents and grandparents had a garden, I did little work with my hands. I never knew how to use power tools, change my oil, or fix a simple garden hose.

Now I'm a farmer. I built my farm and my house and my neighborhood by hand, with other hard-working and collective-minded folks. I continue to maintain all those things through ongoing physical labor. Every day there is physical work. There is firewood to cut, projects to finish, all manner of things to repair, animals to care for, and constant plant growth to tend and tame. There is a learning of a new skill or a deeper understanding of a plumbing, electrical, or natural system.

I came to this life through my political, social, and spiritual awareness, and from my endless curiosity about the economic discrepancies in the world. My family sometimes shakes their heads in dismay. They want me to be happy, and think that I am, but they don't quite understand why I moved down a class level rather than up. They had given me every opportunity to do "better" than they had. Why hadn't I taken it?

Capitalism has long offered the possibility (or the illusion) to transcend the working class. Yet the more we move up on the economic ladder, the more we deal with "information" and the less we deal with the real stuff of life. Over the years we've so entirely moved away from physical work that

Susan Patrice

Over the years we've so entirely moved away from physical work that people don't know where the stuff that sustains their lives comes from.

we now have a national obesity epidemic on our hands and a population of people who don't know where the stuff that sustains their lives (food, water, and energy) comes from. It took only a few generations to get here. The road back may be longer as we recollect the wisdom that was put aside by our ancestors. The process of remembering always seems to be more arduous than does forgetting.

Susan Patrice

Some of us, living in ecovillages and other land-based situations, are on the long, steep road to figuring out how to live responsibly again—to reclaim some basic knowledge that used to be just "good, common, sense." At Earthaven, we don't have low-paid workers running around putting our water and waste systems in, maintaining overhead electric lines (we're entirely off grid), or taking care of our lawns.

Last week I was shoulder deep in a pipe, cleaning out the gunk. Our rainwater system had a take-away pipe underground that was leaking. In the city, I would have called someone to come and fix that. Out here, we need to figure it out ourselves. So I stuck my hand down into the pipe to pull away all the debris, and then kept digging. This project has taken weeks of investigation, fixing problems, fitting pipes, and digging. We finally discovered a crushed pipe and were able to fix the system. Sometimes, when working on a complex physical project, the ignorance and paralysis are hard to overcome. "Can't someone else do this?," "I'm not strong enough," "I don't know enough," "It's too hard," we think.

Working helps us remember our evolutionary potential—what these physical bodies were made for.

At Earthaven, we have a few choices:

1. We can pay someone to do all that stuff for us.
2. We can live with a lot lower standard of living than we grew up with in mainstream culture.
3. We can learn to be working class.

What you realize after being forced to do all these core-to-life tasks is that working feels good. The paralysis of a life of leisure and body-ignorance begins to fall away. Numb spots in the brain and in the muscles of the body start to activate and remember how to work together. The body responds to integration. Empowerment starts to creep in. Working helps us remember our evolutionary potential—what these physical bodies were made for. And getting it right gives us the courage and confidence to keep trying. When using a scythe or digging a trench, we often joke that we should set up an expensive "gym" on our farm so the city people can come get a good workout and actually help us accomplish something important at the same time. We imagine that everyone will benefit.

Part of the hope of ecovillages is to learn the skills that we've all lost through cultural amnesia—to regain strength in our muscles, brains, hands, and hearts to do what it takes to be responsible for our lives. And responsibility for our lives means not shipping out our waste for someone else to deal with, or importing food that someone else has grown, or being ignorant about where our water, heat, and power come from.

The work is hard. The doing of it is crucial. And the reward is indescribably satisfying.

Lee Walker Warren a writer, herbalist, and the manager of Imani Farm, a cooperative homestead farm at Earthaven Ecovillage. She is a cofounder of the Village Terraces Cohousing Neighborhood (within Earthaven) and the Program Director of the Southeast Women's Herbal Conference (sewisewomen.com). She has lived in community for 15 years.

My Advice to Others Planning to Start an Ecovillage

By Lois Arkin

This advice was originally prepared for the book **Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities: A Report for Gaia Trust** *by the Context Institute (1991), Robert and Diane Gilman. At the point that this was written, I had been engaged in L.A. Eco-Village planning processes for about four years, but had not yet begun LAEV at our current location, nor was there an intentional community when these advisory points were written. Now, after living in an intentional community for almost 20 years, at times with up to 40 persons, here are the original 10 pieces of advice from 1991 and how I refined the advice in 2005 and again in 2011.*

1. **Start with people.** Ultimately, land and buildings are always accessible to a group of people who have a common vision and commitment.
   2005 Refinement: A strong vision, good planning, groundedness, and perseverance are the four qualities that will always get you what you need and want, eventually.
   2011 Refinement: It takes some of us longer than others.

2. **Develop a core group of people who have some kind of existing track record.** If you don't have one, find those who do and sell them on your vision.
   2005 Refinement: Make sure you get a congenial core group of folks with complimentary skills and knowledge who can make a five-year commitment to one another. Then learn to care deeply for one another in relation to the land where you want to work, in relation to the problems with the life support systems in your chosen bioregion, and in relation to the issues in your local political jurisdiction..
   2011 Refinement: Learn early how to pick and choose your battles with one another, and do not tolerate unresolved negative conflicts; agree to disagree and love each other anyway.

3. **Don't be in a hurry, but do be persistent and persevering.** We have been very fortunate in focusing on a site that has not been immediately available to us. It's given us the time to develop the culture of the Design Team, develop political and community support, enhance our track record, and attract resources for moving forward. Of course, for a group that already has all that together, this advice is not applicable.
   2005 Refinement: It's about process as much as place. So get your team geographically contiguous as quickly as practical, but don't worry about it being your final location. The experience of interactive processes doing ecological, economic, and social work can go with you wherever you ultimately settle.
   2011 Refinement: In the world we live in today, it is critical not to be attached to place but to be fully engaged with place where we are. The world-changing work we are engaged in and the pace at which the earth herself is changing may require us to relocate from time to time.

4. **Do not compromise your vision to acquire funding.**
   2005 Refinement: Look for creative ways to solve potential funding problems that advance your vision.
   2011 Refinement: Often, the less money you have the more creative you are. Our movement is about doing more with less. Brag about it a lot.

5. **Keep educating all members of the group on the overview.** Provide opportunities for members to learn in informal and exciting ways about all the major systems and sub-systems of an ecovillage: social, economic, ecological.

2005 Refinement: Make the time to do it. Everyone won't have the same understanding, no matter what you do, but they'll bring fresh energy and help the founding core group to see things in new ways too.

2011 Refinement: Institute story-telling as early as possible. You don't have to wait 10 years to share memories. Begin your own rituals as early as possible. Let them flourish.

6. **Let your integrity combined with your pragmatism be your guide.** Don't be immobilized by ideology.

2005 Refinement: Those who don't agree with the founding vision or have not taken the time to understand it, but enjoy the fruits of the labor of the founders, may try to convince others that you are inflexible, a control freak, attached, stuck in your ways, crazy, evil, and worse. Stay strong, focused, loving, and forgiving in the path of these attacks. But at any point that the shoe really fits, be willing to recognize it, and change your ways. Work on improving your selection process to secure diversity with emotional maturity.

2011 Refinement: Learn to let go when the time is right. What it develops into may be very different than you originally imagined, but you'll have changed too.

7. **Don't be attached to the project or being number one.** Facilitating widespread sustainability consciousness is the goal; ecovillage is a method of helping people get there.

2005 Refinement: Form coalitions with groups as they come online advocating for, teaching, demonstrating what you have been working on for years. Or once the ecovillage ideas "catch on" in your bioregion, go to the next phase of sustainability, e.g., developing curriculum for local schools, creating your own school, engaging in more public advocacy, writing the zoning codes, giving public talks, civic engagement, running for public office, etc.

2011 Refinement: ...unless you just want to retire to the garden. You've earned it!

8. **Do not use or exploit guilt to motivate people,** but recognize that many people depend on guilt for their own self-motivation. Help people transcend guilt by keeping focused on the vision. Keep your doors open to fresh and exciting energy. Generate excitement through art, parties, issues-oriented dialogue, etc.

2005 Refinement: Show a lot of appreciation for what others do to generate excitement..

2011 Refinement: Help others to overcome this tendency as well. Learn, teach, use an effective feedback method such as nonviolent communication.

9. **Keep borrowing from others;** always credit when you can, but if there is not space or time or memory, trust our sustainability networks to know that you are trying to act on behalf of all of us.

2005 Refinement: Recognize others at every opportunity.

2011 Refinement: ...even when they don't really deserve it. Hopefully, they'll be inspired to rise to their publicity.

10. **Be gracious,** maintain your sense of humor, keep people on track, forgive people from your heart; we're all doing the best we can; keep the air cleared; work at manifesting the values in the processes that you want to live with.

2005 Refinement: Attend to your own health first.

2011 Refinement: Attend to your own health first.

Contact Los Angeles Eco-Village cofounder Lois Arkin at crsp@igc.org; www.laecovillage.org.

Ecovillage Infrastructure: The Skeleton of Community

By Gwendolyn Hallsmith

When you think of an ecovillage, the images that come to mind are generally pastoral—small pretty homes amidst gardens overflowing with organic vegetables, flowers blooming, children playing on swings suspended from graceful old maple trees. We focus on the visual and social amenities of living in community, and yet the physical and legal infrastructure are the less visible (but no less critical) components of an ecovillage community's success.

All too often, people try to form ecovillages without a solid understanding of the legal and technical issues associated with large numbers of people living on the same piece of land together. They find a large lot for sale out in the middle of the countryside, buy it, and start to make plans for communal living without first making sure that what they have in mind is even possible. This is not baseless speculation on my part—as a city planning and development director, I have been contacted by many groups over time that have needed help when they found themselves in a difficult situation.

Before you buy that beautiful property with the spectacular view, there are a number of questions you need to ask. First and foremost are questions about two critical life support systems that no community can be without—potable water and adequate human waste treatment capacity. Beyond that, you want to know what the zoning regulations are in the community where you plan to live, building codes, and any other regulatory issues that might apply to a large development project.

Water Supply

Just because there is a small brook flowing down the hill on the dream property you found does not mean it will be easy to create a community water supply. The EPA water supply regulations require that any system serving more than 15 connections or 25 people for at least 60 days a year be treated as a public water supply. Surface water, in these circumstances, requires treatment systems that eradicate critters like giardia and cryptosporidium, two parasites that make people very sick. These slow filtration treatment systems can be very expensive—it is often much more cost-effective to drill a well. But wells that can serve an ecovillage are also very difficult to permit. They require fairly expensive pump tests to demonstrate that the aquifer has the capacity to withdraw the water needed without robbing nearby properties of their water supply. The easiest way around all of these problems is to find land that has access to an existing public water supply. With a public water supply, the municipality or district takes care of all the regulatory requirements for you.

Human Waste

Second only to water supply are the systems you need to treat human waste. While many ecovillages want to reduce the impact on water by installing composting toilets, this does not eliminate your need to have either permitted septic systems or access to a municipal wastewater treatment facility. In Vermont and other cold

climates, greywater is regulated, and composting toilets are not permitted in places where a conventional system or public sewer system is not available. Septic systems require good soils, and there are rules about how far from septic systems wells need to be. As with the water supply, the simplest way to manage human waste is to find land that has access to public sewer pipes and wastewater treatment systems. This way, even if you use composting toilets, there is a backup system.

Composting toilets and greywater management take careful planning and require ongoing attention. It is not advisable to simply throw the contents of a composting toilet into your compost bin. There is not sufficient evidence that even in an ideal composting situation where adequate heat is generated, this is enough to kill all of the viral and bacterial contamination that might be living in the compost. In Vermont, where we live, you are required to bury the composted material for two years before using it anywhere near plants for human consumption.

Greywater from sinks, showers, and laundry has many of the same issues. While it can often contain nutrients that help plants grow, it is advisable to use it on non-edible plants. Simply running a hose from greywater to the garden works in the summertime, but in climates where freezing occurs, this doesn't work. In Vermont a septic system or sewer treatment of greywater is required.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

These are laws passed by the local community about how land is used in town. The zoning typically tells you how many homes can be on an acre of land and what kinds of homes are allowed—usually a single or two family home is allowed without special permits, but as soon as you want to build more than that you need to provide more information. Zoning will also talk about uses allowed, design standards, and application procedures. Subdivision regulations typically deal with road standards for new roads going in to serve more homes and the other amenities needed when new developments are being proposed—sidewalks, curbs, signage, parks, bike paths, etc. Some states, like Vermont, have additional regional or state review of large projects. In Vermont, any intentional community with more than 10 homes would trigger review by the regional Act 250 Commission.

These review and approval processes, while important to maintaining the integrity of the environment and the community where the development is being proposed, can add a lot of time and expense to a project. They also add a layer of uncertainty, because with most land use review the answer at the end of the process can be a simple "no, you can't do this." Even if the answer is yes, there are sometimes conditions set on the permission that make it too expensive to complete. Never purchase land before you understand all the permitting requirements—it is not uncommon to condition the purchase on obtaining the permits prior to closing.

Legal Structure

Let me start by saying that I am not a lawyer, and this does not constitute legal advice. You need to get a good lawyer before contemplating any land purchase, subdivision, or other large development project. That said, there are several legal forms your community can take, and the form it takes will have an enormous impact on the life and decision making in the community. There are two forms you need to consider—the legal entity that owns the community and the form of ownership for the housing in the community.

Legal Entity/Owner Choices

Corporation: For the purpose of this article, this includes LLCs, S-Corps, and other similar entities. As I said, I am not a lawyer, and I'm also not a tax attorney. The advantage of a corporation is that it gives you protection from liability. LLCs and S-Corps behave a bit more like partnerships insofar as the income you derive from the corporate activities (and the loss) passes through to your personal income taxes, so you don't have to pay taxes twice. Since corporations are a legitimate legal entity, it also gives you a way to pass ownership on in an orderly fashion; it is not dependent on the individuals who establish the community in the first place. The Headwaters Garden and Learning Center (the project I'm involved with) was established as a close corporation under Vermont law, which means that the current owners always need to approve new owners—hostile takeovers are not an option.

Nonprofit Organization: Given people's overall goodwill when they are setting up an intentional community, this often seems like the logical form to adopt. It allows for grants to be written to help cover the costs, and allows all sorts of good, tax-exempt activities—education, poverty alleviation, community service, health activities, affordable housing, etc. The problem with establishing your community as a nonprofit is that if you want to build and sell homes, or start community businesses, all the proceeds from that activity need to go to the benefit of the nonprofit. While having a nonprofit for the charitable work of the community is a good idea, it's not necessarily a good idea for the overall structure. Nonprofits will also tend to be corporations, which in turn will offer the liability shield of that structure.

Cooperative: Cooperatives will be structured by state law, but in general they will allocate benefits based on patronage rather than equity. A cooperative is owned and controlled by the people who use its services. For ecovillages, they may be a preferable choice, given their more egalitarian form. In Vermont, a cooperative also must be a corporation, either a for-profit or a nonprofit. So in this case, it also offers the liability shield for the individuals involved.

Options for Homeownership

Fee Simple Lots/Subdivision: Once the community identifies a large piece of land to use for several homes, one of the simplest ways to make home sites available for different people and families is to subdivide the land and sell lots. A homeowners association can be established to discuss and decide on community issues, but each homeowner would own their lot outright. While simple, this does not always offer the same degree of community control

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From Camp to Village

By Andrew Heben

There is tremendous opportunity for sustainable practices within the tent cities organized by our unhoused populations here in the US. Instead of considering ways to improve living conditions within these marginalized communities, attention is typically directed towards rescuing people from their situation. This approach leaves people in an expected state of urgency and desperation to find conventional shelter, yet our stock of affordable and transitional housing continues to dwindle, and what does remain is often socially isolating and environmentally unsustainable. Rather than being rescued, members of tent cities are more often left to carry out a nomadic existence, forced by city officials to move from one space of underutilized land to the next.

A better approach may be to consider ecovillages as a model for reframing these informal settlements as a viable alternative. Let's address homelessness and sustainability together.

Ecovillages typically have personal, social, and ecological dimensions. Many tent cities already demonstrate strong personal and social elements—especially organized ones in which a self-governing community begins to emerge. They often ban theft, alcohol, and illegal substances in order to improve living conditions within the community and lessen the likelihood of eviction by the city.

Organized tent cities practice horizontal organization where people facing similar issues work together in order to help themselves. This opportunity for participation results in what Caleb Poirier describes as "a returned sense of agency," where people who became accustomed to being unheard all of a sudden make decisions that directly shape the community in which they live.

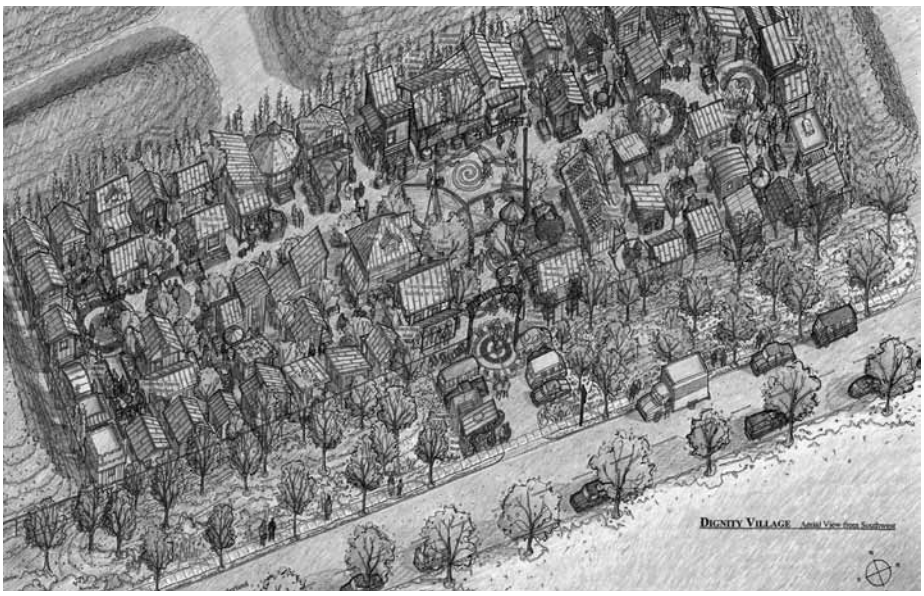
Mutual Support at Camp Take Notice

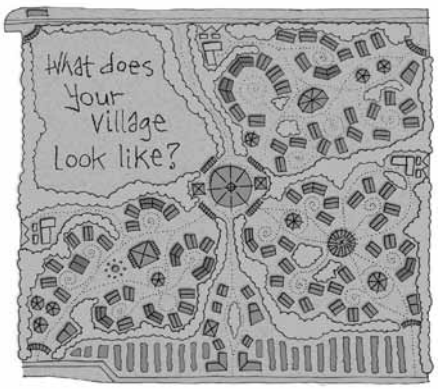
Caleb is the founder of Camp Take Notice in Ann Arbor, Michigan. What started over three years ago as a single tent in the woods evolved into a highly organized community of around 60 otherwise homeless individuals. After a series of relocations, the camp settled in its sixth location, where it developed organically for over two years in leftover space created by highways. In late June, residents found state workers constructing an eight-foot fence that would prevent them from returning to their long-time home. "It's not against Camp Take Notice specifically," said Mark Sweeney, a regional manager for the Michigan Department of Transportation, "but more to prevent a homeless encampment of any kind in this location." While some received subsidies for one year's rent, over half did not. This insufficient, short-term solution could cost the state over half a million dollars.

During the summer of 2010, I stayed at Camp Take Notice to collect some first-hand research for my urban planning thesis project on tent cities. Instead of acting as an outside observer I decided I would much rather be a participant in this alternative community. Among other things, I found a prevalent gift, barter, and sharing economy in which goods and services were regularly traded without monetary exchange.

A fine example of this came during my lowest moment while staying at the camp. As usual, I started the day by winding my bike up the forested trail, over the guardrail, and began to ride on the bridge over the highway. A large truck approaching from behind caused me to swerve and scrape the curb. Looking down, I saw the piece that holds the chain in place had cracked in half. With only a few dollars I realized I would probably not be able to get it fixed during the rest of my time there.

For most this would not be a huge deal, but a bike is an extremely valuable possession in this situation. Being able to get downtown each day is imperative for campers to get food, showers, and other services. I chained my bike to the nearest





road sign and got on a bus since I had a meeting with the camp's nonprofit organization that afternoon.

After the meeting I walked the three miles back to camp to save bus fare, picking up my dejected bike along the way. As I entered camp, someone asked how my day was. I explained what had happened. As we examined the bike near the community's gathering area, others joined us, including Dave, who identified the broken piece as a rear derailleur. He said he had worked fixing bikes for years.

Usually reserved around me, Dave became quite engaged with the chance to help with a problem he was knowledgeable about. A number of old bikes were lying around so he suggested we replace my derailleur with one from an unused bike—a task for which we needed a special tool. We sought out Ethan, a military veteran with a wide selection of tools. Ethan sifted through a large case to find the right fit. I was able to remove the broken piece easily, and then start to replace it with a derailleur from an unused bike. But none of them fit my bike properly. I was still out of luck.

The next day I met with Caleb who, upon hearing my problem, helped me get a "Fare Deal" card which reduced my bus fare to $0.75. Panhandling a few quarters from time to time or recycling a few bottles was not a problem. Although my bike was still busted, I felt better about the situation knowing there was a network of friends to help when needed.

The experience also reaffirmed my belief in the personal and social dynamics of organized tent cities. Individuals facing similar issues work together in community, while simultaneously creating opportunities for personal healing and growth. The person with the problem becomes part of the solution.

Where Ecovillages Fit In

A key difference in this comparison is that ecovillages are villages of choice, while organized tent cities, though autonomous in nature, are camps of necessity. Also, outside of an often unintentionally small footprint, tent cities lack the ecological dimension fundamental to ecovillages. It takes a highly motivated community to take on such responsibility, and many people believe homeless folks could never do it.

Photos courtesy of Andrew Heben

Opposite page bottom left: Rendering by Mark Lakeman of existing conditions at Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon. Here, 60 otherwise homeless individuals have had the opportunity to move out of tents and into structures made largely from recycled materials. Opposite page bottom right: Conceptual illustration by author for Opportunity Village Eugene. Currently, we are envisioning four self-governing neighborhoods of around 30 residents each along with a central village commons, a social campus with independent micro-businesses, and a village garden.
This page top: Two residents at "Nickelsville," an unsanctioned tent city in Seattle, work together to stay dry while another resident makes her rounds during a security shift. The community has a vision for transitioning to an ecovillage and has already begun to construct more durable structures with a defined path network.
This page lower photos: Self-constructed homes at Dignity Village along with a shared garden in raised beds.

Portland's Dignity Village disproves this. Formerly known as Camp Dignity, the group was relocated dozens of times throughout the city, but continued to demand a "third alternative" to the street or shelter. Their relentless determination earned them a stable piece of city-owned land on which the settlement has existed for over a decade, slowly evolving from a camp to a village. Mark Lakeman, an architect who helped facilitate the vision for the village, describes the transition:

"[Camp Dignity] started off as tents but immediately they were self-organized into clusters. It was a nomadic form of a village at the start. As the camp was about to transition into more permanent settlement patterns, we realized the last 10,000 years were going to play out in a decade. They were going to be able to go from nomadic hunters and gatherers in a way—since they were subsisting off of what they could find—to settling and then establishing a system of pathways, nodes, and places; creating an urban fabric that actually reflected the people who lived there."

This vibrantly painted village of self-constructed homes and gardens sets a precedent for how organized tent cities can transform spaces into places. However, Dignity Village had a

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Good Neighbors
Top 10 Reasons to Live Next to an Ecovillage

By Alyson Ewald

There are local charms and delights in all the places I've lived—small New England towns, European cities of millions, Russian provincial centers. But I believe I've finally found the best place to live on Earth: right next to a thriving, growing ecovillage.

Sure, the ecovillagers themselves will usually tell you heaven is to be found inside their gates. And ecovillages, no doubt, are a crucial inspiration and model for all of us to learn how to survive on this changing planet. But they are not for everyone. Lots of folks have good reasons for living elsewhere, despite strong allegiance with the values of the village community. The great thing about this is that many of us are choosing to live very close by, generating a positively awesome neighborhood.

If living in an ecovillage suits you fine, then please by all means join one. As for me, here are the top 10 reasons I place my own personal paradise on the other side of the valley—but no farther.

10. Parties and peace. Virtually any evening of the week I can find something fun to do at the village. Many daytimes, too, can be filled with frisbee games, seed swaps, timber-frame bent raisings, dance classes, meditation, yoga, you name it. But personally, I'm beyond the age when I can keep up with all that. I like to have so many options in case I have the energy and spare time, but these days I appreciate being able to chill in the hammock or just sit at the pond watching my daughter play. And as a recovering workaholic I need to feel free of others' judgment whenever I do manage to hit that hammock even when it's a nice day and there are carrots to plant. Social joys or quiet solitude: it's my choice.

9. A safe remove from the soap operas. When I lived at the ecovillage I was always in the thick of things. If there was a tough decision for the group to make

Ryan Mlynarczyk

Scenes from author's neighboring ecovillage, Dancing Rabbit.

or a tricky social dynamic to navigate, I jumped right in, hungry to learn and eager to pull my weight. It was fascinating, but also pretty exhausting. Now that I live a stone's throw away, it's easier for me to pick and choose how much of the drama to get involved in. And I'm still close enough that folks can call on me for facilitation or mediation when they need someone like-minded who understands how the community works.

8. A home away from home (for me and for my friends). It's not infrequent for ecovillagers to seek a respite from all that drama and hubbub. Paradise, after all, can be a little overwhelming for us mere mortals. Then we go looking for someone else's little piece of heaven. It's not exactly that the grass is greener; it's that the grass is someone else's, so we don't have to scythe it (or feel guilty for not scything it, or annoyed at whoever scythed it improperly) before walking down the path to their pond. We can just go swimming.

7. Edge. Permaculture teaches us that the edge or boundary between two elements is a place of high diversity, opportunity, and growth. The edge is where the action is, a place of special creativity and productivity. Think shoreline, atmosphere, cell wall, forest edge. The social interface among the four eco-communities in our area (and between us and other local folks) is often the place where we get the best perspective on our conflicts and gain new insights on how to survive and thrive. Not to mention that it's good exercise crossing that boundary; I have a built-in mile-and-a-half round-trip walk any time I want to visit my friends.

6. Diversity and redundancy. Bear with me for a few more permaculture principles. Nature builds in lots of different strategies to ensure that essential needs get met. There is not just one kind of tree purifying the air, not just one type of plankton or mammal or insect or fungus or bird. Likewise, we need an abundance of ways to handle the converging crises that face us. No one ecovillage or community has all the answers, and some of our experiments are not going to work. It's going to take lots of us working those edges and tapping our widely varying creative juices to meet this challenge. Different strokes for different folks.

5. Stacking functions. The idea here is that each member of a landscape, homestead, or community performs a variety of needed tasks. We are all multi-purpose




Top Three Challenges of Living Next to an Ecovillage (But Not in It)

OK, so life here is not always a bowl full of (organic homegrown) cherries. Here are three reasons I sometimes find myself in the pits.

3. National exposure. I've just cooled off in our private pond and am hanging laundry in the buff while I push my young child (also nude) on our swing at the edge of the woods. Suddenly I hear voices. Walking along the path toward us come 15 strangers. Oh no! I forgot—is it the ecovillage visitor tour? A college class? Or maybe that's the TV reality-show film crew! In any case they are getting a full frontal of both me and my daughter. Is this illegal? And do I turn and run, or smile and wave? I could do without having to make this choice.

2. Isolation. It might seem odd to complain of both too much visibility and too much isolation. But despite all the tours and cameras, I do frequently feel lonesome and out of place. It's as if we don't quite fit in anywhere. We're not really ecovillagers, but not "locals" either. We're farming, but both camps seem to think we're doing it wrong. And most of us left our family and old friends far away to move here.

1. Out of the loop. This is the downside of getting to avoid the soap operas: I often have no idea what's going on in my neighbors' lives. I can no longer count on running into my friends casually, but instead must schedule dates if I want to catch up with them. I am (naturally) uninvited to ecovillage-only events or support groups. Ecovillagers frequently forget to forward us emails offering free scrap lumber or announcing a change in an event's time or venue. Also, a 15-minute walk can seem pretty long sometimes. So I generally miss out on things like early-morning yoga. I understand that I am choosing this distance, but the separation can be painful.

—A.E.

organisms, constantly absorbing new information and adapting our activities to suit our surroundings. An ecovillage is no different. It does not exist solely in order to promote a singular approach to living on Earth; instead it plays different roles for the different people and other beings who interact with it, such as protecting habitat, fostering cooperation, enhancing biodiversity, and planting the seeds for similar ventures to sprout up around it. My community and I are one of those sprouts. When we interact with the ecovillage, such as by setting up a child care collective or a mutual health insurance fund, I feel we're helping to multiply the roles the village plays in creating a cooperative culture.

4. Sharing the surplus. There are so many extra goodies generated when we live nearby. I have ready eaters for my sourdough bread at the ecovillage—and a great kitchen there to bake it in. At our homesteading community we have plenty of room for hundreds of fruit trees, livestock, poultry, and eco-farmed crops, which will someday serve the village well. The villagers likewise can provide cheese, yogurt, greens, veggies, candles, and pizza. And there's another commodity in good local supply: experience. The local brain trust on sustainable living is immense, making homesteading here a lot easier than going it alone.

3. Hope. I moved out here a decade ago because swimming upstream tired me out. I needed to feel like I wasn't alone, to see others making similar choices to mine, for similar reasons. Somehow it brings me even more hope and energy when I see a multitude of ways that communities around me are living in these times. From the commune that arrived here in the '70s to the Mennonites raising organic milk down the road, this place is full of folks who care about each other and about Earth. The more I cross the boundaries among these kindred groups, the less isolated I feel and the more optimistic I am about our chances of survival.

2. Resilience. Lately I've been hearing this word a lot. To me it combines diversity, flexibility, and strength, and without it we will perish. Our species must change course drastically and quickly in order to cope with a changing climate, and to avert as much suffering as possible. For example, we need to bring our food sources closer to home, and diversify the offerings each farmer provides. Three years ago, toward that end, we started a farmers' market in our town. The founders were a local business owner, a commune member, and me, with strong support from ecovillagers and Mennonite growers. We don't have time left to argue about tactics or dogma. Resilience requires that we set aside small differences and play to our diverse strengths as a flexible society of local communities.

And the Number One reason I live next to an ecovillage is...

1. Love. The person I've partnered with to raise a family doesn't want to live in a dense village. And I don't want to live more than a short walk away from my friends. Our four-year-old daughter tells us she loves where our compromise has landed her: close enough to walk to her play-dates, and far enough away that most evenings it's just us three enjoying a peaceful meal at home together. My unattached neighbors enjoy the proximity of a broad, deep, and growing dating pool, along with the opportunity to invite sweethearts over to our side of the valley for a quiet romantic getaway. I'm telling you, it's the best of all worlds. What's not to love? ❧

Alyson Ewald lives at Red Earth Farms, a homesteading community land trust she cofounded in Rutledge, Missouri. Previously she lived for several years at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, where she still serves on the board of directors.

Getting Ecovillages Noticed

By Alex Whitcroft

The Context

I am an architectural designer, originally from London, who's currently living at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage (DR). How I ended up in the middle of rural Missouri is, as they say, another story. However, the long and the short of it is that in the summer of 2009 I stepped off a near empty Amtrak train at the Quincy, Illinois station into the humidity of a midwest summer and boarded a dusty white biodiesel-fuelled truck bound for DR to do a natural building work-exchange. I have stayed in contact ever since, and am now here designing the community's new common house—an ambitious new building to serve as the heart of the community as it grows from its current 60-ish people towards its 500-1000 goal.

I'm also on LUPP—Dancing Rabbit's Land Use Planning and Policy committee, which is responsible for crafting policy on village design, leasing of personal land, communal infrastructure, etc.

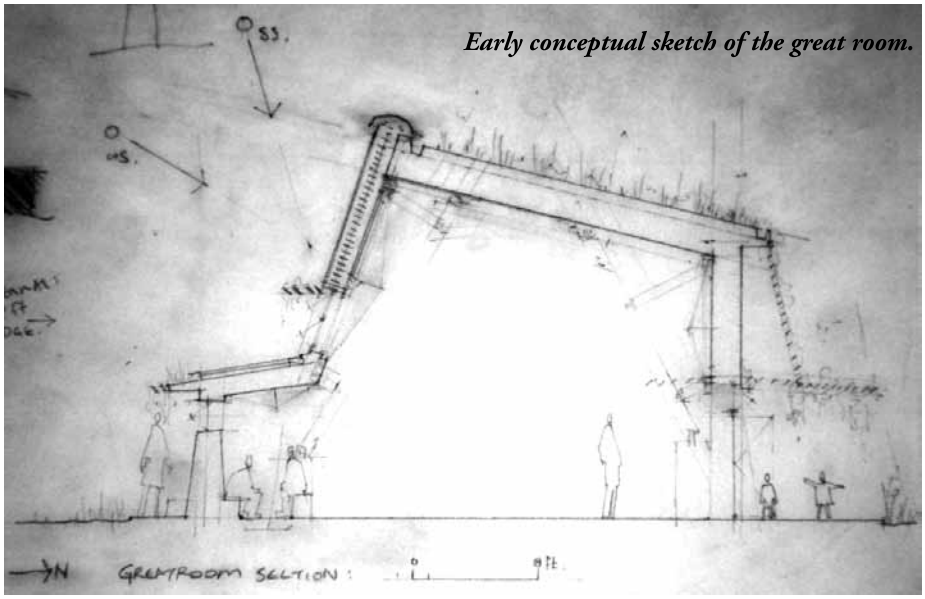
From Innovation to Influence

Intentional communities, including ecovillages like DR, often self-select locations with limited building codes or zoning laws, which restrict more mainstream developments; they often create small-scale solutions to problems which the wider culture deals with at the large/municipal level; they have been refining the consensus process for decades, while only recently the most progressive in the mainstream are starting to talk about crowd sourcing and decision making from the ground up. The list goes on. As a result, they can explore, relatively easily, radical sustainable ideas.

However, quietly going about fixing the world's problems is one thing; getting the world to pay attention is another.

My question is: can ecovillages not only be effective incubators for innovation and beneficial social and ecological change, but also make a notable difference in the wider culture?

The term "ecovillage" is a pretty broad term, covering all manner of communities, and trying to talk about them all together is rather difficult. So for the purposes of this article I want to narrow the focus. I would like to explore, using DR and the common house project, how this, and other similar radical ecovillages and intentional communities, might grow and take more centre stage in the wider conversation about sustainable society and development.



Early conceptual sketch of the great room.

The Reputation Problem

Only recently has the wider culture started to use the rhetoric of "green," "eco," "sustainable," "ecological," "lateral power," "ground-up decision making," "grassroots initiatives," and so on. The communities movement has been talking about and doing these things for decades. You would have thought that being that ahead of the curve would have

been a clear and acceptable indicator that the communities movement had something the wider culture could learn from. However, even if you widen the net to encompass cohousing and urban communities, the communities movement is still largely a fringe phenomenon. It still struggles to shake off the "hippie" label that it has been landed with and be considered for what it is—a global community of well educated, intelligent people developing systems and social models the mainstream would greatly benefit from paying attention to. So what's the problem?

Arrival of the Specialist

In late 2010 I had a Q&A session with the whole DR community whilst they were considering me as the designer for their new common house. There were the usual questions like my previous experience, why I thought I was a good fit for the project, what my aspirations for the building were, how might I be compensated, and so on. But there were some unusual questions too, such as "How do you think you will handle having 50 very opinionated people as a client?" "Well, I hope," I said. When asked if they had any concerns, a few people voiced that they were sceptical of hiring "an architect"—an outside specialist.

Part of the problem, as I see it, is that the radical end of the alternative culture spectrum (I include ecovillages here) often tends to distrust specialists.

Opinions on this vary, and every community's relation to specialists is going to be slightly different, so I'm going to talk about DR and my experiences.

There seem to be a number of main concerns:

1. Specialists are often arrogant "know-it-alls"—they come from a culture of hierarchies where they, as an "expert," are high up the pyramid—and therefore won't be able to operate in a less hierarchical, more mutually respectful culture.
2. Specialists are prescriptive "arse-coverers" and will hold back sustainable innovation and freedom in order to protect themselves or do things the way they normally do them.
3. Specialists have qualifications, bestowed on them by the mainstream, that are not necessarily valued by communitarians.
4. The knowledge and skills specialists have may not apply in a community setting.

The concerns are understandable.

1. Architects have a reputation for enjoying being in charge and doing a terrible job at listening to clients.
2. The mainstream world, including the building industry, can be a minefield of litigation, and as a result part of being a "professional" is that you cover your arse.
3. In part coming from the arse-covering routine, specialists often carry a lot of mainstream values, assumptions, and safeguards with them.
4. And finally, yes, community is a world unto its own and there will be a learning curve for even the most veteran specialist.

DR, like many communities, works by consensus and this model specifically teaches people that everyone is holding a piece of the truth—an idea that I am inclined to believe. No one comes to the table with nothing to contribute. However, the mainstream dogma of qualifications, specialisation, and "expertise," more often than not, tries to claim only a few people have the authority or know-how to speak.

However, in the spirit of consensus, there is a piece of truth the wider culture is holding, which is that many subjects are complex and great benefit is gained from experience. This applies to everything from agriculture to teaching, construction to facilitation.

Ecovillages tend to be overly cautious of specialists, while the wider culture is overly reliant on them.

Ecovillages tend to be overly cautious of specialists, while the wider culture is overly reliant on them. Neither situation is ideal.

There are also financial implications of hiring lots of specialists which communities like DR tend not to be willing or able to support—especially when, by hiring specialists from further away, they would cause money to leave the local economy.

By pushing specialists away, DR can create a situation where 1.) They have to re-invent the wheel—learning for themselves what the right specialist might already know, and 2.) The wider culture can disregard them due to their lack of credentials.

A Middle Ground

What is needed is not no specialists but, as Stefano Serafini of P2P Urbanism said, brave specialists who can listen, ask the right questions, and design with communities while integrating their expertise. What Serafini is calling for is a merger of the knowledge base and reputability of a conventional specialist with skills related to consensus and crowd sourcing that communities already have.

Another piece of a solution is for communities like DR to attract specialists into the community. With specialists living and working within the community a number of things happen: 1.) The community is able to pay for specialists without money leaving the local economy; 2.) If the community is economically depressed, the specialists

can adjust to and charge a local living wage when working within the community and therefore be more affordable; and, last but by no means least, 3.) By living in the physical and social context of the community, rather than working remotely, the specialist can both gain and offer valuable trust and knowledge.

And so here I am, testing the theory—an outside specialist living and working at DR and designing in partnership with the community.

"Artist's impressions" of the building design, produced to help communicate the project.

Why Be Normal?

Another part of the issue is that ecovillages often seem to actively encourage the outsiders' view of them as woo-woo and disconnected from, or unsympathetic to, the wider culture. There is an air of pride around being weird. I can entirely relate to this—I hate to be labelled "normal." And anyway, all radicals get called weird. However, to change the wider world, you need to move gradually from being called weird to being called visionary. That process happens by gaining respect.

So the question is, how can radicals do that? The answer is, interestingly, the same as in consensus and NVC (Nonviolent Communication): by giving others a means of assessing your position in a way they can relate to. If you are in a consensus meeting and two people each can't hear what the other is bringing to the discussion, you try to use their language; compare the issue to examples they already understand or agree to; match their energy; reflect back to them what they said so they feel heard; etc.

The wider culture won't listen if it thinks ecovillages are out of touch, not understanding the wider culture's reality/values. Ecovillages should use the same skills they are already honing for their internal politics to relate to the wider culture.

Making the Common House Relevant

Let's use the new DR common house as an example. As a community, DR decided that it wanted this building to be a flagship for the community, an example of cutting edge sustainable architecture, and a tool for the community's outreach and education efforts—in themselves important pieces of being noticed.

There were a number of things to demonstrate: that DR is building a viable economy; that the alternative construction materials and techniques employed at DR are compatible with modern building standards; that this project was as sustainable as the cutting edge in the wider culture. It's not unusual for *really* eco projects to get a large chunk of their funding from donations or wealthy institutions. As a nonprofit, DR could have opted for this route. However, we agreed to pay for the majority of the project ourselves. We also decided to pay people a local living wage to do the construction—a move away from the volunteer and work-exchange culture often found here. This would help strengthen our internal economy, give a sense of ownership, and also show that we were creating here an alternative, but viable, economy. That's an important piece for the wider culture to understand.

We also wanted to use natural, local materials such as clay, strawbale, and natural plasters, as these have a considerably lower embodied energy than more processed/manufactured products, and are great in terms of biodegradability, toxicity, etc. However, we were aware of the need for energy efficiency, airtight-

People discussing or playing with the building plans during a community design charrette.

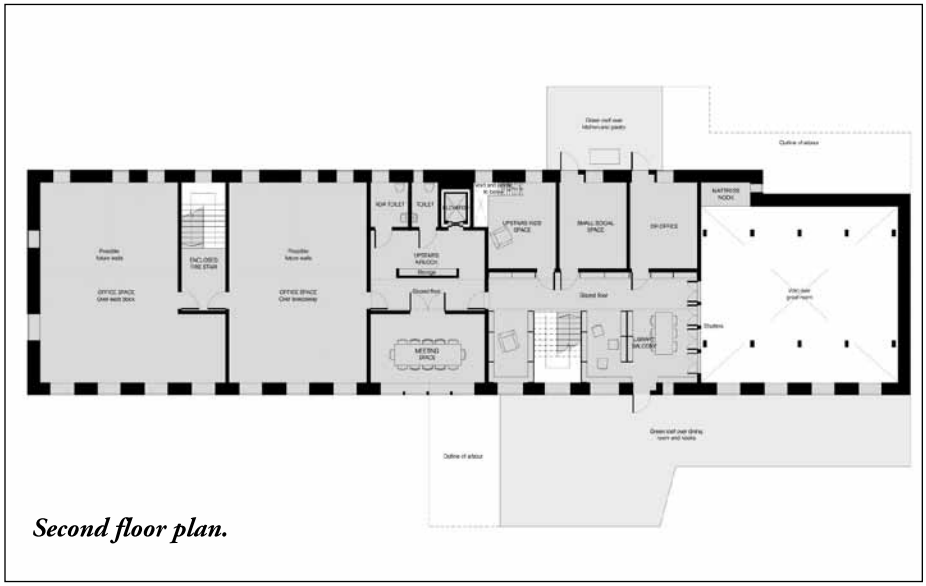
ness, damp-proofing, integration of modern services/equipment (like a commercial kitchen), managing labour costs (which can be very high with natural materials), etc. All of these are also currently valued at the progressive end of the wider culture. As a result we chose to use a hybrid of natural building and green building, using the best features of each. If the wider culture could dismiss the project as a "quaint little building at a commune" they probably would, but a building that meets every sustainable benchmark the wider culture currently thinks about, integrates the most advanced building systems, does it in a way that challenges the current thinking, but is still understandable to someone holding that wider culture's viewpoint...that is a powerful tool.

Similarly, as a means of translating the unorthodox nature of the project into language understandable by the wider culture, we decided to pursue LEED and LBC (Living Building Challenge) certifications. Both are green building certification systems that assess and try to quantify how eco a building is. LEED is widely known throughout the construction industry and is rapidly becoming the de facto standard for green building certification in the USA. Certifications are graded from Bronze through to Platinum. We have our sights set on Platinum. LBC is newer and much more stringent. As I write this only three buildings in the world are currently certified as "Living Buildings." However, LBC is already gaining a reputation as the most thorough certification system around.

When first discussed, the idea of spending time and energy fulfilling mainstream certifications was seen by some people in the community as a waste of time, or selling out. It is true that LEED Platinum at least will make little to no difference in the ecological performance of the building. However, that's just the point—ecovillages are already nonchalantly exceeding the wider culture's standards and not shouting about it. By achieving LEED Platinum DR is showing, without any room for argument, that they can match the wider culture blow for blow. By achieving LBC DR is going further—showing it can match even the most cutting edge aspirations of the wider culture. There's not much room for ignoring that.

Replicability

Communities are, to use the currently trending term, "evolutionary" or "emergent" rather than top-down designed—that is, they emerge and evolve as a result of a set of inputs much like organisms, not like a toaster, which comes into being when someone says "behold the toaster" in all its pre-defined top-down-designed glory. As a result, they are difficult to transplant. It's not like buying a more energy efficient appliance (such as a toaster) or fitting your house with solar panels. You can't do community on your own, and you can't just buy it. You can't manufacture community, you have to grow it. The question is, how do you make it easier?



Second floor plan.

As I see it, if the vision of ecovillages is going to spread, then two things need to be in place: 1.) available and affordable teaching and education opportunities so that people who want to can learn about them, and 2.) replicable systems as a foundation/toolkit for founding communities.

Educational Reach

At DR the first part is already under way. DR runs a range of educational

programs and workshops including tours, short-term visitor programs, and seasonal work-exchanges. The community is also working to expand its educational options with paid courses including natural building and Gaia Education's Ecovillage Design Education program.

At most of these kinds of events the audience is made up of people already involved or in touch with the communities movement.

The next step then is to get people who are not already tuned in to the alternative culture scene attending events, and through that reach further into the wider culture. Interestingly, events like Off Grid Blues—a blues dancing weekend held at DR, which was attended by a wide range of people, many of whom had no previous exposure to an ecovillage but went away touched and impressed—show that the right courses/events at an ecovillage can bring in people from outside the normal crowd. This happened because people were attending something not specifically alternative culture based—blues dancing.

The same model could be applied to other areas, such as alternative construction workshops aimed at teaching mainstream contractors how they could use natural building techniques, or consensus training courses aimed at teaching mainstream professionals how to facilitate, work more openly with clients, etc.

Eco-Rules and Regulations

DR will be 15 years old this autumn. Over the last decade and a half it has put together a wide range of policies, guidelines, and committees to administer and guide the community.

To date DR has been regulated largely by socially enforced "guidelines" and a set of seven ecological covenants. Although these have been pretty successful so far in maintaining the integrity of the village's principles, there have increasingly been difficulties where individual needs/choices—such as commuting by car to work, or material choices in construction projects which the covenants don't specifically prohibit but seem to stretch the bounds of what is socially accepted, etc.—have begun to show the limits of the current systems. Without a more robust system there is a risk of increasing dilution of DR's mission and ecological performance. However, there is resistance to further "rules and regulations" that some people see as limiting their ability to explore, innovate, or simply do things their own way—their freedom.

It's a difficult balance to strike, as over-regulation and prescription in the mainstream world are part of the reasons to move to community. On the other hand, community already imposes some remarkably restrictive lifestyle rules. For example, at DR you can't own a private motor vehicle—that's a big ask for the average Westerner, let alone the average American. So why are a few more regulations such a scary proposition? Part of it may be that it's very easy to talk abstractly about vision-level wishes and even construct systems to get there. It's different living day-to-day where time, emotional energy, health, and money are all bottom-line pressures whose limits we have to deal with.

So the million Whuffie question is: could more structured and enforceable rules protect the vision of communities like DR, or are they more likely to choke innovation and risk restricting accessibility due to increased financial or energetic demands? I think that, if they are designed well, regulations, with room for exceptions, would benefit communities like DR.

Another of our hopes in pursuing LBC certification on the new common house is that, by sharing the research and methods, DR could adopt LBC, or their own version of it, as a kind of sustainable building code—in the manner mentioned above. This might then be a transferable tool that others could use.

In the LUPP committee, we are working on expanding DR's current guidelines around buildings and neighbourhoods into a set of more fully fledged appropriate holistic planning and zoning regulations, covering things like density, water management, passive solar, designing to encourage community, and so on.

If we can create clearly articulated systems that benefit the communities themselves, and are transferable to settings in the wider culture, maybe these can provide the DNA by which to propagate ecovillages.

Could more structured and enforceable rules protect the vision of communities like DR, or are they more likely to choke innovation and restrict accessibility?

Minor Shifts, Major Effects

I don't want to see ecovillages watering down or sugar coating the radical ways of living that they are exploring in order to win favour in the mainstream. On the other hand I am excited about those same radical ideas and lifestyles and would love to see them spread as far and wide as they can be.

I think that by making some relatively minor shifts in the way ecovillages like DR operate and relate to elements of the wider culture—such as specialists, standards, and course participants—ecovillages can gain leverage and affect real, notable change.

Alex Whitcroft is a multi-disciplinary architectural designer whose work focuses on holistic sustainable design, craft and close collaboration with craftspeople, exploration of materials, and blending innovative and traditional materials and technologies to create beautiful, robust, ecologically sound, culturally specific architecture. His website is alexwhitcroft.co.uk.

Creating eCohousing

By Vivian Vaillant

"Vivian! You are just in time for check in. Two sentences that say where you are right now." Michael, one of the longest-term members to live onsite at The Yarrow Ecovillage, is facilitating our monthly community meeting. As I turn the corner I let out a sudden gasp of delight.

"I'm just..." My voice catches in my throat. I'm working on not being so darned emotional. I try to gather my thoughts. "I'm just so taken aback by the image of you all! And I'm so grateful!"

My neighbours and neighbours-in-waiting are gathered in the old bunker silo that doubles as a sun shade, rain shade, community kitchen, and bike shed. There are about four old couches filled with smiling faces. Chairs and benches make up a second ring of smiling faces. We have become an enormous group. The oldest members and the very newest all gather together to go through the business of the day. I run back for my camera. Some memories are worth taking pictures of.

The meeting is full of important details about the filing of legal documents, community contribution hours, and the startling realization that in 20 days our bunker silo needs to be emptied for demolition. Demolition!? How can that be? I joined this project two short (and very long) years ago and every meeting, BBQ, and other important community moment has happened in this barn. When I came here last summer the barn was my kitchen and comfort. I've had long talks by candlelight in this barn! I've played men-against-women pictionary in this barn (and the women won, by the way!). And now it is coming down to make room for the final stage of construction. In two and a half short years we've gone from no buildings to 16, and now we count down the months to our final construction.

Did we make mistakes? Certainly. We could write a whole book about things we'd recommend no other group do. I think I can safely say we have done one thing very well. We consensed that cohousing be the mechanism to do the housing portion of the ecovillage.

At The Yarrow Ecovillage we strive for a more sustainable life by relying on a deep sense of community. Years ago the community (then very small) asked themselves a defining question: "If you can only choose one, which is the higher value? Community? or Sustainability?" The answer came back a resounding "Community." Not what you'd expect from an ecovillage. May I defend? The reason was that by prioritizing strong community connections, sustainability would naturally follow.

We are surrounded by like-minded people who teach us, push us, and offer us helping hands in a way that lets every family strive for a higher level of sustainability. Some families are more committed, or farther down the path of learning than others. We allow for imperfection as we all learn and grow. We'll all do better next time. By placing community as our highest priority we have also become attainable to a broader group of neighbours. We actually have homes to sell people! We have a site plan, and a common house. People know what they are getting into. People also don't have to feel like the perfect vegan yogi to come here. All we ask is that they respect our prior agreements, and that they are personally striving to be a little bit better every day.

Bunker silo meeting.

I really think the cohousing model helps us achieve that. While our homes are not the cob, strawbale, or yurts we once sort of wished we could build, the more conventional cohousing homes that Charles Durrett has designed for us hold human connection as the highest priority. Everything, from the distance of front doors and the set-up of the mail room in the common house to the locations of our gathering nodes, is designed with the highest level of human contact in public spaces balanced with high levels of privacy in private spaces. This allows for us to live in close proximity without being stuck in each other's faces all the time. We like it very much.

Cohousing—or in our case "eCohousing"—has been in North America for over 30 years since Charles Durrett and Kathrine McCammant brought it from Denmark. In 30 years over 150 cohousing communities have been built across the US, and another 25 in Canada. More begin development every year. The major hurdle for cohousing projects tends to be the acquisition of land. In our case land was not a problem. We had 28 acres of land and not enough people to get all the work done. By bringing Charles on board we were able to attract more people quickly. Every family that comes brings new talents and new ways to have fun. We are on a roll.

If I could send a few words of caution with this great recommendation of the cohousing model they would be these:

1. If possible, hire a cohousing architect before you build any of your buildings. A good place to start looking is the cohousing.org site, or in Canada, cohousing.ca. We had some existing buildings from before Charles came into the picture—our "phase one" of development. It was difficult, but not impossible to work around them. They are pretty, but they impacted the flexibility of the overall site plane.

2. We did have one shortfall within the process: front closets were a priority that was not met. Because we are a farming community, an entire mud room in each house would have been very nice. In the end we've found ways to adapt and meet our needs; however, I think this miscommunication could have been avoided by holding a community meeting to discuss the plans before Charles arrived to garner our feedback. When he comes, his time is spent very quickly between city officials and community meetings. His time for feedback is limited. Community efficiency would have helped us immensely.

The village from the farm.

3. Stay away from any custom homes. They will surely cause your community more strife than they are worth. Consider that in cohousing your highest value becomes your community connections. Our experience has been that custom homes have cost both the custom home owners and the community at large more stress than they are worth. I think a good rule to adopt would be to allow only floor plans that are used at least twice in the site plan. If someone wants to design something custom, it should be fine as long as it is salable to more than one family. This will go a long way to fairness in the sales you have to do to newcomers. As the head of marketing I can tell you that it is difficult to explain to newcomers why some of our units are so specialized when the other 18 are exactly the same as each other.

4. As much as possible build all of your units at the same time. Phases of development are tiring and costly. You stand to save a large amount of money by building out simultaneously. It is also nice to do one big move-in month rather than having some people afar and others on-site.

5. When cohousing architects speak, please listen to them. They do know what they are talking about.

While we've almost completed our multigenerational cohousing project, we've also begun a seniors cohousing group. In the final picture our ecovillage will be a 20 acre organic farm, a multigenerational cohousing, seniors cohousing, and commercial development. We are on the main street of a small town with all of our basic needs within walking distance. The journey has been long. Thousands and thousands of hours have been put into our project to date. Love, frustration, and overwhelming commitment will get us to completion. (Is there such a thing?) As we celebrate 10 years since we bought the land, I can tell you that adopting cohousing has allowed us to move at a much faster rate. I believe the key to our long-term success will be the human-centred architecture cohousing has brought. And what luck for me that this is my sweet home!

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For more information on cohousing you can read *Creating Cohousing* by Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant (we're a chapter in the latest edition). See also the websites www.cohousing.org and www.cohousing.ca. ❧

Vivian Vaillant is one of the many people who have worked hard to make The Yarrow Ecovillage a successful reality in Yarrow, British Columbia (see www.yarrowecovillage.ca).

Coming of Age: 21 Years of EcoVillage Planning and Living

By Liz Walker

"To promote experiential learning about ways of meeting human needs for shelter, food, energy, livelihood, and social connectedness that are aligned with the long-term health and viability of Earth and all its inhabitants."

—Mission statement for EcoVillage at Ithaca–Center for Sustainability Education

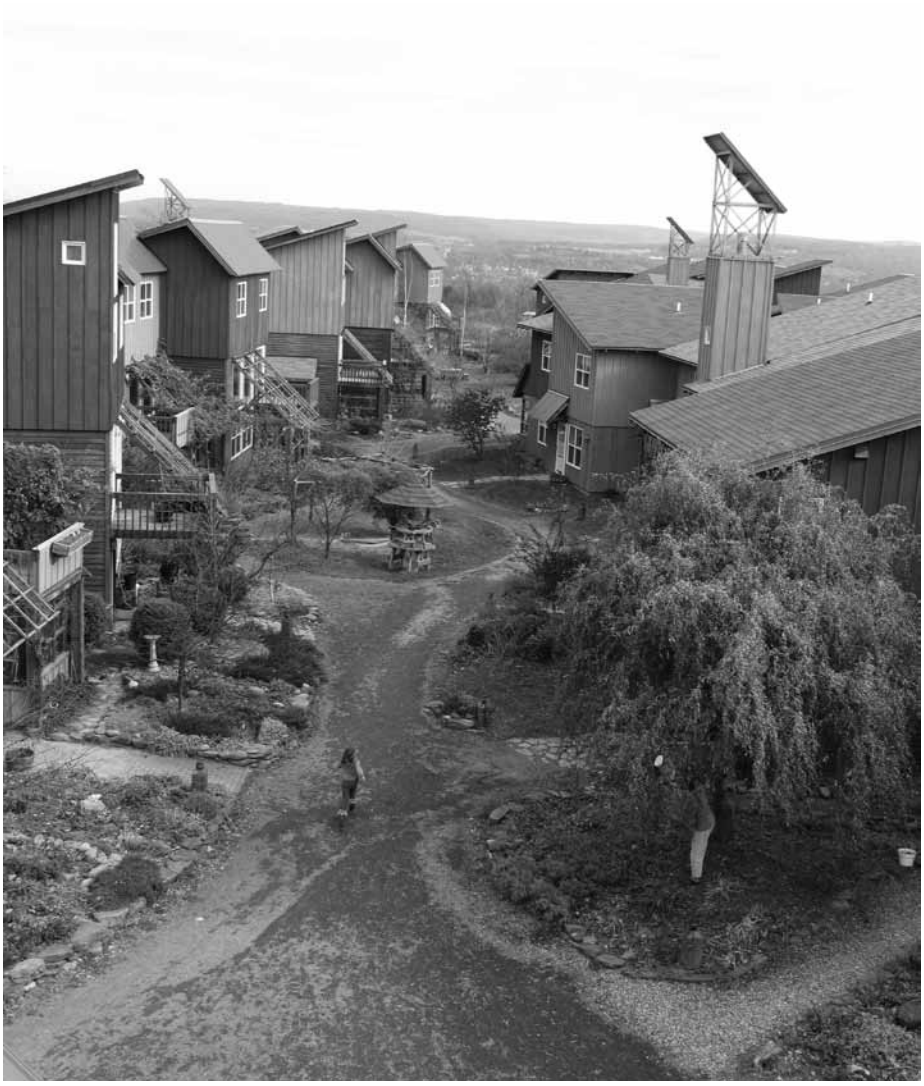
Last night a group of four dozen people gathered in the Common House for a simple vegetarian dinner of curried lentil soup, hearty cornbread, and a salad made from three kinds of greens from our onsite farm. After the dishes were cleared, a third of the group stayed on for an in-depth presentation by Jesse Sherry, a PhD student from Rutgers who is studying the ecological footprint of several ecovillages and comparing their impact to that of the average US citizen. Using data generated from about half of the 60 households who live at EcoVillage at Ithaca (EVI), Jesse found that the EVI average was about 2.4 global hectares (gha) per person, compared with 8 gha per person for the national average. This means that people who live in our community use only about 30 percent of the resources (for travel, heat, food, water, and waste) of typical Americans. Lest we get too self-congratulatory, the two other ecovillages studied—Earthhaven in North Carolina and Sirius in Massachusetts, were at 1.8 and 2.1 respectively. We were doing well, and with more collective effort we could do even better.

Looking around the room, I remembered our "Envisioning Retreat," 21 years ago. In June of 1991, 100 of us camped out in a field during the week of the summer solstice and dreamed of creating an ecovillage together. While fireflies flickered around our tents, we talked of our vision: to create a community of up to 500 people, with thriving organic farms and a vibrant education center just outside of Ithaca.

As with the presentation we had just heard, I was struck at how far we have come, and at the same time how far we have to go. At age 21, how have we matured, and how are we still struggling to live out our values? What have we learned that may be useful to the broader society?

Forming an Identity

Early in the development of EVI, we chose to appeal to middle class Americans. We wanted to create an alternative lifestyle that would demonstrate a far more ecological approach than mainstream culture, yet that would be



Photos by James Bosjolie

attractive to a wide variety of people. We wanted to influence development patterns, and make a difference through our example.

This influenced many of our subsequent choices. We wanted to be accessible to visitors and students, so we decided to develop on land that was just two miles from downtown Ithaca, New York, a progressive college town that is home to Cornell University, Ithaca College, and TC3, our local community college. We have a steady stream of visitors who come to EVI on tours, to do research, to visit, or to buy produce from our farms. A common comment from visitors is, "You know, I could actually see myself living here."

Another early decision was to use the cohousing model. In 1991, cohousing was so new to the US that none of us had ever seen this type of community. However, cohousing brings some key principles into play that have been highly successful. Our two (soon to be three) densely clustered neighborhoods are centered on winding pedestrian streets that offer a congenial place for kids to play, neighbors to chat, and conversations to unfold around picnic tables and sand boxes. There is a delightful sense of wandering through a park as one follows the path past unique front-yard gardens blossoming with a profusion of flowering plants.

The Common Houses offer a common space for several community dinners each week, kids' indoor play space, home offices, common laundry facilities, and a place for ongoing classes, celebrations, dances, and special gatherings. There is a nice balance between people's private lives and the ongoing life of the community.

Another key choice was to actively farm the land. We chose land with abandoned agricultural fields that we have gradually been bringing back into production. Right now we have two working farms: West Haven Farm has 10 acres under production and grows certified organic vegetables and fruit for 1000 people a week during the growing season. Kestrel's Perch Berry Farm is five acres and has a U-Pick operation with seven kinds of berries. Both farms are operated as CSAs, with member families from all over the county. In addition, we have several thriving community gardens for the residents, and a growing agricultural education program, Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming, which will soon reclaim 10 acres at EVI for small-scale incubator farms for low income beginning farmers.

EcoVillage at Ithaca was started by a

nonprofit organization (now called EVI–Center for Sustainability Education), and a big part of our initial work has been to grow the ecovillage itself from a vision to a real, living laboratory. At times it has been hard to separate out the identities of the living community and the educational work. Once in a while there is a clash between our nonprofit mission (which seeks to bring in visitors, support research, and "grow the vision") and some of the residents who want to enjoy quiet lives without the disruption of more visitors or more neighborhoods.

Gaining Skills

As our ecovillage has developed over time, we have grown in our capabilities. Our initial cohousing neighborhood was the first in New York State, and we had all the challenges of convincing our local planning board, bankers, insurance agents, and the NYS Attorney General's office that we were legitimate developers. Now we are actually the ones writing new zoning regulations; not only do we anticipate they will be adopted by our county, but also hope they will be of use around the country.

In 1997, when our first resident group, "FROG," was built, no incentive programs were in place to help fund renewable energy. Now, in 2012, we have just installed a brand new 50 KW ground-mounted solar array which is producing 60 percent of the electricity needed by all 30 homes in FROG. Smart meters tell us how much current we are using in our homes or as a whole neighborhood. Our second cohousing neighborhood, "SONG," built in 2002-2004, was able to take advantage of incentive and rebate programs that returned approximately 50 percent of the value of the investment. Out of 30 homes, almost half sport photovoltaic panels (solar electric) and four use solar thermal (hot water). Our third neighborhood, "TREE," currently under construction, plans to make extensive use of photovoltaics and solar thermal. Incentive and rebate programs now return about three quarters of the original investment, making it crazy not to use them.

In addition to expanding our renewable energy capacity, our green building efforts have also become more sophisticated over time. From simple passive solar duplexes in FROG, to examples of strawbale, structurally insulated panels (SIPs), and timber-frame buildings in SONG, we are now aiming for Passive House (PH) certification in TREE. The Passive House standard is "arguably the most stringent energy-efficient building spec in the world," says Chris Corson in the May 2012 issue of *The Journal of Light Construction*. "The big picture goal of the Passive House movement is to nearly eliminate housing's share of climate change by slashing energy consumption to about six percent of that used in conventional homes." In the TREE neighborhood, we are aiming not only to greatly reduce energy consumption, but also to show that it can be done affordably.

With 15 years of community living under our belts, we've also grown tremendously in our collective ability to solve conflicts. And we've had some doozies! One community-wide conflict that took over a year to resolve was figuring out a policy on outdoor cats. Our group seemed pretty evenly split between those who wanted to restrict cats from hunting (cats kill millions of birds a year), to those who felt that their beloved pets should have the freedom to roam. After a dozen or more tense meetings in "salons" (non-decision-making discussion groups), neighborhood groups, and whole village meetings, we finally reached consensus on a long-term policy that would restrict each of the three neighborhoods to no more than two outdoor cats apiece. The

short-term policy allowed existing neighborhood cats (including four owned by one person) to be "grandfathered" in. While it was a compromise that thrilled no one, it allowed us to finally drop the issue, and move towards a more ecological long-term policy, while not penalizing those who already owned outdoor cats.

Facing Challenges

While we have a good track record on many fronts, there continue to be challenges in others. I'll pick two for now: achieving more racial and income diversity, and long-term community burnout.

While our goal has always been to be an inclusive community, we have had only mixed success. In some respects, the village population is quite diverse, with ages from two to 82, people with varied types of jobs, and spiritual backgrounds ranging from observant Jews to Bahai, Christian, and Earth-based spirituality. There are a few people with major physical disabilities, and several children with major developmental delays. There is a fairly small lesbian, gay, and bisexual population currently, at just five percent of the adult residents.

When it comes to income level, most people are middle class, although there are some residents (often renters) who are low income, and others who are quite wealthy. Over the years we have tried many different strategies for keeping housing as affordable as possible. We have used standardized design and construction in FROG and TREE, with options for self-building in SONG. We also received a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank for SONG that enabled us to pay the down payments for six affordable homes in SONG. In TREE, we are aiming for very affordable pricing based on building 15 apartments in addition to 25 houses, standardizing design and construction, and using a nonprofit development model in which the group itself acts as general contractor, while hiring a very experienced builder. But I think the most successful strategy may be that TREE will also offer 15 percent of its homes as rentals, allowing people to live here who would otherwise not have the capital needed to buy a home.

We probably have least diversity in race. Currently we have 15 percent people of color (compared to 20 percent non-white population in Tompkins County, and 33 percent in the City of Ithaca). There are very few African Americans at EVI, a situation we would love to change. There are currently several efforts aimed at bridging this gap. Quite a few of our residents have taken a five week course called "Talking Circles on Race and Racism." Several of our residents have been trained to lead these sessions, which aim to create a dialogue between whites and people of color. There is also an onsite, ongoing weekly study group on bridging the gap between environmentalism and social justice.

Another challenge we are facing is how to keep the energy going for the long term. After 15 years of living in community, we are currently facing a problem of burnout. It is often hard to make the quorum for our monthly village meetings, our work teams sometimes don't have enough participation, and many community meals (there are four dinners a week) have low attendance. What is wrong? We've been trying to figure it out.

Our cook team has been especially hard hit, and we've noticed a few trends. Many more people have specialized diets than even five years ago. The cooks are now responsible for making meals for a wide variety of dietary needs: vegans, vegetarians, gluten-free, nightshade-free, kid-friendly, and various combinations of these. There are whole families who are on meat-oriented diets to correct severe allergies. What's a cook to do?

Part of the solution seems to be to simplify the meals, aiming for one-food-fits-most (e.g. a vegan, gluten-free main dish can feed most people). We are also trying to find ways to appreciate the cooks, who

may put in between two to six hours to prepare a meal, then have it scarfed up quickly, with people rushing off for another evening activity. It's sometimes hard to keep the culture of community going when the societal trend is chronic busyness and isolation. The good news is that we are consciously addressing this, and experimenting with different ideas, including monthly coffee houses and special celebrations. In addition, with the influx of new TREE residents moving in over the coming year, there will be lots more people to partake in both cooking and eating community meals.

Stepping Out into the World

While we have always been engaged in educational work, in the last several years our efforts have grown dramatically. Part of this is through establishing partnerships with other groups. Our nonprofit arm currently has formal partnerships with Ithaca College Environmental Studies Department, Tompkins County Planning Department, Center for Transformative Action, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative, New Roots Charter School, and many other groups who share our values of sustainability and social justice.

Partly because of these partnerships, EcoVillage at Ithaca–Center for Sustainability Education has landed two major federal grants. One, a three year USDA grant, funds Groundswell Center (already mentioned) to work with beginning farmers. This program has taken off like wildfire, and is bringing together local food justice groups with farmers, and like its name, creating a groundswell of interest in local food and farming. Every week from spring through fall, a couple dozen aspiring farmers meet for hands-on classes that teach everything from business planning to nutrition to organic weed control. The excitement is palpable.

Last April we also received an EPA Climate Showcase Communities Grant in partnership with the Tompkins County Planning Department. The three year grant (one of a total of 50 around the country) allows us to study the lessons we've learned from building EVI, and apply those lessons to three new pilot projects (the TREE neighborhood, an urban infill "pocket neighborhood," and a new residential eco-development of 70 homes planned on county land). We'll study energy usage of future residents a year before move-in as well as a year after move-in to find out the most successful strategies for cutting greenhouse gas emissions. It is thrilling to think that one of our very earliest dreams—to actually influence mainstream development to become bright green and community oriented—is underway.

One of our very earliest dreams—to actually influence mainstream development to become bright green and community oriented—is underway.

Looking Towards the Future

In the very near future, our population will increase by a third, to about 250 people. Our per capita ecological footprint should also shrink substantially, with the construction of Passive House buildings in TREE, and new solar arrays. As our ecovillage continues to grow and mature, we also plan more onsite businesses, a dynamic EcoVillage Education Center, more farming, a more racially and economically diverse group, and we hope, ever-deepening community ties, both to each other and to this gorgeous Finger Lakes regional community of land and people.

Liz Walker is cofounder of EcoVillage at Ithaca, and serves as Executive Director of the EVI–Center for Sustainability Education. She has authored two books, EcoVillage at Ithaca: Pioneering a Sustainable Culture*, and* Choosing a Sustainable Future: Ideas and Inspiration from Ithaca, NY, *both published by New Society Publishers.*

Growing Up in EcoVillage at Ithaca

By Allegra Willett

The wind is rustling through my hair and I can feel the rough texture of the straw beneath me. "WE MUST RIDE ON!" comes a call from my left. Emma is our chieftain and we are riding our faithful wolf mounts onward to save a tribesman. Of course we aren't; our imagination is so full bodied that the hay barrels beneath us are magically wolves. The weaponry we so proudly carry across our backs is simply grapevines twisted with twine. We had journeyed into the forest that surrounds our village alone with small saws earlier that day, scavenging for vines with curvatures perfect for our new bows. After our bows were strung with twine we headed into the goldenrod fields to select arrows that would fill the makeshift quivers that rested behind our non-dominant shoulders. For weeks on end we would run freely through the woods, climbing trees and making forts with sticks and moss. We stalked through the high grass behind the village pond, making grass houses and pretending to hunt. The freedom our land allowed, and that with which our parents gifted us, made us grow with the opportunity to explore our surroundings and learn from what we saw around us.

In the evenings after our community meals we would gather all of the children in our cohousing village and don our darkest clothes so we could slip into the shadows while we played "dark tag," our version of cops and robbers. I can still remember running to the veggie-oil-powered bus that housed our French Canadian visitors and asking them to play with us in the darkness. One of those times we were running beside the pond in the pitch blackness with one of the men from the bus. I was yelling, "RORY, RUN FASTER!" to a girl who lived a few houses down from me. Tim, a fast boy from the other team, was hot on our heels and I knew that Rory wasn't a fast runner. Suddenly the Canadian scooped her up in his arms and ran her into the safety of our village, with her screaming and laughing for him to put her down.

Dark tag was the time for all of us to get together to play, no matter what our age differences were. The village would ring with laughter and shrill screams from boys and girls jumping out of the blackness. You could tell a really good game was going when the village was silent with all of us stalking each other from our hiding places. My generation of EcoVillage kids created dark tag 15 years ago; we are legends here and the game is still played today.

Growing up in a cohousing community was full of freedom for me as a child and I had very little awareness of the housing experiment EcoVillage was known for worldwide. To me EcoVillage was a home with endless space and time for exploration. I have always imagined life to be a series of adventures that should never be taken for granted. When I was returning home from interning at Disney World this past January, I remember sitting in the observation car on the Amtrak Auto Train that runs from Sanford, Florida to Lorton, Virginia. We had just passed through the Georgia border, and I was looking out the window as the sun was setting, wondering what adventures the world had in store for me next. I could almost feel the future, yet it was more like smoke than an actual texture. It is hard to grasp the exact shape my future will take but the smoke tells me that the future adventures are as sure as my dark tag teammates waiting to be discovered in the shadows.

Home-schooled at EcoVillage at Ithaca, Allegra Willett is now in her late teens. She wrote this essay for her college entrance application.

Fifty Years On: Living Now in the Findhorn Foundation Community

By Lisa Sutherland

I first heard about Findhorn whilst kneeling in a mountain of mulch, trellising beans through the brown stalks of sunflowers. I was taking a stranger for a ramble through the diverse abundance of the garden I was tending using permaculture principles, common sense, creative need, and long conversations with the plants and landscape. My guest was delighted by the story of how the lawn of this small suburban plot in a semi-industrial area in Durban, South Africa had become a community project that shared the healing power of nature with all who were willing to learn and care for the garden. "Have you heard about Findhorn?" she said, and that was it, I felt something deep within me hum and from that moment on, a journey of discovery began.

Three years later, I found myself on the threshold of a communal ecohouse in the housing cluster called Bagend, all my worldy goods packed into a suitcase and a backpack. I had come to Findhorn to answer the call of love, a call that led me to participate in the first Findhorn Ecovillage Design and Education Training.

I had great dreams of creating an ecovillage in South Africa, with the intention of housing the many children families orphaned through AIDS. Most people settle for a house—I wanted an entire village! Now, six years later, these ambitious dreams have waned and the anxiety to change the world single-handedly has softened into the valuable wisdom that I am not alone on this journey. Indeed, there is a global wave of people dedicated to being the change they want to see in the world, committed to the inspired action of social and environmental justice, investigating new ways of living and growing together, honouring all life on this planet.

Here, living within the Findhorn community, I am reminded every day of the call to hold the faith and vision of a better world. I only need to look outside my office window to see the demonstration of building this future. The grass roof on the guest lodge is the playground for insects, its structure designed to harness renewable energy and its walls welcoming in the guests who, like me, are drawn to experience this demonstration of a community aspiring to harmonious and sustainable lifestyles.

This year, the Findhorn community is celebrating its 50th birthday. From its humble beginnings in 1962, this constantly evolving community is now home to more than 400 people creatively exploring how to live more consciously and sustainably on this planet. It is difficult to define the Findhorn Foundation Community in relation to place. Although The Park, located on the beautiful Findhorn Bay, is a demonstration of ecological buildings, the social and spiritual impulse of the community reaches far beyond, indeed to all four corners of the globe. This global community includes the many people who have been inspired by their experiences here and have taken them out into the world, seeding many projects in their hometowns, from meditation circles to sustainability projects. The Findhorn ecovillage is unique because it addresses sustainability not only in environmental terms, but also in spiritual, social, and economic terms and this moves the concept of community beyond the site and into the realms of the heart and mind and spirit.

The focal point of everyday life in the community is the practice of the founding spiritual principles of inner listening, co-creation with the intelligence of nature, and

Photos courtesy of Lisa Sutherland

taking inspired action.

The community encourages everyone to engage in their own form of spiritual practice and offers numerous opportunities to explore various ways of connecting with the intelligence that is at the heart of all life. In the gardens, the Celtic festivals are celebrated to mark the seasons; every year we hold a festival of Sacred Dance, Music, and Song; and people hold and share various faiths. I can start my day by lifting my voice in chorus, harmonising with others as we sing the songs brought to us via the Taizé community in France. I can also attend daily group meditations in the Main Sanctuary deepening the practice of inner listening and being still.

This diverse community includes holistic businesses, artists, builders, healing professionals, a community shop, a café, an eco-friendly printing company, a Steiner school, a theatre complex, and associated retreat and workshop centres—all linked by a shared positive vision for humanity and the earth. I consider myself blessed to have all these resources at my fingertips. I can buy local, organic, fair-trade food, hold my meetings in the warmth and welcome of the café, read our information on eco-friendly paper that considers the impact on the planet and not just profit, benefit from the renewable energy that powers my office, dance in the spacious beauty of the Universal Hall, attend courses that ignite my spirit, and find the support and nurturing I need as I continue to discover the depth of my personal journey.

The experiential programmes and workshops offered through the Findhorn Foundation share practical steps for personal and global transformation. Working for the Findhorn Foundation I am supported by the daily practices we share with our guests. I begin my working day with a check-in—an open space in which to hear where everyone is at, to assess what might be needed to support one another, and to identify the work tasks that have priority. Once a week we have time to meditate and share together, valuing the need to nurture the relationships we have with one another. Periodically the team comes together for supervision, to examine the conflicts, the edges, and the issues that are at play in our field. The business of the Findhorn Foundation is not just task, it involves a dedication to being aware of the way in which we go about our daily work and how we are in relationship with ourselves, one another, and our world.

Sound like heaven on earth? It is, and this Eden also has its share of snakes. Accommodation is one of those. For five years I lived in communal housing, eventually choosing to move into a flat of my own in the village because I realised I needed space away from the hustle, bustle, and intensity of community life. As well as providing for individual needs, the community faces the challenge of providing affordable housing for a ballooning aging population and the numerous young families who settle here in this child-friendly environment.

The question of minimum wage is a hot issue at present and the Findhorn Foundation has realised that it is no longer possible for all co-workers to receive this basic remuneration as it does not meet the needs of several people. With regards many issues, the community walks the fine line of being innovative and pushing boundaries and having to adhere to government policy and law. There is a raw edge where different

The community walks the fine line of being innovative and having to adhere to government policy.

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Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood—Rebuilding Community within the City

By Robin Allison

Turn off busy Swanson Road in the western suburbs of Auckland, leave your car in the carpark to walk between clusters of houses into the heart of this urban community, and you find yourself in an oasis of calm, beauty, and abundance. Neighbours stop for a chat on the path, children race past on their tricycles, and the loudest sound you hear is the birdsong. This is Earthsong, home to 69 adults and children in 32 homes nestled amongst gardens, paths, and a village green on only three acres of land.

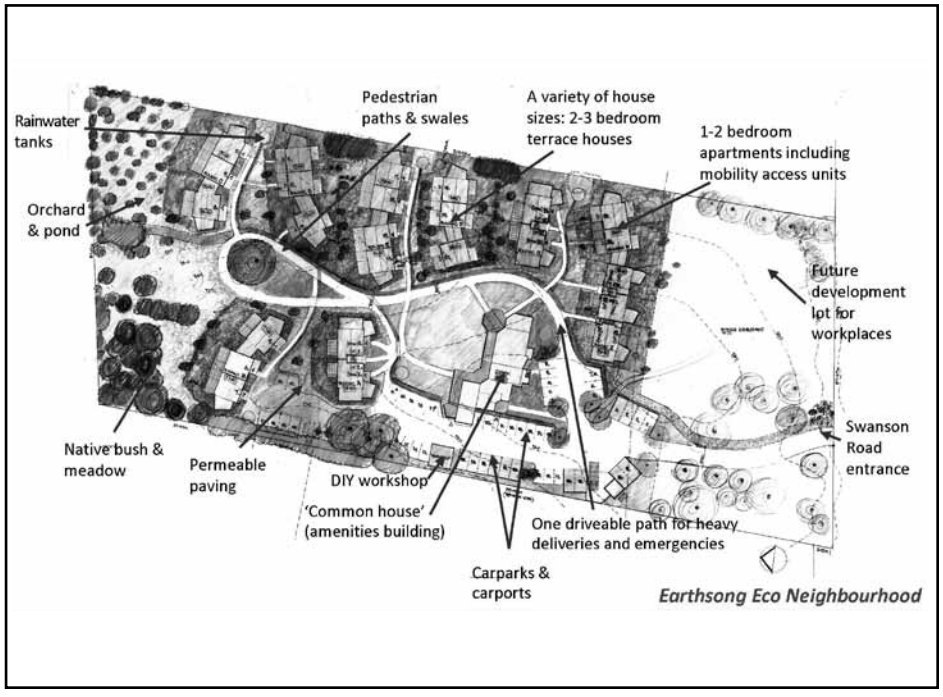
Earthsong is an eco-neighbourhood based on the twin principles of cohousing and permaculture. The founding vision, still strongly held by residents today, has three equal components: sustainable design and construction, respectful and cooperative community, and education by demonstration. At Earthsong we are relearning the skills and benefits of belonging to a community, and rebuilding a healthy interdependence with each other and with earth.

Launched at a public meeting in 1995, the project grew as people joined and worked together over several years developing the foundation agreements of effective group procedures, legal and financial structures, and site and design criteria. In 1999 they purchased the land (a former organic orchard), then worked with consultants to design the whole development, and contracted with builders to build the project in stages. While the first residents moved into their homes in 2002, the last homes and siteworks weren't completed until 2008.

Communities such as Earthsong add another layer of belonging into the standard suburban model—a layer of community relationships and governance, that doesn't reduce our personal autonomy in our own homes but adds the enormous richness of a cohesive neighbourhood within the more impersonal wider suburb and city.

Design for Sustainability

What makes Earthsong an eco-neighbourhood? Earthsong itself doesn't have the shops, businesses, school, or other facilities suggested by the term "village," so we are happy to be known as a housing neighbourhood. However we are a short walk to the shops, library and community facilities, bus stop, and train station of our local suburban centre.

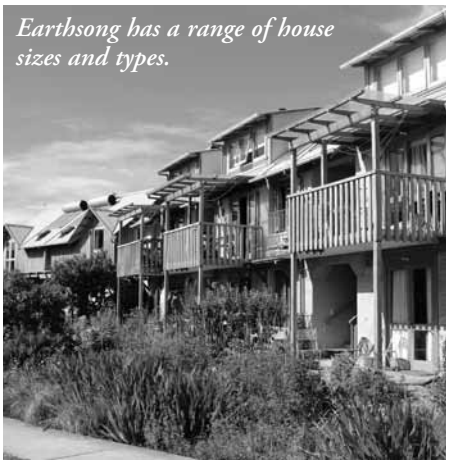


Within our neighbourhood the site layout, buildings, and services are designed to work with the natural landform and climate. Rammed earth and natural timber give the houses a solid and timeless feel, with plenty of windows to let the sun warm the coloured concrete floors for passive solar design. Solar water heaters, nontoxic materials, natural oils and paints all add up to low-energy and healthy houses.

Clusters of two-storey attached dwellings are arranged along the common pathways and shared courtyards, surrounded by old fruit trees and lush new plantings. Homes range from one-bed-

Earthsong common house.

Pedestrian pathways: people space, not car space.



Earthsong has a range of house sizes and types.

Neighbours gather on the path.

Photos courtesy of Robin Allison

room studios to four-bedroom houses to suit all ages and different household types. Easy gradients on all paths allow full accessibility, and seven single-level houses are designed for those older or less mobile.

Roof water is collected for reuse in the homes. Surface rain water flows into densely planted swales (shallow dish drains) beside the paths, and down to the large pond, home to frogs and ducks, reducing water runoff from the site. A comprehensive permaculture site design includes gathering nodes and children's play areas, vegetable gardens, native bush and orchard areas, water management, and composting.

We couldn't include everything we wanted at the time of building due to cost or regulatory obstacles, so we built in the ability to upgrade later. There are cables inside the walls of each house to assist later installation of photovoltaic panels, land area is set aside for more water tanks, and networks of spare conduits in the ground allow for future internet upgrades. Sustainability includes affordability, and our approach has been to achieve as much as we could across the full spectrum of environmental and social sustainability and to be willing to let go of perfection in any one area.

Community Aspects of Sustainability

What we have learnt at Earthsong is that social and environmental sustainability are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Many of the sustainable design aspects of our neighbourhood were made possible not only in *addition* to a social and cooperative structure, but *because* of our social cooperative structure; the two have always gone hand-in-hand.

One example is our car-free neighbourhood: we place a higher importance on our relationships with one another than with our cars, so we designed the carparks at the edge of the site. This has both social and environmental benefits—land area that would otherwise be driveways or road is freed up for productive gardens and community living space, for children to play safely and neighbours to interact as they come and go from their houses.

By sharing resources, we have access to increased facilities and "common wealth" while we use less overall. At the heart of the neighbourhood is the common house, our much-loved community building owned jointly by all the house-holders and providing shared spaces including the large dining/meeting hall, sitting room, large kitchen, childrens' room, guest room, and shared laundry. The individual houses are well-designed but compact (100 square meters for a three-bedroom home) because they don't need a spare bedroom for occasional guests, or a living room large enough for large parties or meetings. Even eco-friendly construction uses significant energy and materials so building smaller houses and having shared facilities makes good

environmental sense.

Living within a diverse and supportive neighbourhood makes it easier for individuals to make low-energy, sustainable choices. With good systems of management, equipment such as lawnmowers, garden tools, and workshop tools can be shared. Carpooling and car sharing are much easier to organize and manage when we already know and trust one another.

Working alongside my neighbours on a cooking team for a common dinner or a working bee in the garden is a great way to build the social glue of relationships that maintains community. Cooperation also happens on a daily informal basis, from child-care arrangements to moving furniture or watering the garden when a neighbour goes away. It's all about building connections between people and valuing the sense of belonging.

Another powerful way that being part of a cohesive community can facilitate environmental responsibility is that we learn from each other. Designing eco-friendly buildings and neighbourhoods is an important first step, but the behaviour of the occupants is at least as significant when it comes to the overall impact. It takes extra effort to live a more sustainable life, to resist the gravitational pull back to doing things the "normal" and therefore easier way, but in community we can help each other with information, support, and accountability.

One example is electricity use, which can vary widely even between identical houses with similar numbers and ages of inhabitants, because of the habits and behaviour of the residents. As a cooperative neighbourhood we can facilitate behaviour change in a number of ways, through information exchange and education, sharing ideas and tips about how to manage the systems more efficiently, internal pricing plans that reward low users and discourage high use, built-in feedback mechanisms, and accountability by making individual house use transparent to all. All of these mechanisms are in place in some form at Earthsong, with the result that 32 homes and the common house are functioning with an electricity supply of the size that usually supplies six houses in New Zealand.

"Through living at Earthsong," one resident told me, "I have become aware of permaculture and have seen it work in practice. With the support of neighbours I am now implementing permaculture principles in my garden."

"My education focused strongly on decision making and producing 'optimal' results," another said. "Our consensus decision-making process here at Earthsong makes me realise how much learning we lose by reducing decisions to numbers. In the beginning I just wanted to get done with the rounds and the meetings; now I value them for providing insight in the thought processes and mindsets of my neighbours."

And another: "I buy much more organic food for myself because it seems strange to live in a healthy house on a certified organic property and fill the fridge up with non-organic food."

Eco-Neighbourhoods within Eco-Cities

Earthsong has become a catalyst in the rejuvenation of the wider suburb. The front portion of our site will be developed as eco-friendly shops and offices, to link the housing with the wider neighbourhood, enhance the adjacent commercial centre, and provide work opportunities for both Earthsong residents and the wider community. Several residents have been deeply involved in local community development projects, working towards a more socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable suburb or "ecovillage."

Like a healthy organism with healthy organs made up of healthy cells, sustainability needs to operate at all levels: the individual, the household, the neighbourhood, the village, and the city. A flourishing, sustainable "eco-city," by definition, would include many flourishing, connected ecovillages and neighbourhoods, of an appropriate scale to encourage cooperation and healthy relationships. It is increasingly apparent that we are all part of one vast, complex planetary system or organism, and eco-neighbourhoods and villages offer fertile environments to re-learn the skills of interdependence and cooperation that will contribute to the health of our beautiful earth home.

An architect, Robin was the initiator and development coordinator and is now a contented resident of Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood (www.earthsong.org.nz). She is a fellow of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship, and is profiled in the recent book How Communities Heal. *Her chapter is available at tinyurl.com/hchallison. Contact robin.allison@earthsong.org.nz.*

The pond: home of ducks, frogs, and herons.

Consensus decision by the full group.

Dandelion Village: Building an Ecovillage in Town

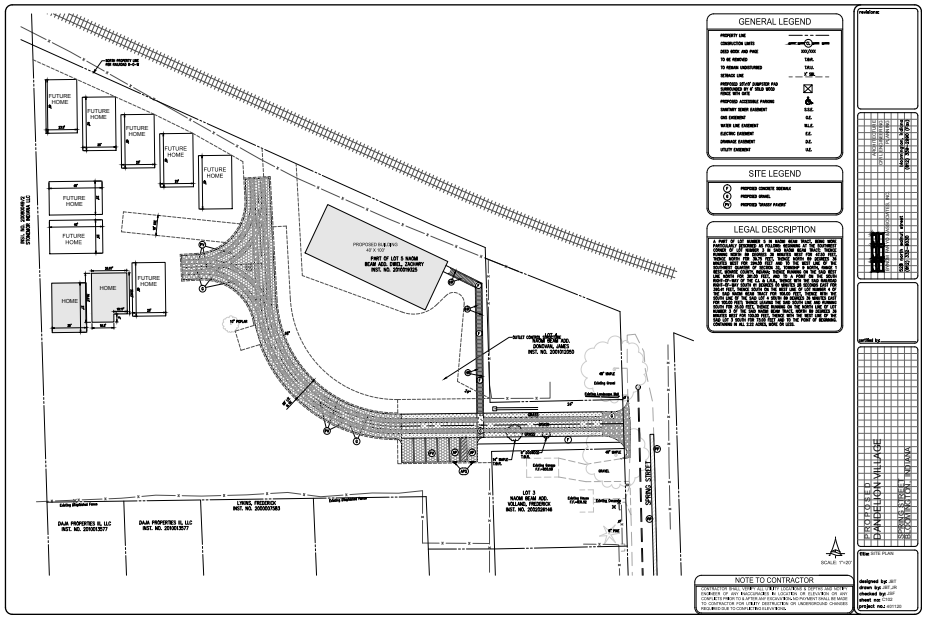
By Maggie Sullivan

It may seem impossible to create an intentional community inside an existing city with all the difficulties in zoning restrictions, red tape, and political jockeying. However, Dandelion Village successfully navigated the legal hoops to form an ecovillage within the city of Bloomington, Indiana and their success can be replicated elsewhere. Their keys to success were understanding the process, identifying allies in positions of power, and communicating with complete transparency about their goals and plans.

While rural ecovillages can provide better opportunities for farming and connecting with nature, urban locations have their own benefits, like car-free living, sewer systems, public libraries, better school options, a market for goods produced by the ecovillage, and a more vibrant social scene. Danny Weddle, one of the founders of Dandelion Village, dreamed of creating an ecovillage in his college town and gathered a group of five people who were ready to make it happen. "We looked for a property that was 15 minutes from downtown on a bike," said Danny. Their original vision was of a 50-member community on a permaculture-designed urban farm with members living in small, minimalist cabins and sharing a communal building with the kitchen and bathrooms. This design would allow higher density than typical single family home developments while maintaining much more greenspace and focusing on "hyperlocal food production."

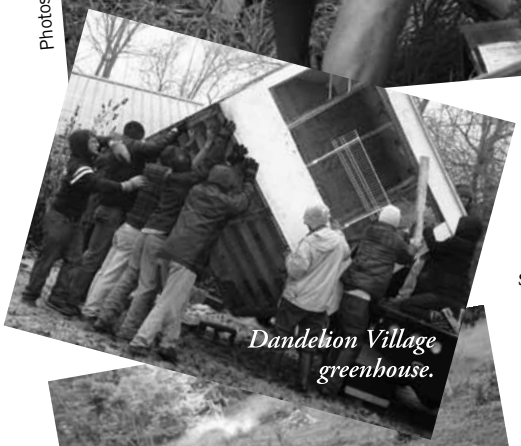
By scouring the property listings and keeping an eye out for "for sale" signs, they located a potential property just south of town. They held a series of work sessions to produce a 14-page ecovillage development plan. At the same time, Danny, Zach Dwiel, and Carolyn Blank set up casual meetings with a few sympathetic city council members, such as the chair for Bloomington's Peak Oil Task Force. These city council members were very supportive and had many suggestions on how to navigate the planning process. Their chief advice was to start talking with the city planning department immediately to determine their options and the best approach for obtaining approval.

Like many fast-growing communities, Bloomington has extensive development guidelines geared towards preserving the exceptional quality of life valued by its citizens. Simultaneously ranked as one of the best college towns, one of the best places to retire, and one of the best gay/lesbian communities, its local culture is artsy, diverse, environmentally conscious, and progressive. Happily, the staff at the planning department was intrigued by Dandelion Village. "Many of the goals of this project…are things the city has been dictating and encouraging through the Growth Policies Plan," said development review manager Pat Shay, commenting on its compact urban form and its use of an otherwise hard-to-develop lot. However, the project was a challenge because it did not meet traditional zoning requirements. "This was a new issue for Bloomington," said planning director Tom Micuda. "We did not have a code for cohousing and that meant we had to go for rezoning for the land. Essentially we did a PUD." PUD (Planned Unit Development) was

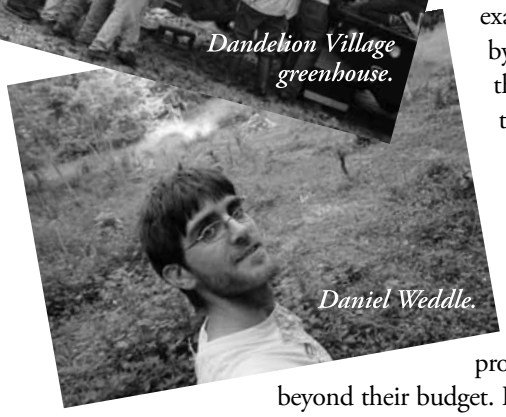


Dandelion Village bees.

Photos courtesy of Maggie Sullivan



Dandelion Village greenhouse.



Daniel Weddle.

designed mainly for developers looking to do large neighborhood developments and allows developers to propose a layout different from the standard pattern. Generally, the idea is that the city gives some sort of concession to the developer (for example, higher density) that is mitigated by the developer offering some benefit to the city, often in terms of subsidizing additional infrastructure costs or helping the city meet one of its development goals like preserved greenspace.

While things were advancing with the planning department, the Dandelion Village group had less success purchasing a piece of land. The owner of the first property raised his price 20 percent, pushing it beyond their budget. Danny, Zach, and Carolyn continued their search via Google Earth and by bicycle. Another promising property fell through before they stumbled on an unusual location that became their ultimate site. It was an odd piece of land sandwiched between a train track, a trailer park, a cemetery, and the blue collar Waterman neighborhood. After conducting environmental studies to determine that there was no contamination from a nearby salvage yard, they purchased the 2.25 acre property for $57,000 and resumed work on the PUD approval process.

Although the Dandelion group had quietly rallied support for months, their first official presentation was to the Bloomington Plan Commission in March 2011. This 11-member board reviews all proposed site developments within city limits and makes a recommendation to the City Council to grant or deny project approval. As part of the process, neighbors were notified of the project and invited to attend the Plan Commission meeting. "In all my years as planning director, Dandelion Village is the most unique project I've ever worked on," said Tom Micuda. "We also had to work through what I would call the fear of the unknown and the fact that ecovillages and cooperative housing are not within the lexicon of standard plan commission members so we had to educate about what that meant."

For the first meeting, Danny and the ecovillage group developed site sketches and proposed development layouts. Their initial strategy was to ask for far more than they thought would be approved, which would allow some room for negotiation. They asked for a density of 15 houses and 75 people as well as site exemptions to allow composting toilets, a large chicken flock of 50 hens, a small herd of goats, barns, and only two parking spaces for the entire development with the understanding that the members would live largely car-free.

Several plan commission members were skeptical of the idea and many were concerned about having farm animals near a residential neighborhood. However, they were impressed by the group's dedication and preparedness and intrigued by the idea of a project countering the "McMansion trend" seen elsewhere in the city. They did advise the Dandelion group that their PUD request would not be approved without plans developed by a licensed engineer. They also listened attentively to the neighborhood residents who came to the meeting and voiced deep concerns. In response, the Dandelion Village group began canvassing door-to-door to talk with their future neighbors and understand their fears.

Most of the concerns revolved around the idea that a hippie commune would bring in drugs and undesirables, not to mention crowing roosters and loose goats eating their peonies. "It was the issue of 'we're not familiar with this—what will it do to us?'" said Tom Micuda. Many neighbors were also concerned about the impact on existing problems like lack of neighborhood parking and flooding issues. The neighborhood streets routinely flooded during large storm events and there were concerns that any sort of development in the area would make it worse.

The Dandelion group continued to talk with neighbors and even helped relaunch the Waterman Neighborhood Association. They also incorporated water retention structures into their site design. Instead of causing additional flooding problems, their development was designed to improve the situation by holding back runoff from the adjacent neighborhood to the north. "We approached from a permaculture prespective," said Danny, describing how they elected to turn waste into a resource. "Water is one of the most critical flows you can possibly have. There has been a drought for the last three years so we said

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Going from Vision to Culture

By Daniel Weddle

My name is Daniel Weddle. I am one of the founders of Dandelion Village, an intentional ecocentric community growing in Bloomington, Indiana. Nearly all of my creative energy for the past three years has been sunk into founding this community. I am the man in the middle of the villagers, city officials, neighbors, and those working for us. I am a politician, speculator, developer, home designer, logger, general contractor, and anyone else I need to be in order to have a place to call home with my friends. My role is beautiful, but exhausting. The story below is about my journey to move out of the center of this project and help it to stand on its own.

Starting with Vision

In January I participated in a panel discussion on a local radio show about the ecovillage movement. A lady called in from a community called Keeping Hill and said, "We have land, a common house, and desire to find more people to live there." She asked me how to find people. The question caught me off guard. I floundered a bit, made some semi-coherent statements, and then spent bits of the last five months thinking about it.

If she were to call me today, I would say: find your vision, make it as clear as you can, and start living and sharing it. Vision is the first step, but ultimately the cross-section of people who are involved in a project at any given time are the culture. Now I want to share some examples of how I have begun empowering others to turn our Dandelion Village vision into our culture. All this work is best viewed through the lens of a young founder working to build community while looking for himself and protecting his sanity.

Handing the Community over to the Community

In fall of 2011, the tension of building a village began pulling me apart and I started to search for ways to dissolve my responsibilities and shift them to the community. I decided to experiment with how much input I had to put into a project before others were empowered to take over. I directed the clearing of a shrubby area of the village, cut garden beds, disked, and cover cropped. Once the land was prepped, I tried to step back and let others take over. But then in January Megan Hutchison approached me about an opportunity to order orchard trees.

We had only a week to decide and I froze up, even though the orchard land was prepped. I communicated to Megan that I was unsure whether the group would be ready to plant trees in the spring without my guidance, and that I was personally overextended in commitments to the village and so couldn't take this on. Megan came to our next public meeting anyway and presented the opportunity. When I said I could not invest in the project but the community had the funds to support it, two people stepped up. This was a big shift; I ceded some control over the project, and others were able to take pieces and make them their own.

Today I can walk through our young orchard and garden even though I did not turn a shovel to make either happen. Enough was provided so that people felt empowered to take on greater ownership of the village and at the same time I was able to move out from some of the burden of being the center. A little preparation energy became big without my help. There is little that is more empowering and beautiful than being trusted. The orchard and garden are the projects of a few that enrich the whole. The work came from their hands and every time they walk through, it is their thing, their individuality in a big communal project.

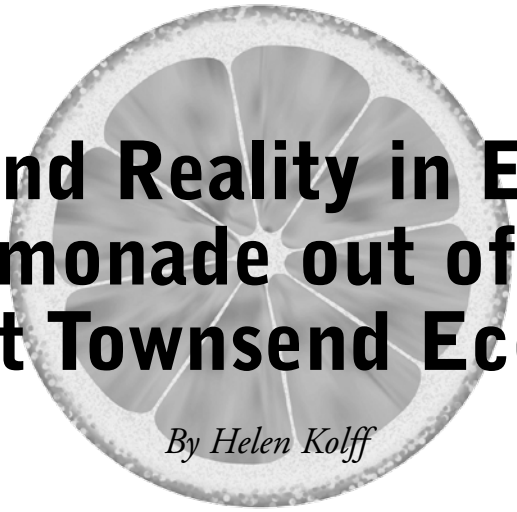
Going from Founder to Community Member

I've met with my fellow founder, Zach Dwiel, a couple of times to discuss how we could shift our roles from founders to equally contributing community members. We agreed that despite the community's budding energy, it was not yet stable and we needed to choose a metric of stability and push the community toward it. This is where things get muddy, as you can pick an infinite number of metrics. We had already spent a majority of the past two years going through a city rezoning process, and knew that project would come to a close shortly, but it was not enough. Our discussions led us through a 15-bedroom common house, a three-season camping platform called "concrete ruin," and two small community houses. We ultimately realized that all of our conversations revolved around the need for the community to be financially stable. We thus set the goal of Dandelion rental rooms and dues covering the monthly expenditures by the end of 2013.

The push to provide economic stability for the community will be my last contribution above and beyond the norm. If Dandelion Village can't stand as a community then I want to let it fail. Founder syndrome for me is the death of my wants, energy, life-force, as I am crushed by maintaining something that can't carry its own weight. If it can't carry itself it is not community; it is charity. I say with the greatest pride that Dandelion Village feels lighter every day. Thank you fellow Dandelions.

Daniel Joseph Weddle is a founder of Dandelion Village in Bloomington, Indiana. He is currently building his home, Inquisitive Owl, and the home of two other cofounders.

Daniel making hardwood flooring.



Vision and Reality in Ecotopia: Making Lemonade out of Lemons at the Port Townsend EcoVillage

By Helen Kolff

We started the Port Townsend EcoVillage because we had a vision: *"A community of people living in harmony with each other and with the earth, exploring together ways to live more sustainably."* That was eight years ago and we are still here and thriving!

We spent nearly every Sunday afternoon for years meeting to make that vision a reality. We engaged in lively debates about what legal structure would be ideal and actually went from an LLC, to a Co-op, to a Home Owners' Association (see "To Be or Not To Be an LLC," Communities, Winter 2006, #133). After seven years, the landowners and cofounders decided to end the debate and temporarily suspended consensus (see "Money, Power and Process: How We Pulled The Plug On Consensus," Communities, Fall 2010, #148).

We are happy to report that we are living our vision even though we have had to make a number of compromises due to the constraints (lemons) of reality.

First, we chose to locate our ecovillage within the urban growth area of Port Townsend (in Jefferson County, Washington). This turns out to have its blessings and its downsides. We live within biking and walking distance of lively cultural venues, a vibrant food co-op, and an exquisite state park right on Puget Sound, so car use can be minimal. Our members are engaged in many meaningful activities outside our ecovillage in this happening town. However, this meant that land prices are higher and city building codes are more stringent than in rural areas. By choosing to be in the public eye, we are limited in some of the innovations we might be able to explore in a less restrictive regulatory environment.

Second, we live in the US where the dominant culture is based on individual ownership of property, as well as onerous financial and legal costs in a system with a shaky social safety net. We found it nearly impossible to get loans from local banks, even from lending institutions that had a history of making loans to cooperatives. This may have been due to both the economic recession and the fact that we tried to form first an LLC and then a limited equity co-op—legal ownership models outside the mainstream. When we tried to find insurance coverage, we had difficulty even after we became a Home Owners' Association. Surprisingly, an insurance agency that covered a neighboring HOA chose not cover us. We did succeed in finding insurance coverage, a prerequisite of being granted our planned unit development by the City of Port Townsend.

So, how are we mitigating these constraints and obstacles? How are we making lemonade out of lemons?

Lemon A: Expensive land and private ownership culture

We came up with some creative financial solutions:

• **Lemonade #1:** Although we are organized as a Home Owners' Association with privately owned lots, we share ownership of all the rest of the common property. This includes the last five (of 12) lots that have not been sold yet, nearly seven acres of land with a small forest and excellent agricultural land. In addition, we jointly own a large duplex called the CoHo that we rent out and are using as a temporary common house, a 3600 square-foot art center, and a well for watering our gardens.

• **Lemonade #2:** We promote some degree of affordability by encouraging those who currently don't have the means to buy a lot and build a home to be a part of the Port Townsend EcoVillage by renting a room or living unit in the CoHo. This has made it possible for us to enjoy the exciting energy of young families and others with lots of talents and gifts. The rent from the CoHo keeps member assessments to a minimum.

• **Lemonade #3:** We encourage people to enter into joint tenancy agreements to buy in and build a home together. Currently, there are three lots that are owned in this way. Our assessments are based on a formula that takes into account and encourages the shared ownership of a single lot.

• **Lemonade #4:** We have agreed to share a percentage of the profits from the sale of any of the lots and homes. Equity is thereby somewhat limited so that profits can be put into our discount fund, allowing us to offer financial discounts to potential members who would not otherwise be able to buy in.

• **Lemonade #5:** The original landowners offer a low interest load on part of the cost of buying a lot. Some members have offered low interest loans to other members who needed them to complete

the construction of their homes. When the homes are completed, owners have the opportunity to obtain a mortgage and repay the loans from fellow members.

Lemon B: Restrictive City codes

How have we addressed the restraints of our local City codes? We are trying to be as sustainable as we can be given these code and zoning requirements. In applying for our Planned Unit Development permit, the City allowed no composting toilets without being hooked up to the sewer system, no satellite bedrooms (structures that serve as a bedroom with a shared bathroom and kitchen in a commonly owned building that is not attached), no wind turbines due to height restrictions, no simple gray water systems (unless the system was engineered and met extensive regulations), no unpaved sections of existing paved roads, no grassy path (instead of a paved sidewalk), and no additional houses on the north part of the property without paving the whole length of the street (at a cost of about $150,000).

In order to be as sustainable as possible in spite of our City codes, we have voluntarily agreed to a number of restrictions that are part of our internal legal documents. Here is a list of some steps we are taking toward sustainability as an ecovillage:

Various Flavors of Lemonade:

- We limit our house size to 1200 square feet of heated space and no more than 1200 square feet of covered surface per lot.
- We own an electric car and share other vehicles.
- We installed solar panels on our rental house.
- We make solar access a priority when planning house sites.
- We share tools, washing machines, and other equipment.
- We use organic seeds and compost whenever possible.
- We have reserved three acres of our land for growing food and have a CSA.
- We lease garden space that is currently not needed by members.
- We avoid the use of toxic chemicals in building and maintaining our homes.
- We promote water catchment systems and share a well for watering gardens.
- We have a shared composting toilet, art center, and rental house.

And our juiciest lemonade is our process. Just as important as ecological sustainability, we pay particular attention to *human* sustainability here at the Port Townsend EcoVillage. Our Process Team regularly takes a pulse of the health of our community's "organism." We evaluate whether there are unresolved conflicts, a need for community-building, a topic that should be addressed, or a celebration that is called for. We are blessed to have a wide variety of group facilitation skills and expertise among our members. We use improvisational theater exercises such as fluid sculpture, Zegg Forum format for personal sharing, Nonviolent Communication and mediation, the Mandala Process we learned from Robina McCurdy, C.T. Butler's method of building consensus, the Enneagram to learn more about personality differences, Diversity and Social Justice work, Joanna Macy's "Work that Reconnects" approach, group participation singing, and self-designed seasonal celebrations and retreats.

One example of our process is our Solstice Celebration. In a festive way, we drum and sing our way out to our forest fire circle that has been decorated with rose hips, holly, cedar boughs, and ribbons. Encircling the ceremonial fire, we take a sprig of lavender and a pinch of herbs to represent qualities we want to leave behind and invite into our lives in the coming year. We step forward, share those qualities, and toss them into the fire. Sometimes the coyotes sing along with us as we leave to go back to our cozy common house. With anticipation, we each take part in the "Give Away," a time when we lay out a prized possession that has meaning and power for us but one that we are willing to part with. We take turns choosing one of these objects as our gift and hearing the story behind it as told by the giver. We then enjoy a scrumptious feast complete with toasts of appreciation to one another. There is nothing like sharing appreciations to build a strong sense of community among us. We all really enjoy the camaraderie, good cheer, and meaning of the solstice time of year.

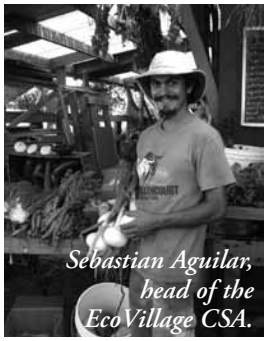
This emphasis on both product and process is allowing us to make some very zesty lemonade out of the lemons and other constraints we have encountered on the way to realizing our vision at the Port Townsend EcoVillage.

Helen Kolff is a cofounder of the Port Townsend EcoVillage, a retired educator, and currently is a community activist, wilderness guide, and grandmother.

Building a cob oven.

Sharing a toast at dinner.

Photovoltaics on the common house.



Sebastian Aguilar, head of the EcoVillage CSA.

Living the Questions

By Coleen O'Connell

Joanne Moesswilde

Jeffrey Mabee

Jeffrey Mabee

In the small coastal village of Belfast, Maine, an ecovillage is brewing. The ingredients have been steeped, following the recipe of a cohousing project and the dream of becoming an ecovillage. Years in the planning, with designs percolating and group processes filtered through, we broke ground in fall 2011. The first homes are being built as I type this. Move-in for the first residents is slated for May 2012.

Forty-two acres at the edge of town, two miles walking and biking distance to downtown, 36 households will stand. Sandwiched between horse farms, the land is open with hay fields while the Little River defines its southern border. Beautiful views of the coastal Maine hills will greet us each morning as we wake in our south-facing sun-dependent homes.

What are our dreams for becoming an ecovillage? The mission for Belfast Cohousing & Ecovillage is "to be a model environmentally sustainable, affordable, multi-generational cohousing community that is easily accessible to Belfast, includes land reserved for agricultural use and open space, and is an innovative housing option for rural Maine." (www.mainecohousing.org)

Our mission opens many small but significant questions to be decided as we grapple with giving definition to that irascible word *sustainable*. What, exactly, are we trying to sustain? A way of life? The planet? An ecosystem? What will truly make us an ecovillage? So far we answer this with plans for farming, growing our own food, putting food by, shared resources, a neighborhood of the old-fashioned type where the village raises the child, living in harmony with the land, allowing there to be space for the more-than-human world... an ecological vision for sure, but one that is still only a vision and not yet real.

In the design process, we started with houses, of course. How to arrange them became clear when our decision was to go with a solar design; next came the decision for duplex/shared wall houses. (Now this pushed the psychological boundaries of middle to upper-middle class folks!) Then came a significant pivotal decision to get off petroleum (at least for our homes—we'll deal with cars later...a much stickier issue), and thus the hiring of the local Design/Build team of GO Logic who build to German Passiv Haus design standards. (See sidebar for more information.) Given the climate in Maine, where 90 percent of the winter home-heating fuel is petroleum based, this was a radical decision. Not even gas cook stoves with those telltale propane tanks outside will exist for our homes. Nor will we have wood stoves as back up—we didn't want to breathe each other's smoke. For some of us, imagining a winter without a wood stove as, at the least, back-up heat for a snowstorm that takes the grid down, is akin to heresy. Thank goodness the prototype house that GO Logic built a few miles away is performing to Passiv Haus standards and we have seen the data and are assured that we will be warmed by the sun as we are cocooned within the super-insulated walls of our homes.

With a mission in place to become sustainable, affordable, and multi-generational, we have mostly failed on one account: affordability. By making the decisions we did, we have left out most of the young Maine families that reside in our area. Affordable, we came to understand, is relative. Our prices work for out of state or urban-dwelling prospective members, but are not affordable for most of the young families

that already live here. High-paying jobs are not plentiful in these parts, known mostly for its beautiful scenery, recreational summer boating, and organic and conventional farming. The affordability issue also squeezes on the mission to be multi-generational. Because of the costs, we have easily attracted older, close to retirement-aged people who are trading larger homes for a small, energy-efficient home, while we have struggled to retain young families with children under the age of 12. When you look at the demographics for cohousing communities around the country you will find highly educated, progressive folks, with plenty of discretionary time on their hands, and income levels that rank in the middle to upper-middle class range—hardly the demographics for Waldo County, Maine, which is one of the poorer counties in our state. But we do have families with children and for that we are grateful.

These issues have been compounded by the timing of our project. The land was bought in July 2008, with our spirits soaring as months of planning were turning real when people plunked down money to buy the land. August, one month later, the economy collapsed, caused, in part, by a burst of the housing bubble. This project is a testament to the sustained vision held by its members in that we were able to break ground three years from that land purchase with 21 houses sold. Since ground-breaking we have sold three more. We continue to market the remaining 12 units with the goal that the project will be complete with Common House by the end of 2014. Given the bad financial climate, we were also counseled by a former cohousing developer, John Ryan, to do our own self-financing, saving all the paperwork and oversight that shaken bankers would hold us to. Though risky, it has proven to be a way forward in this devastated housing market. As each house is built, the risk becomes less and less. Our final goal is to sell the last remaining houses so that work on the Common House can commence. When the Common House is complete, the main characteristic for a

Photos by Steve Chiasson

Passiv Haus

A Passive House (Passiv Haus in German where it originated) is a very well-insulated, virtually airtight building that is primarily heated by passive solar gain and by internal gains from people, electrical equipment, etc. Energy losses are minimized. Any remaining heat demand is provided by an extremely small source. Avoidance of heat gain through shading and window orientation also helps to limit any cooling load, which is similarly minimized. An energy recovery ventilator provides a constant, balanced fresh air supply. The result is an impressive system that not only saves up to 90 percent of space heating costs, but also provides a uniquely terrific indoor air quality.

A Passive House is a comprehensive system. "Passive" describes well this system's underlying receptivity and retention capacity. Working with natural resources, free solar energy is captured and applied efficiently, instead of relying predominantly on "active" systems to bring a building to "zero" energy. High performance triple-glazed windows, super-insulation, an airtight building shell, limitation of thermal bridging, and balanced energy recovery ventilation make possible extraordinary reductions in energy use and carbon emission.

(See www.passivehouse.us/passiveHouse/PassiveHouseInfo.html.)

Jeffrey Mabee

cohousing community will be in place, but then the challenging task of turning all of this into an ecovillage will remain.

As you read this, the first gardens will be producing the first crop of food. The Land Use Committee is deep into its design for the use of the common land: where to put the community gardens; how much acreage to set aside for the CSA farm; how to run that farm; where will the chickens, sheep, pigs go, the soccer field and playground for the children, the campfire ring for nightly sing-a-longs? This part is not a dream; it is hard work and the task of getting 24 households (and eventually 36 households) to agree to the design is a process in and of itself. The growing skill level of managing the decision-making process of a large group of people has brought us from a traditional consensus model of decision making to moving toward the practice of sociocracy, or dynamic governance. This is both exciting and riddled with obstacles—time being one of them. Distance between members is another. Difference of opinion is always an issue, and issues of power ever present. We have finally scheduled a weekend workshop and are bringing in a renowned facilitator, John Buck, to get us started on dynamic governance.

Sociocracy comes to us from The Netherlands. A Dutch businessman proposed this method back in the '90s as new way of running his business so every person would be respected and included and the interests of the minority as well as the majority would be heard (O'Rear and Buck, 2000). The format and ground rules offer a built-in efficiency such that a large group of people can make decisions together without getting bogged down in trying to come to a full agreement within all its membership. It is a process of consent, where the decision can be made if no one raises a reasoned or paramount objection to going forward with a proposal that has been put on the table.

We learn to trust the committees that come up with the proposals and the outcome is that we are all able to live with the decisions. The efficiency factor is most attractive to us, after four years of mostly successful but often slow and stressful consensus processes. We are excited to finally have a clear sense of at least the first 24 household members. Previous facilitation and decision-making trainings have been lost on many people who have come and gone from the project. We have spent money to train people, only to see them leave the project, including most of the founding members. With purchase-and-sales agreements in hand, we can safely move ahead with the new sociocracy training in hopes that the groundwork we are laying now, before we move in, will see us through many years of successful decision making as we collaboratively build the community we have envisioned.

We are slogging through the muck but the vision remains clear. The larger Belfast community is watching us. This is a small town after all, where the networks weave and wind themselves across every sector of the culture. We are under scrutiny. Will we truly accomplish all that we set out to do? Will we be the gold standard for what the word sustainability really means? Will we become yet another example of the growing ecovillage movement? Will we be the hippie village that most folks think we are? Or will we be a group of middle to upper-middle class people living comfortably on a nice piece of land in nice energy-efficient houses?

As Rilke so brilliantly advised, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them and the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

Here at Belfast Cohousing & Ecovillage, we are living the questions. ❧

Coleen O'Connell, a member of the Belfast Cohousing & Ecovillage community, has served on the leadership team for the project. Coleen is the Director/Faculty of the Ecological Teaching and Learning MS Program for educators at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her professional and personal passion has been to explore ecological literacy and sustainability in the context of our personal lifestyle choices. She has traveled internationally with students living in and studying the ecovillage movement. She cofounded a small ecovillage, Ravenwood, in the midcoast region of Maine which has been a teaching laboratory for Lesley University and the Audubon Expedition Institute (now the Expedition Education Institute). She can be reached at oconnell@lesley.edu and welcomes your comments or questions.

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www.passivehouse.us/passiveHouse/PassiveHouseInfo.html

www.mainecohousing.org

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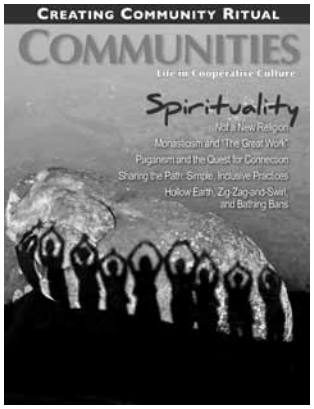
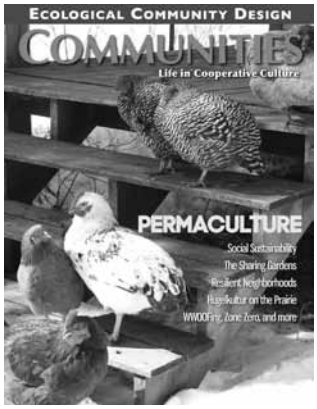




#155 Diversity
Racism in Social Change Groups; Diversity Issues in LA Eco-Village; A Species Deep Diversity; Mental Minorities; Affordability; Religion and Diversity's Limits; Art and Ethics of Visitor Programs; Busting the Consensus Myth; The Lighter Side of Community
(Summer '12)

#154 Spirituality
Creating Community Ritual; The Farm; Sharing the Path; Inviting God to Dance; Monasticism, Community, and "The Great Work"; The Hermitage; Ananada; Paganism; Gnosticism; Localization; Creative Spirituality in Historic Groups; Common Ground in an Uncertain World; Spiritual Warriors; Spirit in the Woods
(Spring '12)

#153 Permaculture
Social Permaculture; Sociocracy; Attending to Zone Zero; The Farm; The Sharing Gardens; WWOOFing; Changeaculture; Prairie Hugelkultur; Permaculture Stole My Community!; The Growing Edge; eCOOLvillages; Nature's Friends; Future of Water; Ecological Community Design
(Winter '11)

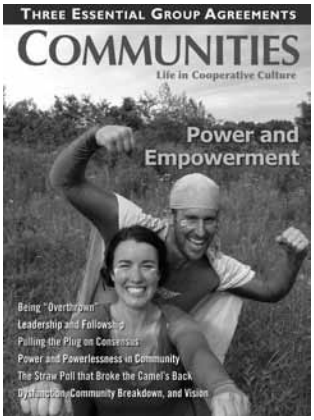
#152 Right Livelihood
Work Less, Simplify More; Crowdfunding; Which Comes First, Community or Career?; The Lenox Place News; Recreational Therapy; The Gift of Compost; The Farm; Wrong Volunteerism; Income Sharing; Redefining Work; Remade in Edinburgh; Buddha Being, Buddha Doing
(Fall '11)

#151 Intimacy
A Nomad Ponders Family and the Ecstasy of the Group; Internal Intimacy; Honesty and Intimacy; Bee Intimacy; The Solace of Friends in Community; Intimacy in the Village Setting; Twenty Years of Open Marriage; A Communitarian Conundrum; Love Is the Answer; Fascinating Selfhood
(Summer '11)

#150 Mental Health: Challenges and Hope
Gifted, Mad, and Out of Control; Walking Wounded; Nurtuing Healthy Minds; Rx for "Mental Illness"; Mental Illness as Spiritual Path; Crazy About Community; Peer Counseling in Community; Shadow Sides of NVC and Co-Counseling; Prescription Facebook; Gould Farm; Camphill Villages
(Spring '11)

#149 Elders
It Takes a Community to Grow an Elder; Elderhood, In and Out of Community; Becoming Elders; A Legacy of Beauty; Remembering Jane Owen; Snapshots of Elders; Aging in Community; Green Houses; Perspectives from Sao Paolo; The Making of Senior Cohousing; Reinventing Retirement; And I Listen
(Winter '10)

#148 Power and Empowerment
Being "Overthrown"; Balancing Powers; Leadership and Followship; Power and Disempowerment on the Ecobus; Pulling the Plug on Consensus; Dysfunction, Breakdown, and Vision; The Power of Process; Moon Valley; The Straw Poll that Broke the Camel's Back; Call in the Experts?
(Fall '10)



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Nashira: An Ecovillage from the Grassroots

By Giovanni Ciarlo

Attending the Llamado De La Montaña (Call of the Mountain) Bioregional Gathering in Atlantida Ecovillage in Colombia this last January, and witnessing the emergence of the new Latin American organization, C.A.S.A. (Consejo de Asentamientos Sustentables de las Americas), was one of the most enriching and energizing experiences I've had in recent times. And although I really wanted to visit other Colombian ecovillage projects while I was there, I had time to see only one, Nashira, an urban ecovillage near the Colombian city of Cali.

Nashira, which means "Love Song" in the ancient local language, was one of the most amazing ecovillages I have ever visited. It is run by low-income women heads of households. This reflects a widespread social problem in the outskirts of cities in Colombia, where decades of civil conflict has left many women to manage and sustain the household. A Nashira pamphlet states *"The Nashira project goes beyond offering just housing solutions, it seeks to provide a better quality of life, offering a secure and nutritious supply of food within the compound, an environmentally friendly atmosphere, and a source of income through the development of workshops where women can manufacture their own products."*

I arrived in Nashira just before sunset. I was introduced to some of the residents and shown to a unit where I had a reservation to spend the night. I was met by Osiris, the 30-year-old son of Marta, the head of the house. As a sign of the changes undergone by ecovillage members, Osiris is a social sciences faculty member at one of Colombia's rural Universities, and was visiting his mom for the holidays, something I thought was itself out-of-the-ordinary for people in the lower-income social class. He showed me to my room, a spacious, well-lit single bedroom on the second floor of the 700-900 square foot home that Marta had helped to build during one of the training sessions offered by national and international ecovillage consultants.

Giovanni Ciarlo

Head of household and daughter at Nashira Ecovillage outside Cali, Colombia.

I hurried to meet Osiris outside for the last bit of daylight to give me a flash tour of the ecovillage. Nashira was founded by a donor who gave the municipal authorities 30 hectares of land to build an 88-home ecological development for women heads of households with matching donations from government housing development funds. To date 48 units are already built, mostly with the sweat equity of their owners, who formed cooperative groups to learn and help each other to build small, attached, efficient, and durable housing units with the assistance of some additional materials, donations, and capacity training. Both national and international organizations spent time teaching ecovillage design and hands-on skills, from village economics (including small businesses that can operate from inside the village) to food production, decision making for self-governance, natural building, bed-and-breakfast ecotourism, a local solidarity economy, alternative renewable energy technologies, and waste management for recycling and recovering of industrial byproducts. One of the organizations doing the trainings is Change the World, where several ecovillage activists in both GEN and ENA work to bring low tech solutions to indigenous and marginalized people and natural reserves in Latin America. Among them is Beatriz Arjona, one of the organizers of the Llamado de la Montaña event and a member of Aldea Feliz, another ecovillage active

in RENACE Colombia—the Colombian ecovillage network, now C.A.S.A. Colombia.

Osiris showed me the common house, a remodeled pre-existing farmhouse where now there is a computer lab and community center. Across from the common house is the solar restaurant, where one can find pastries and coffee during the weekends, and during special events there are cookouts using solar reflectors to grill, boil, fry, or bake many different local dishes with food grown on site. A dirt drive path passes the communal dry toilet built with bottles, mud, and bales of hay. It is beautiful, with the air of a temple or a pagoda where one would go meditate. Art is everywhere, complemented by well designed landscaping that takes advantage of the location to create gardens and paths around the site.

The shallow pool that children play in during the hot sunny days of the tropics is equipped with a converted bicycle pumping mechanism that is instructive as well as functional—pumping water from the well below to fill the pool and to create a waterfall from about eight feet up a wooden tower. The sound is soothing and children use it as a play station while they shower and enjoy the water and the sun.

We were able to see a number of housing units, and greeted people as they came outdoors to wave at us in the last minutes of dusk before dark. Osiris explained how there are several window-stores in some of the houses that sell snacks and beverages as well as some fresh and canned goods and cooking supplies. He told me that people form cooperatives to have more buying and selling choices. He showed me the partridge egg co-op, the chicken co-op, the cassava processing co-op, the recycling and restoring center, the children's daycare, and the rest of the land.

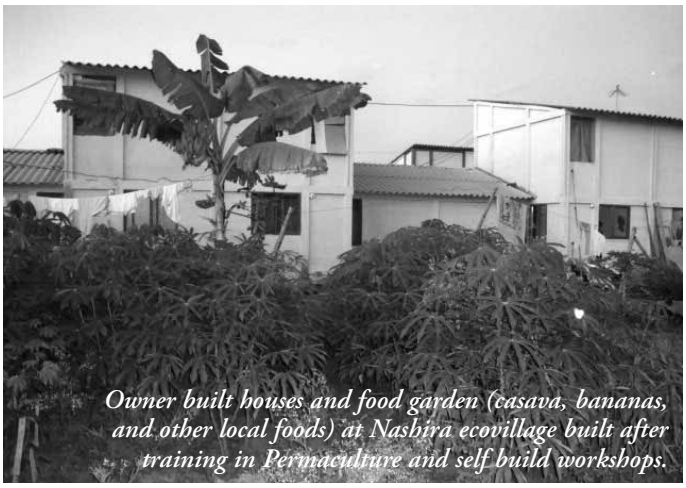
I was blown away at the achievements of this adventurous group of women. They all came from very disadvantaged sectors of the urban population. Most of them lived in shantytowns and cardboard shacks before getting the opportunity to apply and be selected for the project, creating an ecological community of similar women from the grassroots and poorest families in the Cali region.

Nashira impressed me because it is the first example I have seen of an ecological community, aligned with values promoted by GEN, which has emerged from the bottom up. It is a response and a solution to the housing and poverty issues of the oppressed, in a country that has seen decades of civil strife and violence affecting the majority of people, especially those living in the lower economic rungs. It was created not by a population from the privileged sector of society but by the poor, uneducated, economically distraught women leaders with families and dependents of all ages. Added to this mix was the right combination of aide and guidance of national and international agents, alongside committed activists and individuals empowered to help people from the oppressed sector improve their livelihood, because they believe it is possible and it should be done.

Before going to bed I spent time chatting with Marta, Osiris, and Natalia, his younger sister, about growing up in this village, and the opportunities ahead for them. They were upbeat and positive all the way. Natalia is also about to start college, where she hopes to study architecture so she can help others build affordable sustainable housing. The next day I took a refreshing cold shower, and as part of the cost for staying overnight, received a hefty breakfast of partridge eggs and toast followed by fresh brewed coffee. They even arranged calling a taxi to take me to the airport in the early hours of the morning. That's what I call *"Hospitalidad Latina."*

Seeing Nashira was like taking a breath of fresh air in the middle of the wilderness. It has given me renewed hope for a new society, that I like to refer to as *the reinvention of everything*, from our worldviews to the way we govern ourselves, the way we relate to Mother Earth, and the way we create local cooperative businesses that aim to provide right livelihoods to community members. ❧

Giovanni Ciarlo cofounded Huehuecoyotl Ecovillage in Tepoztlán, Mexico in 1982. He is a Board member of Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and is active in Gaia Education as developer of ecovillage design and education materials. He traveled to Colombia as council representative of ENA (The Ecovillage Network of the Americas). He also performs Latin music in the United States and Mexico with his group Sirius Coyote. Contact him at giovanni@ecovillage.org.



Owner built houses and food garden (casava, bananas, and other local foods) at Nashira ecovillage built after training in Permaculture and self build workshops.

The ENA and CASA group in ecovillage Atlantida, Colombia.

Ecovillage Radio

By Russ Purvis

What do Zegg Ecovillage (Germany), EcoVillage at Ithaca (upstate New York), Los Angeles Eco-Village (southern California), and Konohona Community Ecovillage (Japan) have in common? Perhaps you would be surprised at the common threads which run through all of these intentional communities, that also like to be known as ecovillages. Their common philosophical threads form the ecovillage "glue" for the periodic internet radio shows that have now been broadcasting since 2008, attracting over 11,000 listeners worldwide. Not exactly a viral sensation, but it is reassuring to know that on all the continents excepting Antarctica we are not alone. Ecovillages and the culture that pervades them are everywhere!

Many of us arrive at our destination in a roundabout way. It was no different with the birth of Ecovillage Radio. I had been fascinated with intentional community and the concept of an ecovillage for many years, and had helped create some shared living houses. After visiting artists' communes and reading about other living experiments like The Farm (Tennessee), I got to visit a serious ecovillage in 1995, Findhorn (Scotland). I haven't been the same since.

As I climbed deeper into the alternative living experiment I became a founder of Kakwa Ecovillage in British Columbia. During these years of observing and interacting with many members and potential members at Kakwa, as well as ecovillages around the world, I began to wonder about this organization called GEN—Global Ecovillage Network. They seemed to have a lot of great ideas and incredible people, but no apparent marketing strategy.

Since I now was part of the ecovillage family and daily breathed as well as bled "ecovillage," I was open to new ideas that might advance the movement. I discovered the relatively new medium of internet radio in 2008 and a start-up company called BlogTalk Radio. I knew nothing about radio, interviews, or how to get started, but I knew lots of people in the ecovillage movement and many were keen to contribute to the programme. It is no different today, with the exception that my skills have improved, and BlogTalk Radio now charges a fee to a host for an extended show. In the early days it was all free, as long as you had a decent internet connection and a separate telephone line.

The programme has evolved over time. What has become amazingly obvious is the fascination with the founders and members of ecovillages, which dominate the many shows we archive online at Ecovillage Radio (www.blogtalkradio.com/ecovillage-radio). We also explore other ideas relative to sustainable living strategies from time to time, such as formal Ecovillage Design, education for sustainability, and how to grow various crops. Imagine 40 minutes devoted to growing and storage of potatoes, with an expert grower of 30 years! Sometimes we encounter edgy moments like the "Who's your Daddy?" question while interviewing a member of ZEGG (known for the sexual openness of its culture), or the cat policy at EcoVillage at Ithaca. Seems the cat policy was evolving, but the knowledge of a parasite that cats can carry and its potential hazard to human fetuses was not a light-hearted subject.

Recognizing that nothing can take the place of an in-person visit or vacation experienced in an ecovillage, nonetheless it can be pretty juicy to visit a variety of ecovillages, countries, and their cultures virtually, through the eyes of a founder or long-term member. That has been the primary focus of Ecovillage Radio. We answer some standard questions you might pose about their land, infrastructure, housing, degree of income sharing (if any), pet policy, money required to join, etc. We also provide the opportunity to share about member demographics, and most importantly any unique aspects of the community.

For those who might be curious about the monetization of Ecovillage Radio and similar efforts, I have to report the "bad" news. It's basically a labor of love. The current internet radio broadcast opportunities do not provide much advertising revenue for the host in the beginning. However, the digital world moves so quickly that this may have already changed by the time you are reading this article.

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Would an Ecovillage by Any Other Name Smell as Sweet?

By E. Christopher Mare, M.A.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.
—Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet,* Act II, Scene II

I contributed an article to COMMUNITIES back in the Fall of 2000, Issue #108. The article was entitled "Designing My Own Education for the Ecovillage Millennium," and described my experiences creating the world's first formal degree devoted to Ecovillage Design. Now, more than a decade later, I'm nearing completion of my Ph.D. still on the ecovillage track (more or less). I wish to describe here how my understanding of the ecovillage has evolved in the intervening years, noting especially how the name "ecovillage" gets applied to numerous styles of community development—and not all of them compatible with one another!

I remember back at Crystal Waters in September 1997. The newly formed Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was offering their first ever Ecovillage Design Course. Max Lindegger was hosting a star-studded line-up of presenters: Albert Bates from The Farm, Declan Kennedy from Lebensgarten, John Talbot from Findhorn, and Linda Joseph and Kailish from the Manitou Institute. I had one burning question: "What is it about an ecovillage that makes it a *village*?" I'll never forget Max's reply, because it has helped to guide me through all these years of schooling: "A village is large enough to contain a church. Hamlets are too small for churches."

I think that when GEN was forming, there was a purposeful intent not to exclude anybody; therefore, the only criterion for joining the network was *self-identification*: any group that considered themselves an "ecovillage" could become one. There were some obvious advantages to this but also, I would submit, some drawbacks.

I think back to the time when I became part of an urban permaculture experiment here in my hometown of Bellingham, Washington. There were six autonomous individuals living in a house originally designed for a nuclear family, plus two converted school buses and a wikkiup—maybe 10 full-time residents total. The owner was so proud to get this experiment underway that he turned to me one day and beamed, "This can be our own little ecovillage!"

I know that within the Fellowship for Intentional Community, the name "ecovillage" can be applied to any community with an ecological bent—meaning, of course, that some communities form for strictly social or spiritual intentions. Diana Leafe Christian, who was the editor of COMMUNITIES when I submitted my first article, wrote an important book entitled *Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities.* This title can be read to imply that these two terms are on a par with one another—and that ecovillages are, by definition, intentional communities.

Yet not everybody thinks this way. For example, Phil Hawes, who was the chief architect for Biosphere II, and who now teaches at the San Francisco Institute of Architecture, has formed a sophisticated concept of "ecovillage" based on an optimum size of 5000 persons. In Phil's model, the "ecovillage" begins with a cluster of about 250 people who will incorporate all the essential industries needed to build the full village. This is certainly not a model where a "core group" will begin meeting and working through consensus until they reach a point where they are ready to pool resources and purchase a piece of land upon which to construct their dream "ecovillage." No, Phil's model requires professional development and some heavy financing. Does that mean it cannot be an "ecovillage"?

Another successful architect, Greg Ramsey from Village Habitat Design in Atlanta, who has taught Ecovillage Design Courses at The Farm, has developed a model he calls "Conservation Communities"—a model meant to be competitive in real estate markets. Greg is currently working on a project he calls an "ecovillage": two cohousing communities encircling an "artisan village" surrounded by agricultural land and buffered by extensive forest. This is a project that will need to be professionally designed and, when the time is right, contracted to a developer for construction. Does that mean it can't be a *real* "ecovillage"?

And then there's the version introduced by Robert Gilman, who, you may recall, produced for Gaia Trust through his magazine *In Context* in 1991 the seminal report "Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities." Robert has gone on to become a City Council member in a small town called Langley on Whidbey Island in Washington State. At the GEN+10 Conference at Findhorn in 2005, Robert presented a thought-provoking slide show in which he asked the provocative question: "Can Langley be considered

(continued on p. 79)

Busting the Myth that Consensus-with-Unanimity Is Good for Communities *Part II*

By Diana Leafe Christian

"We're all sitting here in a cold sweat," exclaimed one member.

Most people in the room felt apprehensive. The atmosphere was grim. The conflict in this real community I'll call "Green Meadow" (first described in Part I of this article, Communities #155, Summer 2012) was between two community members who had frequently blocked proposals and a roomful of people who wanted to pass an Agriculture (Ag) Committee proposal about a community site plan for future farms, pastures, and orchards. Passing the proposal would mean clearing more of their forest. The two frequently blocking members were committed to protecting the community's land—to protecting the Earth—from the human impact of clearing more forest and implementing the proposed agricultural site plans.

Community meetings had been increasingly characterized by tension, frustration, and over-the-top behavior on both sides of the agriculture issue ever since the committee proposed their ag site plan six weeks earlier.

The frequently blocking members seemed desperate, apparently feeling a heartfelt obligation to, once again, protect the Earth from fellow community members. Those who supported the proposed ag site plan seemed desperate too, including committee members who'd spent months assessing and categorizing the community's potential agricultural sites for their probable best agricultural use.

People's demeanor in meetings was at the high-stress end of everyone's spectrum. Courtesy had given way to intensity; easy discussion to speaking through gritted teeth.

A few months later, during the three-week, post-meeting review period for committee decisions, one of the two chronic blockers retroactively blocked four out of five of the Ag Committee's decisions. And while this member later rescinded her blocks, the relatively frequent blocks of both of these members had a devastating effect on the committee. Discouraged and demoralized, they stopped meeting for over a year.

It's been three years since Green Meadow's "cold sweat" meeting and the subsequent blocks of four Agriculture Committee proposals. Growing and raising on-site organic food is one of Green Meadow's explicit goals in its online Mission Statement. Yet as a result of these blocks—and because other members didn't know how to respond effectively—the community has never reconsidered the proposed agricultural site plan, and no new small agri-

cultural projects, pastures, or orchards have been proposed since then.

This kind of no-win situation is why I no longer think that consensus-with-unanimity is not only not helpful for most communities, but actually harmful. It's harmful when it results in deadlocks, desperation, and heartbreak; in low morale and dwindling meeting attendance; and sometimes, in people just giving up and moving away.

"Consensus-with-Unanimity"

As noted in Part I of this article, I use the term "consensus-with-unanimity" for the usual consensus *process* (agenda, proposals, facilitator, the group modifying and improving proposal), coupled with the *"decision rule"* of 100 percent or unanimous agreement required to pass a proposal, not counting stand-asides. (The "decision rule" is the percentage of agreement needed to pass a proposal.)

When a community has no criteria for what constitutes a legitimate block *(see below)*, nor a requirement that those who block a proposal must work with its advocates to collaboratively create a new proposal that addresses the same issues as the first one, then it has no recourse if someone blocks a proposal. With a decision-making method like this, anyone can block a proposal any time for any reason.

Consensus advocates say that because in consensus everyone's agreement is required to pass a proposal, the process naturally results in widespread agreement, harmony, trust, and a sense of connection among members.

Consider the 15-year-old community without a pet policy because a dog-owning member blocks any proposal to create a pet policy committee.

Yet consider the 15-year-old community that still doesn't have a pet policy because a member who has several dogs blocks any proposal to even create an ad hoc pet policy committee to draft a proposal. Or the 18-year-old group still with no community building because several members blocked a proposal to build it due to their personal abhorrence of being in debt—even though the community borrowed money to buy their property in the first place. Or the cohousing community that has no community labor requirement, no matter that most people want it, because a member blocks every proposal to create one, believing that if it's a *real* community people would contribute voluntarily from the heart.

These communities don't only have no pet policy, community building, or labor requirements. They also have the demoralization and discouragement that results when their vision of a congenial, collaborative community is destroyed, over and over, as they finally realize that some of their fellow community members have the power to stop what everyone else wants, or nearly everyone else wants, without the requisite personal maturity and responsibility to handle that power wisely—and there's nothing they can do about it.

Appropriate Blocks

As noted in Part I, there certainly are appropriate blocks (also sometimes called "principled" blocks, "valid" blocks, or "legitimate" blocks). Appropriate blocks are usually described by community-based consensus trainers as those in which the blocker can clearly demonstrate that if the proposal passed it would violate the group's deeply held values or shared purpose, or would otherwise harm the community. *(See "Criteria for a Principled Block," next page.)* Yet at many communities, members have never been taught the difference between appropriate and inappropriate blocks, or they have learned this but no community member has the courage to point out that someone's latest block isn't actually legitimate, but is based on his or her personal preferences or values. Thus the group meekly acquiesces to the block—even though many consensus trainers caution that

blocking is so extreme, and such a nearly "sacred" privilege, that it should be used rarely.

Type One Errors and "Work-Arounds"

I believe consensus-with-unanimity as practiced in most communities is itself what Permaculturists call a "Type One Design Error." And having criteria for a principled block, as C.T. Butler recommends in his Formal Consensus process, is just another ineffective "work-around."

A Type One Error, as it's known informally in Permaculture circles, is a basic design flaw so fundamental to the whole system that it unleashes a cascade of subsequent, smaller errors downstream. My greenhouse was built with a Type One Error. With small, ineffectual vents in its end walls, it didn't have enough ventilation, and was far too hot for either plants or people. I couldn't create a new vent across the apex of the roof where greenhouse vents are usually located, as this was where the rafters were braced, and doing so would mean rebuilding the roof.

I use the term "work-around" to describe the attempts people make to compensate for such basic, foundational errors. I tried work-arounds for my greenhouse. I kept the door open all day. I cut a long, wide vent along the bottom of the front wall. I covered the roof with a tarp in summer. I tried to grow kiwis across the roof. Nothing worked: the place was still hotter than Hades. Using a vent fan would violate everything I know about Permaculture—using limited off-grid power to run a motor to cool a greenhouse that should have been cooled naturally by convection. But I could find no inexpensive structural or horticultural solution to my Type One Error. I should have just built the greenhouse with appropriately sized, properly located vents in the first place! (I finally installed a fan, and it's still too hot.)

Likewise, the Type One Error of using consensus-with-unanimity causes many communities to have ongoing, seemingly irresolvable problems.

Many communities attempt various work-arounds to deal with the unintended consequences of consensus-with-unanimity. They bring in outside consultants or get more or better consensus training. They try to create more effective agendas or better proposals. They introduce "process time" in meetings to deal with emotional upsets. I think these work-arounds work no better than mine did.

"Criteria for a Principled Block"—Just Another Work-Around

I believe having criteria for a principled block can work well for one-issue environmental or political activist groups. Shut down a nuclear power plant in your county. Get your local schools to serve organic lunches. Save the redwoods.

However, intentional communities—whether ecovillages, cohousing neighborhoods, or other kinds of communities—are *not* simple one-issue organizations. On the contrary, they are complex entities with multiple purposes and needs, both physical and non-physical. These include shelter, private or shared ownership of land and/or equipment, a place to raise children safely, a place to live one's values, collaborative decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution. If the community has an educational mission, it's also a place to offer classes and workshops for others. And if it's rural, it can also be a place to grow and raise food, and create member-owned or community-owned cottage industries.

For these reasons, I believe intentional communities are much too complex for people to easily see whether a block meets any chosen criteria for legitimacy. In an entity as multi-faceted as an intentional community, it's much more difficult to know whether a proposal does or doesn't violate its mission and purpose, because there's so much room for interpretation. Trying to test whether a block is valid or not—trying to determine whether a proposal meets the test for harming the community, or not being aligned with its purpose—is too murky. And if the community has no agreed-upon criteria for a legitimate block, the process of testing the block *itself* could trigger conflict.

What's the Problem at Green Meadow?

One of the requirements for a group to use consensus at all—*especially* when practiced as consensus-with-unanimity, and especially when there no is recourse—is to have a clearly agreed-upon shared purpose. This is the first thing I learned in my first consensus workshop years ago. Yet, most communities' Mission and Purpose documents are vague, ambiguous, and likely to be interpreted multiple different ways.

I have observed, and Tim Hartnett (author of *Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making*) has also observed, at least three reasons people may block proposals inappropriately: (1) the blocking person interprets the community's stated purpose differently than many, or most, other community members; (2) a proposal violates a member's personal values rather than the community's agreed-upon

Four to Six Blocks in a Lifetime

• Only block a few times in one's lifetime at most, and "only after a sleepless night and the shedding of tears."—*Quakers, cited in a handout on the website of consensus trainer Tree Bressen*

• Community-based consensus trainer Caroline Estes recommends only three to four blocks in a lifetime. She says that in her 50+ years of facilitating she has seen legitimate blocks less than a dozen times.

• Community-based consensus trainer Bea Briggs recommends only three to six blocks in a lifetime. She says that her 20+ years of facilitating she has seen only one legitimate block.

—D.L.C.

shared values; (3) the blocker has a (subconscious) wish to gain attention, or otherwise to express some painful-but-suppressed emotional issue.

To me, Green Meadow's situation demonstrates all three reasons for inappropriate blocks. First, it seems as if three different sets of members live in three different paradigms about what the community is *for*.

(A) Some members seem to believe Green Meadow's purpose is to create a rural agrarian village in which some members grow and raise much of the community's food or create cottage industries providing jobs on-site. *(They don't mind that others organize emotional processing meetings, but don't tend to participate in them.)*

(B) Others seem to believe the purpose is to be a spiritually and emotionally rich group that practices whole-community emotional processing. *(They don't mind that some members want to grow and raise food and start cottage industries.)*

(C) A few members seem to believe the purpose is to protect the Earth from human impact *(and so must monitor carefully any proposals about village-building or food-growing in terms of the degree of their potential human impact).*

Second, it seems that there is little knowledge at Green Meadow that it's not a legitimate consensus practice to block because of personal, rather than community-held values. Members have blocked because of someone's personal distaste for the insurance industry, devotion to ecofeminism, abhorrence for borrowing money, or disdain for on-site small cottage industries and their need to expand enough to stay in business.

Third, blocking at Green Meadow seems sometimes to involve personal emotional issues. Tim Hartnett writes, "raising objections to a proposal is an easy way to become the focus of group attention...their agreement may be courted with both attention and other forms of appeasement."

One Green Meadow member wrote the following account: *It seems that the most innovative, creative, forward-moving members have left the community because a few folks, mostly older women with a lot of time on their hands, need attention and tend to get it by blocking proposals.*

It's certainly true that older women get overlooked in the larger culture. And all of us need healing. Yet this group in our community seems to abuse the power that consensus gives them.

Many baby boomer communitarians still seem devoted—perhaps compulsively attached—to consensus-with-unanimity.

They like a slow and emotional process. How I tend to hear it is, "Either slow down and pay attention to us or you won't get your proposal passed." Other folks (often younger, but not always) have felt stopped by this energy to the point of extreme frustration and withdrawal. Many of the most passionate and service-oriented folks have actually left the community. The ones who are left don't seem to have the courage or confidence to actually create anything innovative. So we get the worst of both worlds—overly controlling older members and apathetic and discouraged younger folks.

A well-known professional consensus facilitator came to help us, only to give these women even more attention. The theory was, the more attention we give them, the more their tension will loosen. But in my opinion the facilitator brought more of the same problem we already had. And sure enough, even with the facilitator's group process, they were still not satisfied.

Baby Boomers and Consensus

Despite these problems, and even the oft-expressed support among consensus trainers for having criteria for legitimate blocks and other forms of recourse, many baby boomer communitarians still seem devoted—perhaps compulsively attached—to consensus-with-unanimity. They seem to hold the belief that the promised harmony, cohesiveness, and trust will manifest in community if only its members would just spend enough time exploring everyone's emotions and the nuances of people's differing opinions.

However, advocating more emotional processing in meetings to deal with the kinds of dilemmas Green Meadow is experiencing can *itself* create conflict. In most communities, many members, especially younger ones, can't bear such meetings. They may believe that therapy is fine but should be voluntary, and conducted on one's own time. Or they may not want to witness the emotional upsets of people twice and three times their age. They'd rather these folks behaved as wise elders—not people their parents' or grandparents' age who are expressing emotional upset about what seems like the current proposal but in fact may be long-held personal issues they haven't healed yet.

Younger community members may also not participate in these meetings because they can't afford the *time*. They don't have retirement income or trust funds. On the contrary, they usually work full-time. In rural communities they may make ends meet with several different part-time jobs—not to mention raising children too. In contrast, baby boomers can often afford the time because they may be living on retirement incomes or trust funds.

Baby Boomers and Trauma

I've got a theory about this. I think a relatively high percentage of people born in the baby boomer generation, like me (born between 1946-1964), experienced more trauma

at birth and in childhood than subsequent generations. I've read that early trauma, unless healed by effective therapy later, shows up in an adult as a relatively high amount of emotional distress and reactivity, a relatively high need for attention, and a relatively high tendency to try to control the immediate environment in order to meet a probably unconscious and highly charged unmet need from childhood for safety and security.

Hospital birth and infant care practices in the 1940s and subsequent decades were exceptionally traumatic for mothers and babies. They included huge levels of muscle-deadening drugs (natural birth practices were not yet widely known), forceps, Cesareans, cutting of the umbilical cord prematurely and slapping the infants to suddenly force lung breathing, and removing infants from mothers at birth and isolating them in another room. Breastfeeding after birth was not even an option; infants received neither colostrum nor human connection, but were bottle-fed with manufactured infant formula by nurses on a rigid hospital schedule. Mothers held their infants for only a few minutes a day. All natural sources of safety, security, connection, trust, and empowerment were removed as soon as a baby was born. Psychologists theorize that these infants probably felt terrified, desperate, and powerless. (And I speculate that, in terms of encouraging healthy emotional development, this is a another Type One Error.)

Flash forward 50 or 60 years. If someone born in these circumstances has not gotten effective psychotherapy or other healing, they may have exceptionally high needs for safety and security. They may have (subconsciously) adopted a strategy of trying to control their immediate environment in order to (subconsciously) feel safe enough to get through the day. And consensus-with-unanimity allows—no, invites—people to control their immediate environment through the power to block. I think people sometimes block inappropriately simply because they can.

As Caroline Estes notes, "consensus...allows each person complete power over the group." What? We give people who are likely to have a more than usual amount of unresolved trauma—and who may not have healed it yet and are possibly compensating with strong control tendencies—"complete power over the group"? Living in a community that practices consensus-with-unanimity may be the first time any of these folks ever had social permission to place limits; to stop people; to say the "No!" they couldn't say as a terrorized infant.

So what should we do, kick out all the baby boomers? (Even though, of course, they founded most of our communities?) I think we should respect and appreciate our boomers, *and change our governance system instead*. Adopt a decision-making and governance process that *doesn't allow* anyone to stop proposals because of conscious or unconscious personal preferences or personal values, no matter if they give us protect-the-community reasons. Instead, let's shift to a governance process that doesn't just encourage collaboration and cooperation, but *requires* it. Which is exactly what Sociocracy, Holacracy, and the N Street Consensus Method do, and why I now recommend them. *(See "Resources," below.)*

A Shift at Green Meadow?

Fortunately, increasing numbers of Green Meadow members are now questioning whether consensus-with-unanimity actually serves them. A combination of demoralization, low meeting attendance, and people packing their bags and leaving—along with recent presentations about alternative decision-making methods—is apparently having an effect.

Here's what the 2012 president of Green Meadow declared to his small advisory group a few months ago: "Listen, let's face it. Consensus-with-unanimity is all but dead at Green Meadow. It'll be replaced by a something else by the end of the year."

Last I heard, they're considering Sociocracy. ❧

Diana Leafe Christian, author of the books Creating a Life Together *and* Finding Community*, is publisher of* Ecovillages*, a free online newsletter about ecovillages worldwide (EcovillageNews.org), and a columnist for Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) (gen.ecovillage.org). She is a trainer in GEN's Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) program, and speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops internationally. See www.DianaLeafeChristian.org.*

Future articles in the series will describe the "N Street Consensus Method" in more detail, the "Four Decision Options/Choose Your Committee Members" method of Ecovillage Sieben Linden, Systemic Consensus, Tim Hartnett's "Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making" method, Sociocracy, and Holacracy (and why they work especially well in intentional communities), and politically incorrect tips for adopting a method that may work better than consensus-with-unanimity, even if older members are devoted to it.

Resources

Consensus:

- *On Conflict and Consensus*, C.T. Butler, available for free download on his website: www.consensus.net
- *Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making,* Tim Hartnett (New Society Publishers, 2011): consensusbook.com

N Street Consensus Method:

- "Is Consensus Right for Your Group? Part I," in *Ecovillages* newsletter: www.ecovillagenewsletter.org (click "Articles Alphabetically" to find it)

Sociocracy:

- *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy, A Guide to Sociocratic Principles and Methods*, by John Buck and Sharon Villines (2007): www.sociocracy.info
- SocioNet online discussion: www.socionet.us
- Governance Alive, author and consultant John Buck: www.governancealive.com

Holacracy:

- *Holacracy One:* www.holacracy.org

A Few Basic Process Points for Happy Community Life

Response to "Busting the Myth, Part II"

By Tree Bressen

Many of the points raised in "Busting the Myth, Part II" were already addressed in responses from me and others to Part I of Diana's article. I prefer not to belabor them, and at the same time i understand that some readers find this discussion useful. So here are a few thoughts to bear in mind.

1. Meetings should be fulfilling, with a good spirit. Regardless of whether your group uses leadership by elders, majority vote, or consensus, if your discussions have poor energy it's important to address that and change it. How can you reconnect with your love for one another? What will nourish your sense of unity, in a way that welcomes the individual while honoring the long-term well-being of the community?

2. In my experience, every successful consensus system—and there are a variety, including Sociocracy, Quakers, N Street, Formal Consensus, and more—restricts blocking power in order to guard against tyranny of the minority.

3. Regardless of decision process or rule, if you let someone in your group bully you, you will be unhappy. If there is a problem with bullying and you want it to stop, the group must stand up to it. If that doesn't happen, the group is enabling and co-creating the problem.

4. If the same person blocks repeatedly, that's a danger sign. While consensus allows space for legitimate different interpretations of existing group values and mission, if one or two people continually hold to an interpretation at odds with others' in a way that causes high impact, i'd be carefully and thoughtfully asking whether their membership is a good match. At a minimum such a group may need to take a step back from the particular issue and engage in some deep conversations about common values.

5. No decision-making system is perfect, nor does any decision-making system give you your way all the time. Compromise is a necessary part of collective life, part of the price we pay for the rewards of shared living. While consensus when practiced well has the potential to arrive at creative, emergent solutions, there are plenty of times when the standard of "Can you live with it?" is appropriately good enough.

The understandable desire for an outcome that brings everyone active joy needs to be weighed against the considerable investment in time and energy it may take to get there, and the costs of inaction on the topic at hand in the meantime.

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All that said, here are responses to a few other specific points raised by Diana's article.

I agree that mission and values, while an important base, are naturally broader and more complex in an intentional community setting compared to a nonprofit or activist group. Having clear principles doesn't solve all your problems or make everything easy in any group, and this is even more true in the community setting. However, compared to *not* having clear principles, having them does help, including when tough decisions come up. Diana rightly emphasizes the importance of this in her book *Creating a Life Together*, which contains excellent exercises for groups to clarify their vision.

Second, in my observation while facilitating people of all ages for nearly two decades from elementary school students to seniors in their 90s, i've failed to see baby boomers having any corner on the market of poor behavior at meetings.

Finally, Diana decries tactics such as bringing in outside consultants, getting more training, improving agenda planning, creating more effective proposals, and "introduc[ing] 'process time' in meetings to deal with emotional upsets" as attempted work-arounds for addressing a Type One design error. While she may not have experienced these responses as effective, i have, many times over. Note that i'm not advocating against a structural requirement that blockers get involved in helping craft solutions (in fact i advocate for that too); i'm just saying that, depending on the situation, any of these may be helpful, and it often takes a combination of medicines to yield the best cure. ❧

Tree Bressen is a group process consultant based in Eugene, Oregon, who works with intentional communities and a wide variety of other organizations. Her gifts include elegant process design, holding space for tough conversations, and using good process to achieve excellent product. She founded the collective that produced the Group Works deck, available at www.groupworksdeck.org, and her website, www.treegroup.info, offers extensive free resources on consensus, facilitation, and more. (Tree uses a lower-case "i" in her writing as an expression of egalitarian values.)

"Busting the Myth, Part II": More Thoughts

By Laird Schaub

Like Tree, I have many thoughts related to Diana's article, yet don't want to repeat responses already given to Part I. Here are additional points that seem worth bringing out:

❖ I am uncomfortable with Diana's term "consensus-with-unanimity," as it implies that when groups use consensus to make decisions it requires unanimity to reach agreement. Unanimity implies that everyone feels the same way about a proposal; consensus is far more nuanced than that. It's about reaching a place where everyone agrees that the proposal is the best that can be done to balance the application of group values to the issue at hand, and clarity that there are no principled objections to proceeding.

❖ In the opening example, it's my sense that Green Meadow has not worked through the right sequence. If there are known to be principled concerns (in this case, how to view right relationship to the land as a manifestation of a core ecological value) then I'd have worked through that *long* before it came to advancing specific land use plans.

The dynamic described (a pattern of repeated blocks about proposals on the topic of ag policy) suggests one of two things (or possibly both):

—There is a large (and possibly fatal) rift in how people are interpreting a core value. I'd be making *that* the focus of attention, rather than running proposal after proposal up the flagpole. If the group is unable to find a bridge that will hold the range of views, the group should reconfigure. While I fully appreciate that this will be a challenging and difficult conversation, putting it off will not help.

Working with the example given, I'd want to hear the blockers' thinking about how to balance their commitment to earth stewardship (which apparently translates into preserving the forest) and the core commitment to growing the community's food.

—The group may also (or instead) be suffering from an inability to create a resilient enough container to fully hear strongly held views and then enter into a sufficiently pliable and creative place to explore balancing. They may be trapped in an atmosphere of advocacy and divisiveness.

❖ I certainly agree with Diana that deadlocks, desperation, and dyspepsia are not good signs. And I agree with her unease with attempting to use consensus without defining what constitute legitimate grounds for blocking, the process by which a proposed block may be validated (or denied), or a defined process for laboring to resolve a block. Fortunately I don't know of many groups who don't understand the need for these things. While most groups could probably benefit from tightening up their understanding around this, virtually all groups recognize that having no agreement is a poor strategy, and I know of no groups who consider no agreement about blocking to be a sacred cow.

If the group is unable to find a bridge that will hold the range of views, the group should reconfigure.

Diana observes that a number of groups get into a stalemate because of the obstinacy of a minority—even a single individual—to considering actions that don't match with their sense of what's right for the group. Instead of looking more closely at how they can work through differences, Diana advocates that groups handle this procedurally by adopting a decision rule that allows such minorities to be outvoted.

I'm not excited about this mainly because I see what we're attempting in community (resolving non-trivial differences in a fundamentally different way than happens in the mainstream) to be one

of the crucial things that intentional communities have to offer the wider society. Diana is right to point out that this work is hard (changing deep conditioning is *never* easy). Yet the stakes are high and I am not persuaded that outvoting someone is much different from what happens in the mainstream now. I worry that groups are drawn to this option as a substitute for being careful about membership selection or learning how to work differences constructively and creatively.

❖ When Diana talks about the demoralization that flows from permitting members to repeatedly block proposals because they lack "personal maturity or responsibility to handle power wisely" I'm wondering why groups allow individuals to assert rights while ducking responsibilities. I wouldn't.

After lamenting the problems at communities that have no clarity about a) the legitimate grounds for a block; b) the process by which blocks will be tested for legitimacy; or c) the responsibility of all parties to engage in a good faith effort to attempt to resolve the block (all of which I agree are lamentable), Diana moves on *without example* to suggest that having answers to those missing components merely provides band-aids and will work no better. I demur. I've found that where groups have these three elements in place—and the will to employ them—they are potent and effective tools in working with blocks.

Outmaneuvering people with supermajorities doesn't move us in the cultural direction we urgently need in this polarized world.

❖ While I concur with Diana that the common values of most groups allow for a relatively wide range of interpretation, I do not believe that means they're worthless. Even vague statements can ground a conversation usefully. As a process consultant who has worked professionally with more than 75 groups, I've used this too many times with success to buy Diana's argument.

❖ Of the three reasons Diana enumerates for inappropriate blocks, I don't encounter people blocking purely for personal reasons (Diana's second reason) very often. While blockers are frequently accused of that, they almost always have an argument about why their position is tied to a group value and we're really talking about the first reason—a clash of paradigms—that I agree happens a lot. The challenge here is establishing a container of legitimacy, authenticity, and compassion in which to labor with one another. To be sure, almost all groups struggle with this—I just don't think that voting people off the island (or outmaneuvering them with supermajorities) is a good answer, or even begins to move us in the cultural direction we urgently need in this polarized world.

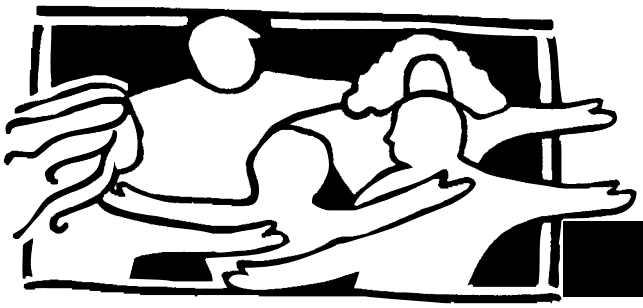
The third reason Diana offers—an inappropriate desire to seek attention (with the idea that negative attention is better than none)—is probably an element, yet difficult to discern. (How much is grandstanding and how much is simply distress leaking into the conversation, either because they don't expect the conversation to go well or because passionate expression comes naturally to that person?) The more fundamental issue is whether the group understands the need to be able to work emotionally. Most groups don't even have a conversation about this, and most groups don't handle it well.

❖ When I talk about being able to work emotionally, I am not talking about therapy. I am talking about understanding an individual's emotional connection to the issue at hand (therapy would be interested in the roots of that response and the potential for personal growth imbedded in that information). The point of working emotionally is that if you don't do it (and strong feelings are present), hearing is poor and the dynamic is brittle—which doesn't lead to good problem solving. With that in mind I advocate listening to pertinent strong feelings for the purpose of unclogging ears and being in a superior position to solve problems. When I labor with an individual to make sure they're heard, that's coupled with the clear expectation that they then listen to and work constructively with what others have to say on the subject. Bridging is not appeasement. Being heard is no guarantee that you'll be agreed with.

❖ I am very nervous about encouraging groups to disenfranchise and marginalize members after labeling them emotionally immature. I've found it far better to assume that people are coming from a good place until you can't find it. While I have reached the conclusion that some people are too much work for too little benefit and don't belong, I never start there, and I worry grievously about Diana's advocacy of adopting policies and decision-making processes that encourage this.

❖ Diana advances an interesting psychological theory about why baby boomers may typically have a different, more needy emotional make-up than other generations. While I am not a psychologist (and I note that neither is Diana), I work regularly with groups who struggle with particular members and I have not observed that "problem people" are concentrated in any gender or age range. ❧

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm, a consensus-run egalitarian community in Missouri, where he lives. He is also a facilitation trainer and process consultant, and he authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.



REACH

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Please make check or money order payable to COMMUNITIES, and send it, plus your ad copy, word count, number of insertions and category to: Tanya Carwyn, Business Manager, COMMUNITIES Magazine, 7 Hut Terrace Black Mountain, NC 28711; email: ads@ic.org. (If you email an ad, please include your mailing address, phone number and be sure to send off the check at the same time.)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALENDAR

HOSPITALITY IN HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA. Fellow Pilgrims and Travelers involved with Intentional Communities and/or who are on a spiritual path, needing a rest-stop along the way may call Dave at (323) 460-4071. I am a massage therapist, Spiritual Director and Teacher with over 30 years of Community Living with emphasis on Houses of Hospitality in the US, Canada and Peru.

SPEND TIME ALONE WITH OTHERS IN THE WOODS! 24hrs to two weeks. Solo / sit spot support by Colin. j9k.org/solos 805 699 6411

PARTNERS WANTED: WE BUILD THE ROAD AS WE TRAVEL! Established woodworkers(s) and other artisans to invest and contribute to our community-based cooperative cottage industry. Long-term vision includes teaching in a school that features woodworking. Fully outfitted wood shop already exists on site, read to be expanded. Adjacent assembly room currently under construction›YOU are the missing element! Contact Paul Caron, The Natural Building School at Earthaven Ecovillage, 7 Consensus Circle, Black Mountain, NC 28711, or call (828) 669-4625. You can also email us at culturesedge@earthaven.org.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

NASCENT COLLECTIVE ON ESTABLISHED 10 ACRES mixed certified farm/ microbrewery in BC's interior seeks new members. Seeking farmers, activists and artists with farm experience, creativity and energy to grow food, create new on-farm food processing, build an educational program, & other new ideas. We grow hops, fruit, veg, sheep, poultry, pigs & brew great beer. Large separate house includes shared/studio space. Greenhouse, barns, commercial kitchen, workshop and more. Minimal capital investment, the right people are the mos important part. Phone 250.675.4122, e:cormac@crannogales.com www.leftfiledstore.crannogales.com Rebecca or Brian, Sorrento BC Canada

ECODHARMA COLLEGE & INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY seeks teacher-members, preferably with an established Buddhist practice, in the areas of permaculture, organic farming, nonprofit admin/fundraising, greenbuilding,cooking/food preservation, and related "re-skilling" areas. Curriculumincludes sustainability and self-reliance reskilling, Buddhist practice,and community-building. Teachers will comprise a non-profit workers'collective that lives in intentional community on site. info@ecodharmacollege.org www.ecodharmacollege.org.

$26,000 1/6 INTEREST IN CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING COMMUNITY'S 28 acre, creek-side land near Hot Springs, AR. Your own 1 ½ acre surveyed home site with access to community orchard, garden. Land abuts national forest, with most set aside for community use. Contact SuRay: rayfill@inreach.com.

CO-WORKERS WELCOMED! The Fellowship Community, a pastoral oasis located only 35 miles from NYC is seeking good people to work with us. Founded in 1966, our intergenerational community focuses on the care of the elderly, the land and social concerns. With our active dairy farm, organic gardens, workshops and more, we offer many opportunities to use your current talents (including organic farming, building maintenance, etc.) and learn new ones while living on our 80 acre campus. Individuals & families can live serving the needs of all generations-promoting humanity in many ways. To apply, visit www.fellowshipcommunity.org or email rsffoffice@fellowshipcommunity.org

PERMACULTURE SYNERGIES. Permaculture Synergies is about people connecting or self organization in a time of separation. PS believes we can go beyond lifestyles of dependence on faltering institutions and the demise of the high tech visions of the "good life". Dependence has usually meant being beholden to impersonal, corporate entities and its' results of a few winners and many losers.

Now production and jobs have moved to Asia and we are left to government, the Tea Party, crying in our beer, or more violent reactions. PS offers a PLACE FOR SELF AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, where self and community serve for mutual and reciprocal development. We offer a small, sustainable living community with private and common land for more independent and cooperative living.

This will be a modest lifestyle to enhance self-reliance and shared work in the basics of food, shelter, and energy production that can be used to built relationships and, importantly, reveal interests that can lead to the pursuit of a wide range of additional cooperative activity. We believe this kind of self-organization can naturally come about if the conditions are available, namely if affordability, time, space, access to each other, and a commitment to communication over the longer term are inherent parts of the new environment. Offering such a facilitative environment in the scenic hill of SE Ohio with good access to towns and colleges is Permaculture Synergies' goal. We invite inter-

ested people to complete and return our Skills and Interests Questionaire. Once 3 or 4 people with shared work interests have been identifies, we will schedule weekends for discussions at a SE Ohio country inn and conference center. We eagerly await your response. It is only for us to start talking about SERIOUS things that true change and improvement can happen.
The folks at Permaculture Synergies. www.permaculturesynergies.com

DANCING RABBIT, RUTLEDGE, MISSOURI. We are a growing ecovillage of more than 50 individuals and are actively seeking new members to join us in creating a vibrant community on our 280 beautiful acres in rural Missouri. Our goals are to live ecologically sustainable and socially rewarding lives, and to share the skills and ideas behind this lifestyle. We use solar and wind energy, earth-friendly building materials and biofuels. We are especially interested in welcoming natural builders and people with leadership skills into our community. Help make our ecovillage grow! 660-883-5511; dancingrabbit@ic.org; www.dancingrabbit.org.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE, TUBAC, ARIZONA. Founders Gabriel of Urantia, Niánn Emerson Chase 1989. 110 adults/children. International members. EcoVillage, green building, sustainable living. God-centered, based on The URANTIA Book and Continuing Fifth Epochal Revelation (The Cosmic Family volumes) teachings. Organic gardens, farm, & ranch. Children's school, landscaping, Soulistic Medical Institute. Agricultural internships. Spiritual commitment required. PO Box 4910, Tubac, AZ 85646 (520) 603-9932. info@GCCAlliance.org; www.GCCAlliance.org; www.GlobalChangeMusic.org; www.GlobalChangeMultiMedia.org WE ARE THE 99%! www.spiritualution.org

CALLING FORTH DESTINY RESERVISTS - EcoVillage of 100+ men, women, & children looking for professionals, green builders, & others with skills of all types to become part of a group of global change agents from around the world, who volunteer their time & live in residence in a sustainable lifestyle on 165 acres in Tumacácori, Arizona. Spiritual seekers required. Change your life. (520) 603-9932 info@gccalliance.org WE ARE THE 99%! www.spiritualution.org

ALTERNATIVE VOICE---A publication designed to sharpen the minds of higher thinkers. Fusing spirituality and activism. Incorporating people like yourself, who have something to say on social, environmental, political, or spiritual issues. Subscription $20 for 4 issues. www.alternativevoice.org P.O. Box 4910 Tubac, AZ 85646 (520) 603-9932. WE ARE THE 99%! www.spiritualution.org

TWIN OAKS, LOUISA, VIRGINIA. "Not the revolution, but you can see it from here." We are an income-sharing, non-violent, egalitarian community that's been living this lifestyle for over 40 years. We would love to have you visit.

We can offer you: work in our community businesses, an abundance of homegrown organic food, a thriving social scene, and an established culture of non-violence, feminism and egalitarianism. You can offer us: your talents and skills (or your unskilled enthusiasm) and your desire to live an ecological and income- sharing lifestyle. For information: Twin Oaks, 138-R Twin Oaks Rd., Louisa, VA 23093; 540-894-5126; twinoaks@ic.org; www.twinoaks.org.

INVESTORS FOR LOVELY 22 ACRE INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY WANTED. High up on the ridge line, this beautiful 22 acre estate is located in rural Greenfield in Western Massachusetts. This property is surrounded by 175 acres of locally owned, protected forest. This region has five rivers, rolling small mountains, and lots of lakes. I am seeking ten investors at $15,000 each to purchase an estate valued at $650,000. There is a garage apartment, five bedroom carriage house, outdoor pool and cabana, and a large 20 room mansion with seven bedrooms.. Intentional community plans are centered around the arts, educational courses, ecology, and healing therapies. Please call Doug Wight at 413-320-3653 if interested.

COMMUNITIES FORMING

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY FORMING – THE JUSTICE TRUST – CALHOUN CO. WV. Lease homesites for 99 years, transferable & renewable. Current rate at $5 per acre per month, which will pay local Land tax. A non-profit trust, land will never be sold. All buildings subject to local property tax. Write for information. Carl f. Shaw, 1019 Kerby Ridge Road, Mt. Zion, WV 26151 (304)354-6598 cfshaw@frontiernet.net

HONOLULU INTENTIONAL OHANA PROJECT, HAWAII. We are currently meeting to explore possibilities for developing some form of co-operative living arrangement in or near the urban Honolulu area. All aspects of the project are still open for discussion. (Go to www.hiop.info for more information.) We are actively recruiting new members at this time. If you are able to attend our meetings on Oahu, please send your contact information to hiop@lava.net.

PEOPLE LOOKING

This ad comes from a prisoner; COMMUNITIES *has not investigated the details of or reasons for their incarceration:*

IF YOU BELIEVE IN THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY, permaculture, transparency with kindness, commitment, polyamory, forgiveness, humor, non-violent communication, and nude dancing in the moonlight, and you are open-minded and compassionate enough to consider the possibility of opening your heart to a flawed-but-working-on-it-non-politically-correct man (prison inmate being one issue), I

would enjoy corresponding with you. Sharing intimacy on all levels is better than being superficial, I believe: how do you feel about that? Namaste and Blessed Be. (see my smile on Facebook!) Denzial Tittle, 66072-179 A-3, PO Box 7000, FCI TexarKana, TX 75505

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEB SITES

COHOUSING.ORG, THE COHOUSING WEBSITE, is filled with core resources for cohousing community – a thriving segment of the intentional communities movement. The site includes the Cohousing Directory, info on National Cohousing Conferences, Classified Ads, and FREE publications including Cohousing Articles, online Cohousing Books, In-the-News, Just-for-Fun, and much more. Its presented by Coho/US, the Cohousing Association of the United States - please visit us at cohousing.org.

WANT TO LIVE RENT FREE - anywhere in the world? There are empty homes in every state and country, and property owners are looking for trustworthy people to live in them as caretakers and house-sitters! The Caretaker Gazette contains these property caretaking/house-sitting openings in all 50 states and foreign countries. Published since 1983, subscribers receive 1,000+ property caretaking opportunities each year, worldwide. Some of these openings also offer compensation in addition to free housing. Short, medium and long-term assignments in every issue. Subscriptions: $29.95/yr. The Caretaker Gazette, 3 Estancia Lane, Boerne, TX 78006; 830-755-2300; www.caretaker.org caretaker@caretaker.org.

RESOURCES

FEDERATION OF EGALITARIAN COMMUNITIES (FEC). LIVE YOUR VALUES, LEARN NEW SKILLS. For 25 years, the FEC has welcomed new members to our groups based on cooperation, ecology, fairness, and nonviolence. No joining fees required, just a willingness to join in the work. We share income from a variety of cottage industries. For more information: www.thefec.org; fec@ic.org; 417-679-4682; or send $3 to FEC, HC-3, Box 3370-CM00, Tecumseh, MO 65760.

GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES available at Tree Bressen's website. Topics include consensus, facilitation, blocks and dissent, community-building exercises, alternative formats to general discussion, the list goes on. Dozens of helpful articles, handouts, and more--all free. www.treegroup.info

Upcoming COMMUNITIES Themes:

Winter 2012:
Endings and Beginnings

If you'd like to write for COMMUNITIES, please visit
communities.ic.org/submit.php

LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)

people doesn't work; our three blockers are still blocking after 22 years.

You quote Tim Hartnett on consensus-with-unanimity: "It necessitates that all group members have the ethics and maturity to use this power responsibly... This may not be a realistic expectation." Wow! I think this hits at least one nail on the head: any group, through the luck of the draw, is likely to have one or more people with serious unresolved childhood issues that they may be compelled to work out, pitting themselves against the group as unwilling adversary. More fairly, maybe we could say that we all have issues that may be activated in group situations to the detriment of the group.

Some of us had domineering, alcoholic or abusive parents.. This seems to play out as blocking to resist domination and abuse by the group.

I am trying to decide how to bring your article to the group for discussion.

I'm also waiting eagerly for Part II and betting that you are going to get an interesting spectrum of feedback.

Thanks for this!

Cecil Frost
via email

No One Right Way

In the last issue, the articles on "Busting the Myth about Consensus" grabbed my attention. Community processes involving real people are always more immediate, concrete, and complex than the conceptual models we use to understand our participation in them. A naïve belief in the "goodness" of some ideal conceptual model—like consensus—does not not help us work our way through the myriad ways in which the ideal becomes real and concrete as people interact together.

All of the points of view expressed by Diane Leafe Christian, Laird Schaub, Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig, and Tree Bressen add to the dialogue needed to understand and to facilitate the process of consensus. There is no one way here; no *or*, simply the richness of *and*.

So I am thankful that the topic was included. I hope that there will be more dialogue on the variety of techniques that can be used to deal with the problems inherent in the consensus-seeking process, as well as the joys which result when it works well.

My own experience with consensus, both in business and in communities, has taught me that that there is no one right way to move forward, only one that is right for a particular group of people, working together in the here and the now to achieve a practical shared end. The more that we are exposed to the different ways of dealing with both the inherent limits and strengths of the consensus process—and the more folks who share the experience they have gained through many interactions, both as consultant and as participant—the wiser we will come to be. Thank you.

Roelf Woldring
via www.ic.org's web contact form

ECOVILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE: THE SKELETON OF COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 23)

over the long run, since fee simple ownership gives the landowners a lot of independence.

Condominium: If you think condominiums are only the large, multifamily developments you tend to find at ski areas and resorts, think again. A condominium is just a form of homeownership—it can include single family dwellings as well. The Headwaters Garden and Learning Center adopted the condominium form of ownership, because we wanted to have a higher level of community control over the different homes, and we also wanted a form of homeownership that was familiar to area banks and insurance companies. With our condominium, individual homeowners own a home site, but all the land is shared in common.

Cooperative: Like its counterpart in the owner entity category, a housing cooperative has a shared benefit for the people who are involved. It also tends to be established when the ownership entity is a nonprofit corporation. In Vermont, housing cooperatives need to be dedicated to the perpetual affordability of all the housing units, although in other places this is not necessarily the case. One of the advantages of an affordable housing cooperative is that the cooperative tends to own the property and its debts and obligations. This means that when units are transferred, the new cooperative member does not necessarily have to go through the mortgage process, but needs instead to come up with the funds for shares in the co-op.

Community Land Trust: Like the cooperative, this homeownership model is dedicated to perpetually affordable housing, and tends to be established as a nonprofit corporation. The difference between a cooperative and a community land trust is that with a cooperative, the members would be the decision-makers and own shares, whereas with a community land trust, the land is leased to the people who live there, while they are allowed to own their homes. Land trusts tend to have a board of directors, like most nonprofits, although there are models out there where communities combine the cooperative and land trust ideas.

Other Ecovillage Bones

Other important structural components of an ecovillage can include farming agreements, business structures, design rules, decision-making rules, conflict resolution processes, membership definitions, joining processes, financial responsibilities, insurance...the list goes on and on. It is better to think through a lot of these issues before you start living there—it's a lot harder to build an airplane in flight than it is to make sure all the landing gear works while it's still on the ground.

Go and visit other communities, ask them questions about what has worked and what hasn't worked. Get them to recommend good lawyers, engineers, and design professionals. It is always easier to work with someone who understands ecovillages than someone who has never heard of the idea before.

But beyond all the advice and assistance you can gather, ultimately what matters is what works for you and your fellow travelers, in your context, on the land you have found. Take it one step at a time, doing the best you can with what you have. Even if the structure feels more conventional than you would like, it is often easier to make change in small steps, rather than to be struggling with unknown forms while building a community at the same time. ❧

Currently Director of Planning and Community Development for the City of Montpelier, Vermont, Gwendolyn Hallsmith has over 25 years of experience working with municipal, regional, and state government in the United States and internationally, and is also Executive Director of Global Commmunity Initiatives (www.global-community.org). Recently she has founded and developed the infrastructure at The Headwaters Garden and Learning Center, a new ecovillage in Cabot, Vermont. There are seven home sites, five of which are still available. Contact Gwendolyn at gwenhs@gmail.com.

FROM CAMP TO VILLAGE

(continued from p. 25)

few special individuals committed to building an ecologically-minded community, which is not always the case for tent cities. I believe this lack of motivation is not due to disinterest or incapability, but rather pressure to move on to more conventional shelter.

So, rather than focus on rescuing people from tent cities, an intentional community, such as an ecovillage, could adopt these unintentional communities, thereby broadening the reach of the current ecovillage movement. We can expand sustainable communities by including those residing in tents, the most basic of shelters!

At the simplest level, ecovillages could provide political support to a local tent city as a viable alternative to conventional housing. A network of support in the larger community is a key first step. Next, campers could become involved at the ecovillage, learning practical skills to apply in their own community. Ecovillagers could hold workshops at tent camps, providing hands-on education and catalyzing the transition from camp to village. While ecovillages expand their cause, organized tent cities could learn how to build and heat small, eco-minded dwellings.

Eugene, Oregon may soon break ground on such a model. Following the dismantling of the Occupy Eugene encampment late in 2011, the city formed a task force to find "new and innovative" solutions to the city's homeless problem. Their recommendation: "a place to be." At an Open Space conference at the end of March, supporters of this initiative connected with members of Maitreya Ecovillage, sparking the idea of a partnership between the two. One member is excited about building tiny houses for the village, while another is interested in presenting a model for more primitive structures that would be useful in the early phase. Yet another has offered to lend his knowledge of simple food production methods. We are working now to convince the City Council.

An urban planner with a strong interest in self-governing tent cities in the United States, Andrew Heben currently resides at Walnut Street Co-op in Eugene, Oregon.

FIFTY YEARS ON: LIVING NOW IN THE FINDHORN FOUNDATION COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 43)

beliefs clash concerning lifestyle choices; for example, car and property ownership, where to shop, what to invest in…rich debates that keep us connected and sometimes divided.

Recently, with new property developments, we are faced with the issue of how big can the local community get without losing sight of its original impulse. It has also generated ideas about how to hold this growing community together so that we may continue to thrive into the next 50 years.

Almost everyone I have met in this community is a gardener of some kind—whether actively putting their hands in the earth to bring forth the bounty and beauty of nature, or cultivating the full radiance of their life's purpose. Here I live amongst people who recognise humanity's interdependence with all of life and affirm the values of love, service, integrity, responsibility, and personal leadership.

The ecovillage at Findhorn reflects the community's commitment to work consciously and harmoniously with nature. The ecovillage includes caring and cooperative relationships, healthy ecological practices and building techniques, responsible energy generation and use, recycling, organic food production, and sustainable social and economic structures, and serves as an inspiring demonstration of new directions for humanity and the planet. Here I have everything I need and it is a blessing to live with a sense of integrity, knowing that all that I source comes from a place that values life in all its forms, and strives to demonstrate sustainable, harmonious living practice. ❧

Lisa Sutherland was born in South Africa and made the biggest leap of faith and longest journey of her life six years ago, when she came to Findhorn to experience the reality of communal living. She now lives in Findhorn village, works part-time for the Findhorn Foundation, runs a complementary therapies practice, and is studying further in Complementary Medicine.

DANDELION VILLAGE: BUILDING AN ECOVILLAGE IN TOWN

(continued from p. 48)

'Let's be selfish and hold that water as much as we possibly can.'"

Hiring a watershed engineer was not cheap but allowed them to present a much more professional set of plans to the Plan Commission at their second hearing. Through the negotiation process, they ended up reducing their density to 30 adults and 10 children with 10 small houses and one large communal building that could contain up to 15 bedrooms as well as a large kitchen and dining hall. They had originally hoped that the small houses could be built without kitchens and bathrooms but that would have classified them as a commercial development (e.g. residence camp) and required the installation of sprinkler systems in all buildings—nearly as expensive as putting in kitchens and bathrooms! They did get permission to have both chickens and goats on the site as well as barns for their agricultural equipment. Composting toilets were abandoned in favor of city sewer connections.

The Plan Commission officially approved their request for a PUD in August 2011. By then, public sentiment was generally in favor of the project and the neighbors who had voiced the strongest opposition began admitting some respect for these crazy young people and their vision. Curiosity replaced concern and the project was unanimously approved by the Bloomington City Council in October as an excellent example of walking the sustainability talk.

By this point, Danny and the other ecovillage founders were worn out but happy. They knew there were still three more permitting steps required and they now had the engineering support needed to develop their final plat for the site. In April 2012, they submitted the final plans for review to get their grading permit, which essentially approves their watershed engineering. Simultaneously, they applied for building permits so that the first two homes could be constructed in the summer. As part of their PUD agreement, they must complete all site grading and basic infrastructure (e.g. storm water retention ponds and main roads) before applying for an occupancy permit, which they hope to acquire in the fall. Once the first founders move in, they will start work on two small community houses and the large community building that will provide a gathering space as well as bedrooms that can be rented out to generate income for the ecovillage and house other members as they build their own permanent homes.

The Dandelion group is thrilled by the location and are excited that they have already formed a bond with their new neighbors. "After a year and a half of politics, it feels great to be through the political process and almost ready to break ground," says founder Zach Dwiel. "I'm super excited to start building and stop politicking." While their community has continued to form over potlucks and planning sessions, the members look forward to working side by side building their new home.

Danny acknowledges that this is still the beginning, for both Dandelion Village and for encouraging ecovillage development everywhere. He will be busy for the next couple of years helping the community develop and take ownership of their property. After that, he plans to return to the planning department to propose that their development be used as the model for a new zoning category specifically for ecovillages. "I feel the greatest effect we can have on the ecovillage movement is to set the precedent of a cooperative housing zoning category for the city of Bloomington," says Danny. He hopes this will pave the way for similar developments in Bloomington and even be adopted in other communities. Perhaps someday his ecovillage zoning category will even become the new normal.

Maggie Sullivan is a Bloomington, Indiana native with a passion for sustainability and a deep love of the Midwest. She co-writes the green living blog www.greencouple.com with her husband Will and serves as president of the nonprofit Center for Sustainable Living. Her favorite ecovillage is Lost Valley Educational Center where she studied permaculture in 2005, and she looks forward to having an ecovillage in her own hometown.

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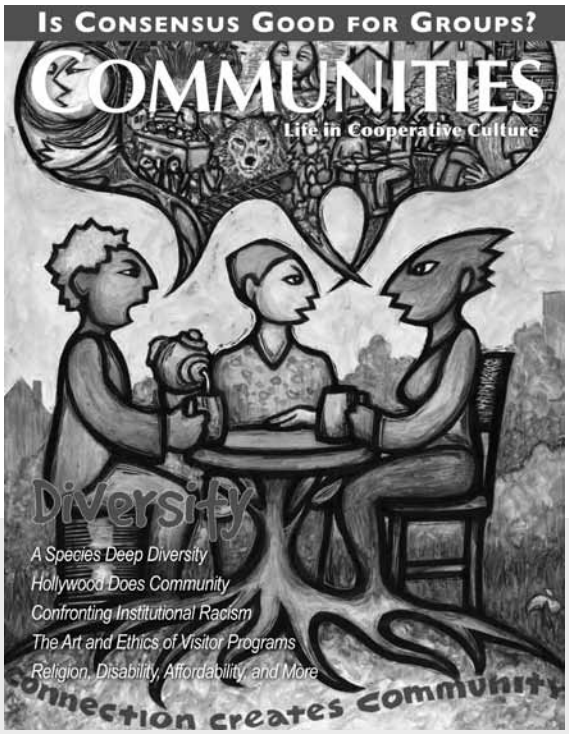

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WOULD AN ECOVILLAGE BY ANY OTHER NAME SMELL AS SWEET?

(continued from p. 59)

ecovillage?" This was not an offhand remark, for Robert re-introduced all the criteria for "ecovillage" that he first enumerated in the 1991 report and demonstrated that, yes, all these same criteria *could* be applied to a progressive municipality.

My favorite examples are the fabulous traditional villages of Tuscany and the Provence. Recognizing that "eco" is short for "ecological" then these surely can be considered "ecovillages," for they are definitely *ecologically integrated* into the landscape. And, we could take it a step further by also insisting that these villages are *intentional communities*, in that they are entirely built and maintained by the self-governing processes of the people who live there—especially so in the days before globalization.

And so, from an academic perspective, a "village" is a certain size and character, and performs certain functions—for one thing, it's big enough to contain a church! Huehuecoyotl in Mexico seems to have realized this: they call their community an eco*aldea*, where "aldea" is the Spanish word for little village, or *hamlet*. Do you think people would sign up for an Ecohamlet Design Course?

This distinction is not as trivial as it may at first sound. All over North America there are phony developments that call themselves "villages." Many single-use suburban subdivisions are named "villages." Then there are shopping centers, apartment complexes, and even strip malls that bear the "village" name. I'm sure you can find some examples in your home town, so ubiquitous is this phenomenon. The point is that these are not really villages, not at all; yet there seems to be a fascination—almost a sentimental longing—for naming everything a "village."

And then there's the "ecovillage." There is not an ecovillage in the world that is big enough to be considered a real village—right? An urban permaculture experiment is surely not a village. Nor is a cohousing development. Nor is three families on 20 acres. Some of the projects may get close—Tamera, Damanhur, Findhorn, Crystal Waters, The Farm—yet technically speaking these are still hamlet scale. What does all this mean? Just that the name "ecovillage" is being used as a *metaphor* for the greater vision of "sustainable community."

My own opinion is that the settlement patterning of the North American continent was thrown together rather hastily and randomly in a mad rush of "manifest destiny." You might say that post-conquest North America skipped the village stage of development. The resulting infrastructure will prove to be increasingly dysfunctional in the coming period of energy descent. During this period, the entire settlement patterning of North America will need to be retrofitted to a sustainable *village* scale. This means urban villages, suburban villages, rural villages, and yes, *eco*villages.

The ecovillages are the vanguard. I think of them now as "research, training, and demonstration sites" where all the various sustainable systems—ecological systems, social systems, economic systems, technological systems—can be integrated together in one place. These ecovillages are inherently educational centers where the general population can come see how it's done, where they can learn the skills and know-how they will need to begin reorganizing their neighborhoods and suburbs into *real* villages. No one needs to tell them that we're using the name "ecovillage" metaphorically.

E. Christopher Mare, M.A. is President of the Village Design Institute, Principal of Paradise Designs, and Doctoral Candidate at the Fielding Graduate University. He lives in the Happy Valley Neighborhood in Bellingham, Washington.

Group Works: A Pattern Language for Bringing Life to Meetings and Other Gatherings

Created by the Group Pattern Language Project

2011; 91 cards plus booklet; available from www.groupworksdeck.org (also as free pdf download)

This card deck marks a milestone in group-process resources.

Inspired by *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* by Christopher Alexander and co-authors (1977), which explored 253 design principles that help "create built spaces that nourish people's souls," a group of volunteers met and collaborated for three years to generate an equivalent "language" for working successfully in groups. The resulting card deck explores how to create meetings and gatherings that also nourish people's souls, this time through 91 principles or patterns, divided into nine pattern categories.

Instead of trying to replicate the many books offering specific models and techniques for running good meetings, the Group Works cards aim to "express shared wisdom underlying successful approaches...more specific than general values and less specific than tools and techniques." Each card features a pattern title, pattern image, pattern "heart" (text expressing the core of the pattern), category icon, and list of related patterns—distilling the "What" and the "Why" of a particular principle of effective gatherings and its relationship to others in the deck. Card users can explore the "How" through the many resources available on the Group Works website, and by utilizing established techniques or creating new ones.

Pattern categories include Intention, Context, Relationship, Flow, Creativity, Perspective, Modelling (readers will notice that the cards use Canadian spellings), Inquiry & Synthesis, and Faith. If those words alone (or the pattern titles) were sufficient to convey the contents, there'd be no need for the cards, but deeper exploration is what will make these pattern categories come alive. For example, "Perspective" is about "Noticing and helping the group more openly and thoughtfully explore different ways of seeing an issue. Watching, understanding, and appreciating divergent viewpoints, ideas, values and opinions. The key is in how you look at something." In this category (which includes 10 patterns), the "Value the Margins" card reads: "Edges of ecosystems are fertile ground for adaptation. Similarly in group dynamics, growth often comes from generative disturbances at the margins, perhaps from participants less invested in the status quo. Welcome and embrace people and ideas that may at first seem alien."

These cards have many potential applications, including group learning of facilitation skills, preparing for an event, debriefing after a gathering, self-assessment and self-directed learning for facilitators and participants, getting a group "unstuck" in the middle of a meeting, and even consulting as an oracle, a "Tarot card of group process." I have heard a number of positive reports about their use by individuals and groups—including a cohousing group which used them to get past major difficulties to hold a very productive, constructive meeting.

This set has reminded me of how rich group process can be if its full potential is acknowledged and nurtured. Some methodologies unfortunately seem to cram group process into a "paint by numbers" approach—or worse. The Group Works deck makes it clear that group work is an art, with endless nuance and potential for creativity—and that no simple formula will do it justice. Facilitators and participants in meetings and gatherings have an almost unlimited toolbox of methods and techniques at their disposal, if they choose to use them.

In my experience, the best consensus trainers and facilitators know how to make full use of this toolbox, and the keys to their success—the design patterns and the tools—can be learned by anyone who's caught a glimpse of the beauty of good group process. For those feeling trapped in a formulaic, limiting approach to group discussion and decision making (even if, in the words of one facilitation trainer, it's touted as the "best thing since sliced bread"), or who have lost sight of the magic of what truly participatory, effective group work can be, these cards may offer a breath of fresh air.

The core beliefs of the Group Works team are also a breath of fresh air: "We choose to assume the best of people. We believe people flourish when entrusted with the opportunity to authentically self-manage, collaborate, and make decisions collectively, as true respected equals.…We believe in sharing power, that we are wiser when we work together....Good process builds strong communities."

Whether it's used as a window into the vast world of community-building and group work, or as an aid along the way for those engaged in that work, I expect this deck will be of enduring value to anyone who chooses to explore and use it.

Chris Roth edits Communities *and is a member of Meadowsong Ecovillage outside Dexter, Oregon.*

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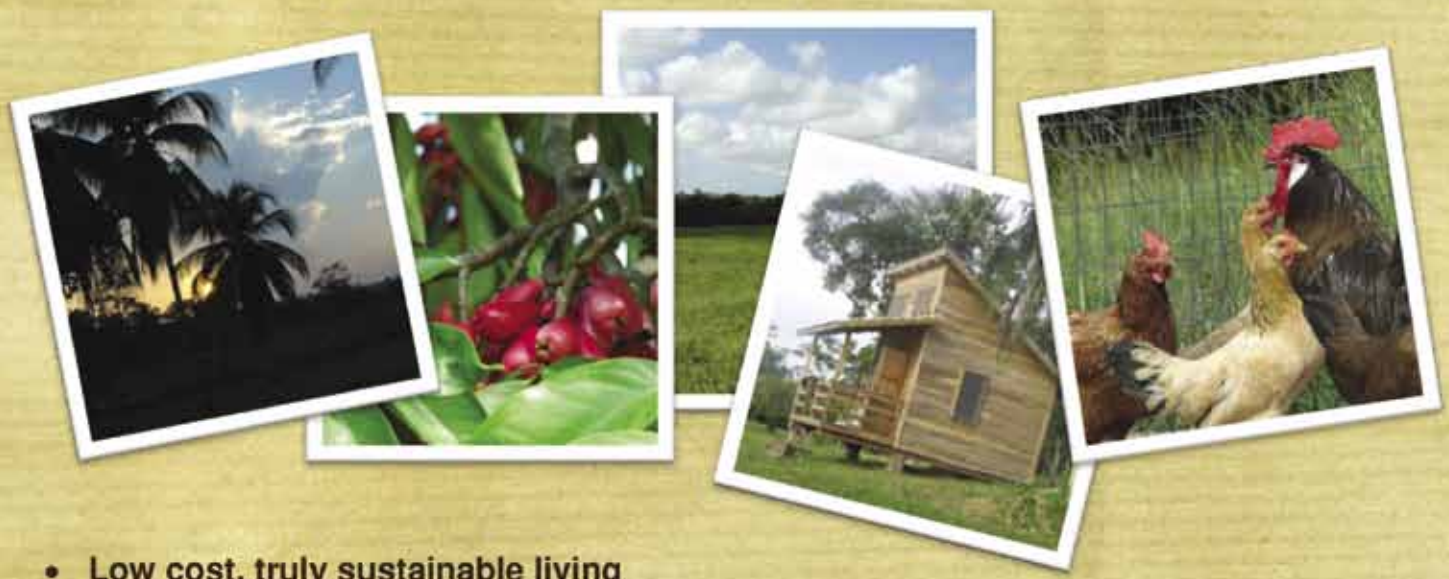

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