INCOME-SHARING • WORK-TRADE • COOPERATIVE HOUSING

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Summer 2026 • Issue #211
$10 US / $15 Canada

Affordability and Inclusivity

How Much Does It Cost?

Welcoming Immigrant Neighbors

Decoupling Profit from Community

Gifts and Challenges in Radical Affordability

Black Economic Power through Collective Naturing

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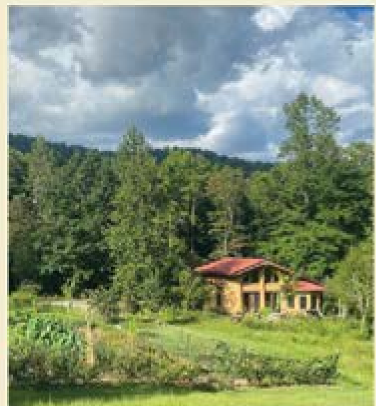

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Foundation for Intentional Community, Global Ecovillage Network

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At Du•má Community in Eugene, Oregon, extensive sharing, abundant on-site food production, renewable energy features, and a walkable/bikeable urban setting help make affordable, small-footprint living possible in a 100-year-old group house. Pictured: residents Alli, Benji, and Sophia on the front porch. See article on pages 42-45. Photo by Mika Tuesday-Wagner.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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Letters

Life Is Short; Don't Waste a Minute

Thank you for the excellent articles "Ego and Insecurity: The Enemies of Community," by Chris Roth, and "Hierarchical Response to Conflict," by Kara Huntermoon, in the Spring 2026 issue of COMMUNITIES (#210).

As the burning soul that got Ravens' Roost out of the ground, it's occurred to me that the skills needed to survive/thrive in community are often at odds with those needed to do well in mainstream America. In our community, like the one described by Chris, the skills and behaviors learned to survive in mainstream culture were corrosive when applied to community life.

Kara's article mentions another important piece of the puzzle when she describes the victimization culture that is common in wider society: the shifting of locus of control (and responsibility for change) outside of oneself.

This is our 10th year since move-in. A few people have come and gone, including a retired lawyer (no experience with intentional community) who is in the process of leaving. His departure is due to his concerns regarding indemnification and liability.

When people are unhappy here, I used to feel like we needed to do whatever it took to assuage that discomfort. Now, if, after a strong effort to understand and address their concerns within our existing system, they are still unhappy, I say, "Life is short, don't waste a minute, if you need to leave here to be happy, what can I do to help that happen?" It is painful and sad when people leave, but the alternative can be worse, as the "Ego and Insecurity" case study describes.

Thanks for the interesting and well-written articles.

Mary Miner
Ravens' Roost Cohousing
Anchorage, Alaska

Cognitive Impairment in Elders: Resources or Stories?

I'm almost 79 years old, have lived in an urban coop for 25 years, and am experiencing increasing symptoms of dementia.

No other residents in the coop have lived in it nearly as long. Most are young people who stay for several years before moving on with their lives.

I don't believe there are any articles in COMMUNITIES about elders living in intentional communities with significant cognitive impairment—or leaving because of it. I think it raises issues both similar to and different from other forms of disability.

Cognitive impairment can develop at any age, but elders are most subject to it. It tends to increase with age, generating more personal and relational problems as it develops. AARP reported that "Nearly a third of Americans 65 and older have some level of cognitive impairment—including 10 percent who have dementia." (aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/cognitive-impairment-trends-in-older-americans)

As populations age, this is an increasing issue across most societies. As leading-edge explorers of communal life, I wonder: What have various communities and elders done with various levels of cognitive impairment in their midst? Have you discussed it? Do you have any resources or stories to share about it?

Anonymous

My One Cent

Some Communities themes feel more in my wheelhouse than others—something that's certainly true for every author. Last issue's focus on "Leadership, Democracy, and Autocracy" included nearly 10,000 words from me, more than half of them in a single article, and that was with conscious efforts at concision. On the other hand, we set the current theme of "Affordability and Inclusivity" almost purely due to popular demand, not because the editor needed to scratch his writing itch—so I didn't.

Yet especially for a theme that I was less excited to write about, I've been surprised and quite gratified by what's resulted. As I'm proofreading this sequence of laid-out articles, elicited and edited separately over a number of months, I feel just as enthusiastic about this more logistical, superficially more "dry" theme as I did about each of the previous four "wetter" themes (which were highlights of my time as editor). For one thing, it turns out that this theme is not as dry as it may appear, but can elicit stories about internal community dynamics, and relationships to self, others, and the biosphere, just as revealing as those that preceded.

This may also be the most useful issue in a **practical** sense that we've produced in a while—particularly for readers either seeking a community to join, or exploring potential models for a community they may want to help form. It should also be useful for current communities and communitarians navigating how to make their groups more affordable and inclusive. In short, I believe every communard and aspiring communitarian will find in the stories herein some concrete actions they or their group might take, or choices they might make, to bring them closer to their ideals and help them become more functional—and/or some wider perspectives that help their approach to community life become more holistic and mature.

Nuts and bolts matter; design matters. This is just as true for financial and legal structures, and policies and practices related to inclusion, as it is for group process and governance, communication agreements, dealing with conflict, land stewardship, food systems, ecological relationships, and how we envision "community" in the first place. Affordability and inclusivity, and all the practical choices around them, turn out to be just as central to that discussion as, for example, how we respond to mass delusion (see issue #207), handle natural disasters (#208), adjust to technological change (#209), relate to leadership (#210), or deal with trauma (part of next issue's theme).

I was happy *not* to write an article this time. Instead, I got to read, work with, and share all the articles that follow. Hope you enjoy! ❧

Chris Roth (editor@gen-us.net) edits Communities.

Village School mural detail by Kari Johnson (East Blair Housing Cooperative, Eugene, Oregon).

Chris Roth

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; email editor@gen-us.net. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email layout@gen-us.net. Both are also available online at gen-us.net/communities.

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We accept paid advertising in Communities because our mission is to provide our readers with helpful and inspiring information–and because advertising revenues help pay the bills.

We handpick our advertisers, selecting only those whose products and services we believe will be helpful to our readers. That said, we are not in a position to verify the accuracy or fairness of statements made in advertisements nor in REACH listings, and publication of ads should not be considered a GEN-US endorsement.

If you experience a problem with an advertisement or listing, we invite you to call this to our attention and we'll look into it. Our first priority in such instances is to make a good-faith attempt to resolve any differences by working directly with the advertiser/lister and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

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.

How Much Does It Cost?

By Cynthia Tina

In a gift economy, the more you give, the richer you are.
—Charles Eisenstein

This article is excerpted from the new book Intentional Community: How to Choose Community Living for Better Housing, Health, and Happiness *by Cynthia Tina, communityfinders.com/book. This chapter begins Part IV, Practical Considerations, and appears on pages 153-166.*

By this point in your exploration, you may be wondering some practical questions, foremost:

How much will this actually cost?

Can I afford to live in one of these communities or not?

Too often people get excited about the idea of community living, start exploring directories, fall in love with photos of gardens and common houses, then feel their heart sink when they see the price tag.

Every week I hear from people who long for connection, sustainability, and shared purpose, but who have little or no money to put toward it. They feel like the very lifestyle that could support them is financially out of reach.

The truth is that there is no single answer. The cost of living in an intentional community can range from more expensive than conventional housing to dramatically more affordable, depending on where it is, how it is structured, and what kind of life you want to lead.

This chapter will help you understand why costs vary so widely, what kinds of models tend to be more affordable, and how to think creatively about your own path, even if your budget feels tight right now.

Some communities will be out of reach for many people financially. Others are more attainable than you might expect, especially if you are willing to be flexible about location, housing type, or lifestyle.

The Housing Crisis, and Why Communities Are Not Immune

We are living through a global housing crisis. Prices have risen faster than wages in many regions, rental markets are tight, and homeownership is out of reach for a growing number of people.

Intentional communities are not magically outside of this reality. Communities still need to buy land, build or renovate homes, pay for infrastructure, and maintain roads, roofs, and septic systems. They do this inside the same economic system everyone else lives in.

Sometimes people imagine that intentional communities ought to be free or nearly free, as if they exist on a different planet where money does not apply.

In practice, communities are doing their best to create something more cooperative in the middle of a very unequal capitalist economy. Some succeed at keeping costs low. Others, especially in high-value areas, end up as expensive as the surrounding housing market.

Cohousing projects near thriving cities, for instance, often look very similar financially to any other condominium or townhouse development in the area. That can feel discouraging if you are hoping community will be your "affordable housing solution."

At the same time, many communities are actively experimenting with more accessible models: shared ownership, cooperatives, income sharing, land trusts, and resident-owned neighborhoods. These experiments matter, because they point toward what could be possible on a larger scale.

One important note here:

If you or someone you love is in an immediate housing crisis, intentional communities are rarely a quick fix. Most have careful membership processes that take months or even years, and they may not be equipped for emergency shelter. If you are in urgent need of housing, please reach out locally for crisis support first, then consider intentional communities as a longer-term path once you have some stability.

"It Depends": Geography and Model Matter

Just as in mainstream housing, geography makes a huge difference. A three-bedroom home in rural Missouri will not cost the same as a similar home outside Seattle or Boston. The same is true in community.

Here are a few real-world examples that show the range:

• At Rooted Northwest, a forming cohousing community outside Seattle, home prices start around eight hundred thousand dollars. This reflects the very high real estate costs in the Pacific Northwest.

• At Earthaven Ecovillage in rural North Carolina, some residents rent simple apartments or cabins for a few hundred dollars per month. Many supplement or offset costs through work exchange, growing food, or shared infrastructure.

• At Twin Oaks Community, an income-sharing community in Virginia, people can join with very little money. Members contribute labor to community businesses and receive housing, food, healthcare access, and a monthly stipend in return.

• At Beacon Hill Friends House in Boston, residents rent private rooms in a large shared home organized as a nonprofit. For an urban environment, this can be a relatively affordable way to live with others in the city center.

Rural ecovillages, community land trusts, and rural cooperatives often fall on the more affordable side. Urban cohousing, coliving, and ownership-based communities in expensive cities will usually be higher cost.

Exploring communities outside of major metropolitan zones, or even outside your current country, can dramatically expand the range of financially realistic options.

Different Community Models, Different Money Systems

Each type of intentional community tends to use a different financial structure. Understanding these differences will help you focus your search where it makes the most sense.

Cohousing

Cohousing communities are usually based on private homeownership combined with shared common spaces. You purchase a home or unit and then pay monthly dues to a homeowners association or similar body for shared expenses.

If you cannot qualify for a mortgage, or you do not have cash for a down payment, cohousing may be challenging at first. Some cohousing groups, however, work hard to include more affordable or rental options inside their projects. Burlington Cohousing in Vermont, for example, is part of a Community Land Trust, which helps to subsidize a portion of the units so they are within reach for lower and middle income residents.

Housing co-ops and group houses

Co-ops and collectives are often based on shared ownership or rental. You might buy a share in a cooperative that owns the building, or you might join a group house where everyone shares rent and utilities. Monthly costs tend to be lower than market-rate apartments in the same city, although this varies.

Income-sharing communities and communes

Income-sharing communities like East Wind or Acorn pool member income and labor. The community covers essential needs, such as housing, food, and basic healthcare access. There is usually no buy-in cost, but there is a clear expectation of work inside the community businesses and household systems.

These communities can be very affordable in cash terms, but they ask a lot in terms of participation and cultural fit. They also represent only a small percentage of intentional communities overall. Most communities have separate finances and simply share some expenses, rather than fully pooling income.

Ecovillages

Ecovillages range widely, from off-grid projects in the countryside to small villages with modern homes and fiber internet. Some have ownership models where you buy or lease a small lot. Others offer rentals, work exchange, or the option to build or park a tiny house. Costs also range widely. Some ecovillages are quite expensive, others are among the most affordable options available.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs)

CLTs are nonprofit entities that own land for the long term and keep it permanently out of speculative real estate markets. Residents typically buy or lease homes on that land under long-term agreements, such as 99-year leases.

Because the land itself is not bought and sold like a normal asset, entry costs can be significantly lower. The trade-off is that resale prices are often capped, so you may not

Photos courtesy of Cynthia Tina

see the same equity growth as in a conventional home. This invites deep questions about how we relate to wealth, legacy, and housing as an investment.

Coliving communities

Coliving spaces, especially in cities, are usually commercial enterprises that rent furnished rooms or micro-units in a building with shared amenities. They can be more affordable than renting a full apartment alone and offer built-in social life, although most are not designed for families and may not include shared ownership or governance.

Resident-Owned Communities (ROCs) and manufactured home co-ops

Some of the most affordable community models in North America are resident-owned manufactured home communities. In these neighborhoods, residents have collectively bought the land under their homes and run it as a cooperative. ROC USA has helped hundreds of such communities make this transition from private ownership to resident ownership.

Monthly lot fees can be relatively low compared to market rents, and residents have stable control over their land. While these places may not always use the label "intentional community," the cooperative structure and shared decision-making place them firmly inside the broader movement.

How Communities Make Housing More Affordable

Alongside individual affordability, there is a larger story: intentional communities experimenting with more just and sustainable housing on purpose. Here are some of the key strategies that I see communities using.

Reducing building costs

Some communities lower costs by using natural building techniques like straw bale, cob, or light-earth construction. When people pool skills, tools, and labor, they can build simple, beautiful homes at a fraction of conventional costs.

Other communities partner with innovative prefab builders. Geoship, for example, is developing bio-ceramic geodesic homes that are designed to be both climate resilient and relatively affordable. Models like this can pair well with communities that have land, volunteers, and a shared vision, but limited access to conventional capital.

Redefining equity and ownership

Rather than tying wealth solely to rising property values, some communities adopt models that balance access and equity. Community Land Trusts cap resale values to keep homes affordable for the next generation. Some co-ops allow shares to appreciate slowly, but not to speculative levels.

These models invite residents to ask: "How much is enough, and what do I want to pass on? Maximum personal gain, or housing security for those who come after me?" There is no single right answer, but intentional communities are where these questions are being worked out in real time.

Transforming the HOA model

In many conventional neighborhoods, the homeowners association is something people complain about. Rules are set from the top, enforcement is punitive, and residents feel more regulated than empowered.

In intentional communities, the same legal structure can function very differently. Residents themselves typically design the bylaws, decide how to spend shared funds, and use cooperative decision-making practices. In this way, the HOA or condo association becomes a tool for self-governance, rather than an outside authority.

Reducing dependence on landlords

Where renting is involved, communities often aim to reduce the power imbalance between landlord and tenant. Sometimes the "landlord" is actually the cooperative or nonprofit that residents themselves manage. Sometimes a single owner lives on site and sees renting as a long-term partnership with neighbors, not a profit-maximizing enterprise.

In manufactured home parks that flip to resident ownership, for example, residents are no longer at the mercy of sudden lot rent hikes or park sales. Instead, they collectively decide about improvements, rents, and maintenance.

Creative funding and subsidies

Affordable communities rarely appear out of nowhere. They are usually built through a mix of creativity and persistence. Some of the approaches I see include:

- Government grants or subsidies for low-income units
- Nonprofits raising funds specifically for affordable homes
- Low-interest loans from aligned individuals or foundations
- Rent-to-own agreements that ease the path into ownership
- Adding accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to create smaller, lower-cost homes
- Community-owned businesses that generate income for shared infrastructure
- Setting aside a percentage of homes for low-income residents

None of these solutions is perfect on its own. Together, they point toward a housing ecosystem that is more cooperative and resilient.

Pairing needs and gifts

Some of the most inspiring models of affordable community life arise when groups pair complementary needs.

Treehouse Communities, for instance, are intergenerational neighborhoods that support families raising children from the foster care system while giving elders a way to live with purpose and connection. Elders gain meaning and community, while children gain stability and support.

Other programs match seniors with younger housemates, or veterans with volunteers in community-like villages. Bastion in New Orleans is one example, where injured veterans and their families live alongside military and civilian volunteers in a supportive neighborhood.

These models show that affordability is not just about lowering rent. It is about designing communities that share care, responsibility, and resilience.

Building a Culture of Sharing

Finally, at the heart of affordable intentional communities is a simple cultural shift: people share more.

Sometimes sharing is very extensive: communal meals, shared work, and pooled incomes. More often, it looks like a return to village life. People borrow tools instead of each household buying its own. They share childcare. They trade rides, skills, and food.

As more of life comes into the realm of "ours" rather than "mine," many costs naturally go down. You may not need your own guest room if there are shared guest spaces. You may not need your own full workshop if the community has one. You may buy fewer appliances, books, or toys when they can be shared.

Some communities embrace elements of a gift economy, where shared reciprocity—rather than strict accounting—guides how people exchange support.

For example, in my community, we try not to stress over who contributes what to the garden or how many veggies each person takes. Our aim is simply to grow an overabundance so there's always enough to share. It's amazing how bringing a spirit of abundance, rather than scarcity, into a system can make everything flow more easily for everyone.

Sharing is not just about saving money. It is also about creating a daily fabric of generosity, reciprocity, and belonging.

Rethinking What "Home" Means

When people ask, "How much does it cost to live in an intentional community," they are often picturing a very specific thing: a private house, similar to what they have now, but located inside a community. That certainly exists. It is not the only option.

Living in community often means living smaller privately and larger collectively. You might move from a three-bedroom house into a one-bedroom unit with access to guest rooms, gardens, play spaces, common rooms, a workshop, and shared vehicles.

Many people find this shift liberating. They discover that what really makes a home feel rich is not the size of the kitchen, but the number of people who feel comfortable cooking there with you.

As you consider cost, it may help to gently question what you actually need to feel at home. How many rooms, how much stuff, how much private lawn? What might you be ready to trade for deeper connection and shared abundance?

Self-Assessment: How Might You Afford Community Living?

Money is only one dimension of this journey, but it is an important one. A little honest self-assessment goes a long way. Here are a few questions to reflect on:

• What do I currently spend on housing each month, including utilities, insurance, and property taxes or renter's insurance?

• Do I qualify for a mortgage, or is renting or co-owning more realistic at this time?

• How open am I to downsizing my private space in order to gain shared amenities?

• Am I willing to relocate to a less expensive region if the right community exists there?

• Could I keep a remote job or income stream while living in a lower-cost area?

• Would I consider an income-sharing or work-trade community, at least for a season of life?

• What skills could I bring that might be valuable to a community, such as childcare, building, gardening, cooking, or administration?

You do not need perfect answers, but writing down your honest responses will help you clarify which models and regions make the most sense to explore.

Getting Creative with Your Path

Once a community knows you and wants you there, surprising options can open. I have seen this again and again.

A member at Rachel Carson Ecovillage, for instance, was initially unable to afford buying a unit. Over time, as relationships deepened, the community created a subsidized lease-to-own option that allowed her to move in and gradually build equity.

I worked with one client for months trying to find a suitable option for his income level, which was not quite low enough to qualify for subsidized housing but also not great enough to buy a home outright. He finally came into conversation with Sawyer Hill Ecovillage in Massachusetts, though he knew he could not buy in alone. Through the community network, he was connected with two other people in a similar position. Together they co-purchased a home under a rent-to-own style agreement and are on track to become equal co-owners.

These stories have a common theme: first there was a fit in values and relationships, then creative financing followed.

Some paths to explore, once you have a strong mutual interest with a community, might include:

• Sharing a home with housemates instead of buying or renting alone

• Parking a tiny house or ADU on community land where that is allowed

• Offering specific skills in exchange for partial rent or dues reduction

• Joining as a renter first, then exploring shared equity or co-buying later

• Participating in a community business that provides a stipend and covers some costs

• Applying for low-income or subsidized units if the community has them

• Exploring community land trust models that lower entry costs

None of these are guaranteed. The point is that intentional communities are often willing to think creatively once trust has been built.

Examples of Affordable Community Experiments

A few communities in North America that explicitly weave affordability into their mission include:

• Jamaica Plain Cohousing in Massachusetts, which includes a mix of market-rate and affordable units in a vibrant urban neighborhood.

• Elderspirit Community in Virginia, a senior cohousing model that combines modest private homes with strong mutual support.

• Boulder Housing Coalition in Colorado, a network of housing cooperatives that provide below-market rents and shared governance.

• Veterans Off Grid in New Mexico, which focuses on creating low-cost, land-based housing for veterans.

• Stone Soup Cooperative in Chicago, which operates cooperative group houses with accessible rents.

There are many more. The point is not to memorize names, but to realize that people across the continent are already building mixed-income, intentional neighborhoods that share resources and reduce costs.

The Real Cost, and the Real Value

So, how much does it cost to live in an intentional community?

It depends. It depends on where you live, what kind of community you choose, what role you play in that community, and how you define "enough."

Some communities will absolutely be out of reach for many people financially. Others are more attainable than you might expect, especially if you are willing to be flexible about location, housing type, or lifestyle.

Perhaps an even more powerful question to hold alongside the spreadsheets is this one: *What is the cost of **not** living in community?*

There is a cost to isolation, to chronic stress, to juggling everything alone. There is a cost to raising children without a village, to aging without neighbors who notice if you fall, to facing climate and economic uncertainty without shared resilience.

Intentional community is not only about lowering expenses. It is about investing in relationships, mutual care, and a more livable future. Even when it costs the same as, or slightly more than, a conventional home, many people find the value they receive in return is far greater.

You are not just buying a house. You are choosing a way of life. ❧

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Decoupling Profit from Community

By Savannah Fishel

During 2024-2025, Savannah Fishel visited 54 intergenerational communal homes across Australia and the US, ranging from eight to more than 200 residents. The output, Beyond the White Picket Fence: A companion for intergenerational communal living, *is available free online, or to purchase in physical form with global shipping at thinkitforward.net/beyond-the-white-picket-fence. At thinkitforward.net you can also find more of Savannah's work, which interlaces themes of preventative health, social connection, housing, intergenerational practice, and more.*

Much of Western society is grappling with a crisis of disconnection, manifesting in mental ill health and chronic loneliness, alongside escalating housing crises. Generally society treats housing as physical infrastructure: a commodity to be traded, rather than social infrastructure: foundations for building community, connection, and aging well. The nuclear-family homeownership model has not only priced out many people from housing security, but has also left communities isolated and disconnected from their very neighbours.

Intergenerational communal living offers a practical, proven response to these challenges. By intentionally bringing people together, across ages and family structure, housing can play a powerful role in enabling and sustaining organic relationships. In times of need, this social safety net can act as a lifeline.

A recurring criticism is the assumption that intergenerational communities are inherently expensive and exclusionary. "Af-

Photos courtesy of Savannah Fishel

fordability" exists on a spectrum, and often the classic cohousing model is expensive. But this is just one type of intentional community. Through my exploration of 54 communities, I sought out a broad range of models, many of which are intentionally designed to be accessible for low-income residents or to provide "below-market-rate" security. True inclusivity in these spaces is often built upon specific financial mechanisms that decouple having a roof over your head, and neighbours who care, from the speculative market.

Ownership Stability through Limited-Equity: Santa Rosa Creek Commons

One way to create long-term inclusivity is through limited-equity cooperatives, such as Santa Rosa Creek Commons in California. Here, shareholders collectively own the community rather than individual units. To join, members purchase a share (the "buy-in") at a fraction of the cost of a typical cohousing purchase in the area. Once moved in, residents pay a monthly carrying charge based on square footage to cover operating costs, which is roughly half the local market rate for rent. When a member chooses to leave, they do not sell their unit on the open market for a profit; instead, their share is transferred back to the cooperative for the next resident, and they receive their initial investment back plus limited interest tied to the Consumer Price Index. This mechanism prevents market-driven price spikes. This financial stability translates indirectly into a vibrant community culture.

Committing long-term to a place, and not being overly preoccupied with property value, creates a fertile home for investing in what I call "neighbourisms": organic, everyday acts of support, care, and interest, which are often rare in traditional housing blocks, streets, or neighbourhoods. One example of the many neighbourisms which have sprung up at Santa Rosa are travel share schemes; for instance, residents organised 63 car rides for a member undergoing chemotherapy. One resident summed up their culture with the following: "I know if I need something, people are there."

Urban In-fill and Radical Inclusion: LA Ecovillage

In the heart of Los Angeles, LA Ecovillage (LAEV) has spent over three decades demonstrating an economically and socially sustainable way of living. LAEV was made possible through an "Ecological Revolving Fund" started in 1985 by its parenting organisation CRSP (now known as the Los Angeles Ecovillage Institute) that enabled property purchases via low interest loans from trusted individuals. Today, a Community Land Trust combined with a limited equity housing cooperative jointly guarantee permanent affordability through a ground-lease ar-

rangement. Very low to moderate income households committed to demonstrating more ecological and sustainable living patterns are the beneficiaries of this legal structure.

LAEV intentionally curates membership to ensure the community remains diverse across five areas: age, ethnicity, gender, household composition, and income level. Residents, ranging from ages three to 89, describe the village as a "haven of mutual aid" within an "anonymous city." This aid includes meal trains for the sick, shared childcare, and a "freebie table" for food and resource exchange. "One resident recently had a stroke and straight away we started a meal chain," a member told me. "I know that I can rely on anyone." Another resident, who lives in LAEV with two children, moved in after years of battling housing insecurity, including navigating restrictive rules of RV parks in Southern California. She said, "When you come here you're part of the community. I feel relieved: I have landed."

An All-Renter Shareholder Approach: Murundaka

For those for whom home ownership remains out of reach, or not preferred, the all-rental model at Murundaka in Victoria, Australia, provides a radical security. Residents are $1 shareholders in a Common Equity Rental Cooperative. Rent is capped at 25 percent of a resident's gross income, which includes utilities and a weekly shared meal, helping to knit the community together. People with a range of incomes live in Murundaka, and the structure supports even those on very low incomes to embed long-term roots without the fear of being priced out by private landlords.

Mikoto is one resident who emigrated to Australia as a single mother. Struggling financially and feeling isolated in private rentals, she found Murundaka—an affordable home where her son could grow up surrounded by a "squad" of children and a web of caring adults providing a broad range of support, from pastoral, to logistic, to academic. Murundaka's flexibility allows residents to move between units as their life needs change, downsizing or upsizing while remaining within their social support network.

Mission-Based Housing and the Gift Economy: Canticle Farm

Inclusivity also means reaching those most marginalised by deep societal structures. Housing approximately 40 residents aged 0-79 in 11 houses in Oakland, California, Canticle Farm functions through a gift economy, relying on donations from residents, as well as external grants, rather than fixed rent. Canticle Farm is working to heal divides—including across race, gender, and class. This community is intentionally diverse in these areas, as well as intergenerational and interspiritual. The community provides a base for both activists and those who have faced systemic discrimination, such as indigenous people and Black men leaving incarceration. One formerly incarcerated resident described the community as a "lifeline," sharing how he deeply values the profound sense of human connection morning circles and communal dinners bring, after a long time in solitary confinement.

Reimagining Home as a Social and Physical Foundation

The 54 communities I visited demonstrate that when we stop treating housing as a speculative asset, we can begin to treat it as social infrastructure; one of many tools to knit society together, facilitate long-lasting relationships and natural webs of care, and provide an alternative to division and isolation. From equity caps that many cohousing communities put in place, to innovative $1 shares in cooperatives, and a range of other approaches, these models prove that living in a more connected way across generations is not just for the privileged.

While no single model is a perfect blueprint, and context and community priorities will change what is possible across different places, the transition toward intentionally designed, connection-oriented housing has powerful, far-reaching impacts, and can be realised in a broad range of ways. If we are serious about tackling complex challenges such as loneliness, insecure housing, rising care needs, and fragmentation in communities, we must facilitate and fund homes that enable and encourage us to care about each other, not just live in proximity to one another. ❧

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From Shared Dreams to Shared Ownership:

How Cooperative Housing Can Root Communities for the Long Haul

By Garlynn Woodsong

Across North America, friends and neighbors are talking about the same things: rent that is already too damn high, and somehow still rising; homes that seem perpetually out of reach, especially for younger generations; a dream of something more stable, attainable, and more about us than me.

That dream isn't just about splitting costs. It's about something deeper: living alongside others, instead of drifting along in expensive social isolation. People imagine growing food together, sharing meals, making music, exchanging tools, and lending a hand when it matters. They picture neighborhoods that feel less transactional and more based on relationships, places where belonging doesn't depend on what you own.

These conversations are happening in Zoom calls and urban backyards, at community garden workdays, and over late-night texts between friends stunned by what the housing market has become. Behind them is a common impulse: to take housing back from the speculative economy, and return it to the realm of the human.

This is where cooperative housing enters the frame. It is not just a legal structure. It is a way of living that makes "shared" tangible and achievable.

In these conversations, the questions surface: What if we bought land together? What if home could be affordable, and ours, without going it alone? Many who are drawn to intentional communities, whether rural ecovillages, cohousing neighborhoods, or urban collectives, share this yearning, and begin with a vision of shared purpose. Yet too often, when it comes time to choose a legal structure, they default to private ownership models like condos or single-family homes, or nonprofit rental formats. What many miss is a third path, hiding in plain sight: the **housing cooperative**.

The Missing Middle Between Renting and Owning

For most people, housing seems to come in only two flavors. **Renting** offers lower up-front costs and flexibility, but little control or long-term security. **Ownership** offers control and potential equity, but also comes with an increasingly steep financial barrier to entry that often excludes all but the very well-heeled.

Cooperative ownership lives in the middle ground between those extremes, with a spectrum wide enough to feel very close to renting or almost identical to owning, depending on design and format.

Some co-ops operate as **tenant-owned rentals**, where residents pay monthly carrying charges instead of rent, but collectively own the property.

Others look more like condominiums, called **market-rate co-ops**, where members buy and sell shares at market value.

At its heart, a housing cooperative is a corporation collectively owned by the people who live there. Each member buys a share, which grants the right to occupy a home and the right to vote on community governance. A single blanket mortgage covers the property; residents acquire their membership through **share purchases**, which, in some cases, can be financed using individual **share loans**.

Within that shared framework lies remarkable variety.

Limited-equity cooperatives keep homes permanently affordable by capping resale prices, allowing members to build modest equity and secure long-term stability, while keeping prices accessible for the next generation of buyers.

Zero-equity or **leasehold co-ops** allow members to rent from the group they govern, creating a form of tenant-owned housing that stabilizes communities without requiring high up-front investment.

Full **market-rate co-ops** offer homeownership for higher-income residents, while preserving collective decision-making.

Housing+ cooperatives integrate shared livelihoods such as childcare, makerspaces, community kitchens, car-sharing, or small business incubation. These deepen the economic ecosystem, building everyday cooperation into the life of the community.

Whatever the flavor, cooperative housing shifts people from consumers of shelter, to stewards of place. Ownership becomes community participation, rather than merely selfish possession.

Why It Matters for Communities in Formation

For newly forming communities, ownership structure shapes culture. A cooperative legal form can embody the same shared values that many groups try to express through consensus meetings, shared meals, collective decision-making, and collaborative work days. Because co-ops are built on the principle of one member, one vote, they avoid the power imbalances that can arise when a few hold title, and others rent on informal agreements.

In the United States, many co-living and intentional community efforts default to condominium or LLC (Limited Liability Company) models, because lenders, lawyers, and developers already know them. Yet those structures bring complications. Condos tie communities to speculative pricing, where rising values can create tensions between neighbors whose interests diverge. Fear of construction-defect liability can even block condo projects before they start. LLCs may begin as cooperative ventures, yet often concentrate power in a small group of managing members, and can still be vulnerable to fluctuations in the speculative real estate market. Both make it harder for communities to welcome new members equitably, or pass homes affordably to the next generation.

Cooperative ownership offers a different path. By de-commodifying housing, removing it from the speculative real estate market altogether, it replaces resale profit with long-term stability and collective stewardship. It also allows for greater flexibility. A limited-equity co-op can evolve physically and socially, adjust governance, and welcome new members, without losing affordability.

Co-ops can also make financing more accessible. Mission-driven lenders and CDFIs (Community Development Financial Institutions) understand cooperative finance. Philanthropic and public partners are more willing to invest in structures that guarantee long-term affordability. Many cooperatives combine with community land trusts, a pairing that ensures both land and buildings remain in community hands and affordable for future generations.

Co-ops succeed when members invest not only money but time and care, learning to make decisions together, maintain property collectively, and resolve conflicts constructively. These are the same skills any intentional community must develop to endure.

Lessons from the Field

Across the country and around the world, cooperative housing isn't a theory. It is a mature model, with roots stretching back to the 19th century. Examples of successful co-ops abound.

In Oregon, **SquareOne Villages** supports residents transitioning from shelter into limited-equity cooperative ownership, balancing affordability with modest wealth building. The **Oregon Cooperative Housing Network (OR Co-Op)** connects emerging cooperative communities across the state to share legal tools, training, peer support, and a common voice.

In Seattle, **Frolic** shows how small-scale infill paired with cooperative ownership can create permanently affordable homes, without the pitfalls of condominium speculation, liability, and exclusion. Projects like Corvidae Co-Op demonstrate that new development doesn't have to repeat old mistakes; it can seed communities designed to evolve together over time, proving a new model for anti-displacement infill strategies.

Beyond the West Coast, co-ops have quietly anchored communities for generations.

In Washington, DC, and New York City, limited-equity cooperatives born from tenant takeovers in the 1970s still offer affordability and self-governance today.

Photos courtesy of Walnut Street Co-op

In Vermont, the **Champlain Housing Trust** combines land trust and cooperative models to steward thousands of homes.

In Toronto's Parkdale neighborhood, a federation of co-ops has protected immigrant and working-class residents from displacement, while nurturing local culture and small business.

Nationally, **ROC** (Resident Owned Communities) **USA** has enabled more than three hundred manufactured-home communities to buy their land collectively, proving that democratic ownership can scale without losing its local roots.

The lesson across these examples is simple. When residents own together, they build far more than housing. They build agency, stability, and belonging, the foundations of community itself.

Bridging Urban and Rural

Intentional communities often take root in rural places, where land is abundant, zoning tends to be flexible or absent, and groups can experiment with new forms of living together.

Cooperative housing, by contrast, has flourished in cities, where apartment buildings offer a natural format for shared ownership, democratic governance, and mutual aid among neighbors whose lives are already lived in close proximity.

Yet the **Community Land Trust (CLT)** movement, which pairs so elegantly with **Limited-Equity Cooperatives (LECs)** to form the CLT plus LEC relationship, began not in dense cities but in the rural South. It emerged from Black farmers organizing for land security, civil rights, and economic justice in the 1960s.

Seen through that lens, the CLT plus LEC combination is more than a technical arrangement. It is a bridge between two distinct but compatible traditions. Rural intentional communities and urban co-ops are not separate worlds; they are branches of a shared movement for collective ownership, ecological stewardship, and community-rooted economies.

Each holds lessons the other needs. Cooperative structures help rural communities stay generationally stable, integrate new member-owners, and protect working farms during leadership transitions. Rural intentionality, in turn, can remind urban co-ops to center relationships, stewardship, shared work, and a rhythm of life shaped by the land rather than by the property market.

Urban cooperatives bring experience with bylaws, boards, reserves, share loans, and regulatory compliance. Rural communities bring practices of land care, mutual support, and practical skill sharing that root urban co-ops in something deeper than paperwork and a legal structure.

These exchanges can be very real. A rural cooperative might provide food to an urban partner community, while offering seasonal opportunities for urban members to learn farming, contribute labor, and earn pathways toward ownership. A single farm could become a training hub, an employment platform, and a multigenerational anchor.

Imagine a village built around these principles. The residents co-own the farm through a limited-equity cooperative. The land trust holds the ground in perpetuity, using a long-term lease so that the farm can never be sold off for profit or converted to uses that undermine its mission. The cooperative begins by building clustered homes that leave generous acreage for gardens, fields, orchards, pastures, and riparian buffers. It shapes the built environment around shared kitchens, workshops, and flexible community spaces. Over time, it adds childcare and eldercare cooperatives that reduce social isolation and reinforce interdependence. Renewable energy systems are designed in from the start, combining solar, batteries, hydro or hydrogen storage, and robust food and supply storage so that the commu-

nity is resilient in the face of climate disruptions. Composting, water capture, graywater systems, and land stewardship programs reinforce a self-sustaining micro-grid of both energy and care.

Growing a Movement

This is not fantasy or speculation. It is already happening in small pockets. The real challenge is not imagining them, but finding ways to make them replicable, accessible, and dignified for both elders and newcomers. Scaling these models requires structure: pathways for cooperative conversion, training programs, succession plans for aging farmers, and umbrella organizations that help coordinate land trusts, lenders, public agencies, and cooperative development centers.

Programs like **Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms** (WWOOF, www.wwoof.net) offer a starting point for connecting people who want to live and work in community with elders ready to pass on land and knowledge. This could become a route for intergenerational continuity and shared stewardship, if tied to a cooperative framework, such as with umbrella organizations capable of coordinating land trusts, cooperatives, training programs, lenders, and public agencies. Such a framework could provide a supported route for aging farmers to move from sole proprietorship into community ownership. It could welcome new trainees and workers who want a pathway toward membership, ownership, and stewardship. These new stewards could bring energy, skills, and perhaps capital, along with a commitment to keep the land in production, and to sustain the community long after the founders' lifetimes.

A movement like this depends on elders who can teach and pass on craft knowledge, as much as it depends on new stewards who are ready to learn, work, grow food, and care, not only for the land and for one another, but also for the broader community and the planet. It weaves the wisdom of those who came before with the commitment of those arriving now.

We already know that one of the most efficient and ecologically sound forms of agriculture humans have developed is the medium-scale, integrated, multi-crop organic farm. Emerging practices in biodynamic agriculture, carbon-smart soil building, and agroecological design only strengthen that model.

What is missing is a structure that allows this farming approach to spread, replicate, and endure through generational change.

A cooperative conversion pathway that helps existing farms transition into agricultural ecovillages, paired with a steady flow of new recruits who want to live and work in community, could create that missing structure. With a theory of change rooted in land, people, and long-term economic democracy, this could bridge the urban and the rural in a way that honors both, to build a future where community resilience, ecological integrity, and shared prosperity are the norm rather than the exception.

Getting Started

If your group is forming now, begin with vision, then choose a structure that matches your values. Ask: Do we want permanent affordability? Shared governance? The ability to welcome new members equitably? If yes, a cooperative model may fit. There are nonprofit developers, attorneys, and cooperative development centers who can guide you. Even one pilot home or fourplex can become a seed for a larger neighborhood.

Remember that cooperation is not just a legal form. It is a practice. Successful co-ops depend on members who build shared capacity over time to maintain property collectively, to resolve conflicts constructively, and to cultivate healthy communication. These are the same muscles any intentional community must strengthen to allow it to thrive.

Toward a Cooperative Future

In a time of housing scarcity and climate disruption, cooperative ownership offers a quietly radical, transformative possibility: stability without exclusion, equity without speculation, and a culture of shared stewardship that can weather the storms ahead.

For those who want to live differently, the cooperative model is not just paperwork. It is an invitation to build the world we keep imagining: one where home is not a commodity, but a commons. ❧

Types of Co-ops at a Glance

- **Limited-Equity Co-op (LEHC):** Members purchase shares at below-market prices; resale earnings and prices are capped to preserve affordability.
- **Market-Rate Co-op:** Shares appreciate with market value; democratic governance remains.
- **Zero-Equity Co-op:** Members rent from the group they govern; often used in nonprofit or service-based communities, such as for student housing.
- **Housing+ Co-op:** Adds shared economic ventures (such as makerspace, childcare, mobility, or arts co-ops) to reinforce economic resilience.
- **Community Land Trust (CLT)-Limited Equity Co-op (LEC) Land-Trust Hybrid:** Land held by a nonprofit trust, buildings owned by the co-op, ensuring permanent community control and affordability.

Resources for Starting a Co-op

- **National Cooperative Bank (NCB):** lending and technical assistance for housing co-ops (ncb.coop).
- **ROC USA** and **ROC Northwest:** support for resident ownership conversions (rocusa.org and nwcdc.coop/roc-northwest).
- **CooperationWorks!:** a national network of cooperative development centers (cooperationworks.coop).
- **OR Co-Op, the Oregon Co-op Housing Network (OCHN):** peer support and legal resources (orcoop.net).
- **The Cooperative Housing Blueprint** (PLACE Initiative and SOMOS Mayfair, 2025): free downloadable guide for forming or converting co-ops (woodsongassociates.com/publications/cooperative-housing-blueprint).

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The Jedi Path Into Community: Why Work-Trade Is the Stealthiest Way to Learn to Live Together

By Bruce Horowitz

What if there were a way to step into community life without buying land, signing a lease, or pledging your next decade to a shared vision board?

There is. It's called *work-trade*—also known as work-exchange—and when it's done well, it can feel like a backstage pass into the heart of communal living. Done poorly, it can unravel into resentment, burnout, blurred boundaries, and some hard, even expensive lessons. At its best, work-trading is a win-win: a traveler, seeker, or curious human exchanges a reasonable amount of labor for their basic needs: lodging, food, and immersion in community life, while the host receives much-needed help and fresh energy. At its worst, expectations go unspoken, lines get crossed, and what began as an adventure ends in awkward exits or worse.

After years of experiencing work-trade from both sides—guest and host—I've come to see it as a kind of Jedi training for community living: immersive, illuminating, and occasionally humbling. Let's explore how it works—and how to do it right.

What's the Exchange, Exactly?

At its core, work-trade is simple: hours for essentials. A work-trader contributes labor—often three to five hours per day, five days per week—in exchange for lodging, meals (or food access), and participation in the life of the place. "Lodging" can range from pitching your own tent to staying in a shared room, tiny cabin, or off-grid yurt. Showers might be hot—or solar-warmed. Toilets might compost.

But the real exchange isn't just practical. It's relational. Communities receive more than help weeding gardens or cleaning kitchens. They receive new perspectives, cultural diversity, conversation, music around the fire—and yes, sometimes romance. Work-traders receive more than room and board. They get a lived experience of shared meals, shared labor, shared values. When it works, there's a sense of camaraderie and accomplishment that money simply can't buy. When it doesn't? That's where nuance enters.

The Honeymoon and the Hard Truth

Most exchanges begin in a honeymoon phase: Rundown quarters seem charming. The food tastes better fresh out of the garden. Everyone is interesting.

But then the real questions surface:

- Are the hours what we agreed upon?
- Is there an educational component—or just repetitive labor?

- Are my basic needs actually being met?
- Do I get a voice in the community, or am I just labor?
- What happens if it's not a fit?

Without clarity, the exchange can start to feel unequal. Work-traders may feel misled or overworked. Hosts may feel taken advantage of—or worse, that they've invited chaos into their inner sanctum. This is when making the time to craft and share agreements—and to adhere to them, pays off. Clear agreements aren't bureaucratic—they're liberating.

When It Goes Right: The Magic of Enough

On the Big Island of Hawai'i, one homestead host, Jamila of Kamani Grove Healing and Learning Center (a forming intentional community; see ic.org/directory/kamani-grove), has been refining her work-exchange model for years. Her homestead offers a rustic but sweet tiny cabin in exchange for three to four hours of help per day, five days a week. Work spans gardening, harvesting, kitchen support, landscaping, regenerative agriculture, and more. After morning work, everyone shares lunch. Afternoons are for rest and self-care. Evenings might bring a game night, a weaving class, or songs around the fire.

But Jamila has discovered something deeper: sustainability depends on numbers. In 2021, for a brief window, her land hosted 12 helpers at once. For three or four days, everything clicked. Food flowed from garden to kitchen. Tasks were shared with ease. Laughter came easily. Work no longer felt like drudgery. "It was synergy," she said. "Suddenly there was deep pleasure in the daily work."

Her theory? Humans thrive in networks of support—and there may be a magic minimum number. Too few helpers, or the wrong mix: only one single mom and child, for example—and everyone feels overextended. Other ingredients to pay attention to are gender balance and a good age distribution. The right number and proper mix of people, and the load lightens for all. It's not just about labor. It's about social ecology.

She's also clear about boundaries: defined agreements, ("Ohana agreements" in this case), thoughtful intake questions, clear tech-use policies (phones in the office, not at the dinner table), and orientation sessions for incoming groups. Work-traders shape the quality of food, conversation, and energy on the land. It's a big deal.

When It Goes Sideways

Steve, a recent work-trader, spent three months rotating through farms and homesteads. At one macadamia nut farm, he expected to learn chocolate-making and food processing. Instead, he crawled on the ground harvesting nuts for hours each day, with little instruction and sparse meals. "They didn't really teach us anything," he said. "It felt like a scarcity mindset." At a cat rescue homestead, he worked long, undefined hours—sometimes until midnight—feeding animals, cleaning, running errands, and helping with construction projects. There was warmth and good meals, but no clear agreement on hours or boundaries.

Finally, at a smaller farm, he found balance: three to four hours per day, clear start and end times, kind people, and a "full belly." It wasn't glamorous. It was weeding, hauling, tending. But it was fair. "It taught me how much work it actually takes to be a farmer," he said. "And it taught me how to communicate my needs." In the end, for Steve there was a blessing in the lessons: work-trading became a crash-course in boundary-setting.

Ethics, Power, and Sex

Let's name a sensitive truth: when people live and work closely together, intimacy can develop. This is precisely why communities need clear ethical guidelines around sexual relationships—especially between long-term members and temporary work-traders. Power dynamics matter. When the people deciding whether you stay or go are also potential romantic partners, lines can blur fast, feelings can get hurt, or even worse. Clear

Photos courtesy of Bruce Horowitz

policies protect everyone.

Hosts must define expectations around:

- Work hours and days off
- Meals and food quality
- Lodging standards
- Conflict resolution pathways
- Exit strategies
- Sexual and relational boundaries
- Adherence to community guidelines

Without clarity, even well-meaning communities can drift into murky territory.

How to Find Work-Trade Opportunities

The most well-known online platform is the WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) site at wwoof.net. Originally called "Willing Workers on Organic Farms," WWOOF connects volunteers—"WWOOFers"—with organic farms around the world. According to the organization, visitors participate in daily farm life while receiving meals, accommodation, and educational opportunities—without money exchanged. Though WWOOF is farm-focused, many intentional communities and homesteads also use it to source help. Other platforms include Workaway, the Federation for Intentional Communities site (ic.org), the Global Ecovillage Network sites (ecovillage.org), this magazine, plus good old-fashioned word of mouth.

Clarity Builds Trust

Green Flags:

- Clear written agreements about hours and duties
- Transparent descriptions and multiple photos
- Honest reviews
- Defined conflict resolution processes
- A trial period with a defined exit strategy
- Hosts who ask as many questions as you do

Red Flags:

- Vague expectations ("We'll figure it out when you get here")
- No clear daily schedule
- Overwork framed as "family commitment"
- Poor or insufficient food
- Blurred sexual boundaries
- No way to leave feedback

As Jamila advises hosts: put as much information as possible in your profile. For work-traders: when you arrive, ask immediately, "How can I help?"

The Secret Ingredients: Inclusion and Affordability

The social ecology of many places may tend toward smaller numbers of work-traders helping out larger numbers of residents. Seek places where work-traders are included in the community: not only in work, but also in the things that hold the community together: meals, meal prep, heart shares, community rituals, check-ins, and outings. Some communities may let you observe business meetings. These are the spaces where community seekers can really get a sense of a place and learn good community process.

The other secret ingredient is the lack of money in the equation. Instead, contribution becomes the currency. While the relationship between host site and work-trader is inherently transactional, in my experience, this lack of money in the equation has an inherent simplicity and lends itself to a kind of purity—or lack of complication, to put it another way—in the exchange. It's also what makes work-trading affordable for both parties.

The Final Outcome: Authentic Immersions

Work-trading can be a roving buffet where one can taste many different flavors of village living for short periods of time. For communities, it's a way to meet potential long-term members—to "date" before committing. For seekers, it's a low-investment way to explore various models of living: urban farmsteads, off-grid homesteads, retreat centers, regenerative agriculture hubs—and intentional communities. The beauty is that neither side must commit forever.

But that freedom only works when the exchange is defined, ethical, and mutually nourishing. When done right, work-trade becomes something rare: labor infused with learning, contribution wrapped in belonging, travel rooted in purpose. You don't just see how others live. You join them—long enough to get a window on whether their version of home might someday become your own. ❧

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Radical Rural Affordability in the Tiny House Village

By Murphy Robinson

Tiny House dwellers admire the frame of their new house.

Our most affordable infrastructure: tarp shelters for outdoor gatherings.

The squash harvest from a single delicata vine in our garden beds.

My landmates and I all love living in the Vermont mountains, but it has taken some ingenuity to find a way to do so affordably as housing prices skyrocket all around us. We love the lively queer and trans community in this state, the loving and inclusive local politics, the generous subsidized services for low-income Vermonters, and the natural beauty that graces every day of the year in this richly forested state. Vermont hasn't been especially affordable for a long time, and since 2020 it has become a haven for telecommuters fleeing city life in the pandemic and for transgender people fleeing states with repressive laws and social norms. Rural gentrification has driven housing prices through the roof, and severe flooding in 2023 and 2024 has reduced the aging housing stock even further.

At Hunter's Hollow, we live semi-off-grid in tiny houses we built ourselves, haul our water from the stream, and pay $150 per person per month in land dues. That sum covers all our land expenses, access to electricity and wifi in our communal utility shed, and a yearly decolonization tithe that we donate towards projects that support land access for BIPOC Vermonters. Keeping monthly land dues low enables all the landmates to work part-time, volunteer on projects in the larger community, start altruistic small businesses, and put in the labor that it takes to live close to the land. Here's how we keep our monthly expenses so low:

• I purchased this 19-acre parcel of raw woodland in 2017 for $50,000. We are keenly aware that the same land purchase any time after 2020 would have cost much more, so the luck of our timing was key. The land has tripled in value in the last 9 years, so a similar parcel purchased today would have higher monthly costs.

• I purchased the land with no bank debt, using a miraculous patchwork of five different low-interest personal loans from friends and family. By the end of 2025, all but one of these loans has been paid off in full or forgiven by the lender. As our property taxes have increased, monthly payments on the land have decreased, mostly balancing each other out.

• Everyone on the land built their own tiny house from scratch. I've paid for excavation and site work, but all other land clearing and construction has been done with our own labor and work parties with friends.

• We follow adrienne marie brown's maxim to "Move at the Speed of Trust." Landmates have very gradually moved onto the land over time, when the personality fit seemed strong and all current landmates enthusiastically consented. Because land expenses are so low, we never have to accept a landmate we have misgivings about based on a need to cover financial expenses for the land. As I write, we have four year-round residents, and we've had up to five residents in winter and seven residents in the summer in the past.

• This one flies in the face of general values and wisdom in the intentional communities movement: the land is le-

Landmates enjoying the rear facade of our communal cabin.

We hired a portable sawmill to mill hardwood boards out of the trees we felled to clear the land.

A landmate prepares to staple housewrap on her house.

Admiring our new tool shed.

Author framing out one of the small bedrooms in our central community cabin.

A landmate installs reclaimed hardwood flooring in our smallest dwelling structure.

gally owned by one person (myself). We manage our land dues together and use consensus to decide how to spend any excess money that accumulates in our account. The simplicity of sole land ownership means we have no lawyer's fees and don't have to maintain an LLC or 501(c)(3) as our legal entity. Maybe someday we'll take the step into communal ownership, but working within a conventional sole ownership model has saved money and complexity so far. (It helps that I was a penniless renter on other people's land for many years, so I've experienced a long list of landlord grievances that I'm determined not to repeat. When I see people who have never been a penniless renter or lived in consensus-based community try to start a community with sole land ownership as the legal model, it rarely goes well.)

• Our land is located in a town with no zoning (and this was not by accident). We don't have to pay for building permits or notify the town when we add structures. We are still bound by Vermont's strict septic laws, and in 2026 we will be updating our septic to a larger system (costing $60,000) so that we can stay septic-legal as we add more tiny houses. This cost is a big burden and is being paid for solely by me from my savings. Having such low monthly expenses is the only thing that has enabled me to save enough for such a big expense.

• We also have very low food expenses, due to sharing a flock of chickens, a large vegetable garden, and free food from our part-time jobs in the local agriculture scene.

• We live a rugged life that is physically demanding and often inconvenient. We haul our water by hand from the stream or melt snow on the woodstove in the winter. We process all our own firewood on site, which is our sole source of heat in our tiny houses. We shovel the driveway by hand in winter. All of us are between 20 and 50 years of age, in good health, and enjoy manual labor. Our community is definitely not accessible for people with less strength and mobility. We do support each other with labor and supplies when one of us gets sick. We are working on building a community cabin with rooms that can be accessible for a few beloved community elders who might want to join us when they need to stop living independently, but funds are tight so it is not ready for residents yet.

• • •

We are really committed to keeping living expenses low at Hunter's Hollow, because this enables us to focus on our passions and build a life that is very close to nature. However, there are some shadow sides to this approach as well:

• When you adjust your life to this level of low living expenses, it can be hard to pivot back to a more expensive form of housing. Landmates who have left have

needed support from family to provide housing for them or help them pay a higher rent in town.

• We can't really support short- or long-term physical disabilities. For both of my gender confirmation surgeries, I had to stay with friends for close to a month during my recovery. The lack of running water and the necessity to lift and carry so much (firewood, buckets of water, etc.) at home wasn't feasible after surgery. If any of us gets ill in a more extended way, we'll probably have to move off the land, and gathering the funds to do so could be very hard.

• Because of our location 10 miles from the nearest population center in a climate with severe winters, we are all dependent on personal cars. The expense to maintain a winter-worthy car on our bumpy dirt road is steep, and several landmates have totaled their cars on the icy and muddy roads and had to replace them. Car expenses are the biggest line item for our personal budgets and likely the biggest contribution we each make to carbon emissions. This is a frustration that we have not found a way around. Buying land closer to town would solve it, but is prohibitively expensive.

• When living expenses are so extremely low, people rely on minimal income streams that can be unreliable or seasonal, and sometimes they struggle to pay even the $150 in land dues. This puts all the other landmates in the position of having to cover for them until they figure out their finances and catch up, which has created resentments at times.

• While I've attempted to arrange for continued affordable living on this land in my will, in the case of my death there would be some upheavals and the parameters of life at Hunter's Hollow could change.

• While the majority of dwellings on the land are on wheels and can be moved off the land if a resident leaves, one dwelling isn't, and that person will have to walk away from their investment in that structure if they ever choose to leave.

• We are in a very white community, and with the exception of a few seasonal apprentices, all of us are white. We're aware that this makes our community less easy to join for those who don't share our white-skinned privilege.

Like countless land-based people before us, we depend on good health and the friendship and generosity of our landmates to ensure our housing remains workable. While we don't have family ties of blood or marriage binding us together, we intentionally build strong networks both among the landmates and in the wider community, so we can summon the support we need if our health and mobility shift. On balance, we prefer the necessity of ingenuity and mutual aid to the stress of working a "real job" and being bound to a traditional career. That said, as property taxes continue to rise we'll probably need to raise our land dues a bit in the next few years. We hope to keep navigating this together with the values of thrift, collaboration, and earth stewardship at the core of our decisions.

Overall, we're thriving, and we hope that our story can be an inspiration for others who want to live in community but don't have the money to join an elite cohousing community or to purchase enough land for a formal ecovillage. We believe that community can thrive outside of a middle-class setting and that these experiments in low-input living give us all a hopeful model for ways to live together in the midst of climate instability, political upheaval, and energy descent. ❧

Murphy Robinson is a queer carpenter and former wilderness guide living in unceded Abenaki territory (also known as Vermont). He loves firewood work parties, chatting about astrology with his landmates, and watching the inter-cat drama cycles unfold at the tiny house village. Simple and affordable housing is one of his passions and you can learn more about his tiny house construction business at www.dandelionhousingproject.com.

Our gardens, communal grid-tied utility shed, and tarp pavillion.

Landmates celebrate Beltane together in the rain.

A view of the Tiny House village from the driveway in winter.

Photos courtesy of Murphy Robinson

Finding Home:
Ideals and Limitations at an Income-Sharing, Egalitarian Commune

By Adam Reich

Seeking Change

After a brief climb up the corporate ladder, I find myself on a journey of healing and unlearning. I had spent two decades collecting degrees and names of prestigious companies to put on my resume, hoping to validate my worth to myself and others. At nearly 40 years of age, I had reached my dream job. However, I had become jaded, convinced that our endless search for new technologies was ultimately destructive—generally trying to fix problems that we had created ourselves, and inadvertently creating new problems in the process. I longed for a more authentic life with simpler sources of joy and fulfillment.

I also had begun to see the ways in which I was complicit in inequality. The corporate structures, compensation decisions, and hiring practices of most of the companies I had worked for were actively worsening economic inequality and sustaining systemic racism. I wanted out. I longed to participate in the economy in less extractive and exploitative ways, and to relate to others as collaborators rather than competitors.

I also sensed that I was deeply disconnected from the earth, and lacked the sense of truly belonging to a place. I had spent my life pursuing opportunities wherever they took me, conditioned by a diasporic culture in which most people have had (and in some cases, are in the process of) a traumatic severance with some homeland. I longed to cultivate a reciprocal relationship with the land, rather than continuing the untethered pursuit of self-interest that had characterized my life. I wanted to recalibrate myself to savor simpler sources of joy and fulfillment. I deeply wanted to live on and tend land, and to do so in community with others.

These desires pushed me to spend countless hours obsessively researching communities on ic.org, spend six months as a farming apprentice at a Zen center, and make in-person visits to about 10 communities. After a two-year process of searching, I eventually found my way to Alpha Farm, an income-sharing commune located in rural Deadwood, Oregon, halfway between Eugene and the Coast. I was enamored with the beauty of the land and felt a strong desire to become intimate with the forests and streams. Though the community seemed to me to be in major need of more love, energy, direction, and maintenance, I saw so much potential for a thriving community and homestead. I opted to accept the invitation to return to Alpha as a provisional member, taking a step towards putting down roots and becoming a "person of place."

Community in Hibernation

I arrived at my new home in March of 2024 at the tail end of the wet season, marked by weeks-on-end of clouds and rain. That gray, wet, and cold period is beautiful in its own way, and is a much-needed part of life's ongoing cycle of birth and death. And yet it wears on you, as your heart longs to feel the warmth of the sun on your face, and the sweet memory of last year's wildflower bloom is distorted into impatience and dissatisfaction with the comparatively monochrome green of the verdant landscape.

The community, too, was in a gray pe-

riod of sorts, still recovering from the loss of its last remaining founder and elder nearly two years prior. Caroline Estes, a widely-respected teacher and facilitator of consensus decision-making, had been held in love and cared for by younger members of the community as her body and mind had gradually failed her.[1]

Caroline's passing thrust Alpha back into adolescence, with a need to rediscover its identity in the absence of the figure who served as the steadfast authority on its purpose and vision. As with all things, this loss also represented a rare opportunity for those who remained. Caroline's tenacity and conviction had been a major force in shaping what Alpha Farm had been, and simultaneously prevented it from becoming anything else. It can be argued that at times Caroline held on too tightly to her own vision, stifling the evolution and growth of the farm. She can hardly be blamed for this, given the outsize share of time and resources that she contributed to make her vision possible.

Much like the black bears who periodically feast in the apple orchard in preparation for winter, Alpha had seemingly entered a state of hibernation. Its metabolism had slowed, with expenditures of time and labor averaging well below the agreed-upon 40 hours per week, though remaining adequate to sustain itself. Its temperature was depressed, with a palpable absence of warmth and engagement in meetings and check-ins. Alpha was surviving, though the infrastructure gradually atrophied under deferred maintenance.

Much credit is due to the members of that time for keeping Alpha alive during this transition. The embers of this audacious project had been carefully cradled and gently kept glowing, ready to return to flame when conditions allow. With the longest-standing member at the time I arrived having lived at Alpha for only five years, much of the institutional knowledge of the past 50+ years had been lost, leaving a space for something new to emerge.

Inspired by Idealism

Alpha Farm is structured to be non-hierarchical and operates on consensus, promising to offer all members equal decision-making power. Thanks to the hard work and generosity of countless past members, the 287-acre property is fully paid off and owned/managed by the cooperative. Alpha Farm is an income-sharing commune, meaning that the money earned by its members goes into a shared account that is used to cover all of the operating costs and living expenses of the cooperative and all of its members. Housing, food, vehicles, and basic necessities are provided, and a modest stipend of ~$75/month is given to each person for other personal spending.

Though members are expected to contribute 40 hours of work each week, each member typically spends just 10 hours per week (on average) performing income-generating work that one would associate with a typical "job." Primarily, this amounts to delivering mail for the rural USPS route which is Alpha's primary source of income, or performing handyperson jobs for neighbors. The remaining time is spent on homesteading and community-focused projects like gardening, food preservation, cooking, cleaning, maintenance, firewood collection, taking care of sick or aging community members, and various forms of engagement with the broader community of Deadwood. Most of these activities were things that I would have previously had to do outside of my typical 40+ hour/week jobs.

The income-sharing model and lack of financial buy-in intends to make membership available to people of all economic backgrounds and skills; prospective members need only bring an enthusiasm for communal living, and a willingness to contribute to the community. Full membership is offered after one year of demonstrated ability to uphold community agreements and work through any interpersonal conflict that may arise.

I was inspired by this model. I loved that all work was valued equally. Whether you are out earning money, at home growing food, or caring for an elder, your contributions are rewarded equally. I loved that there was no owner. There was no landlord to defer to, and no hierarchy for decision-making. This governance and financial structure represented a radical departure and refreshing alternative to the companies of my past, where in addition to exorbitant compensation discrepancies, many people in the workforce were hired in ways that effectively stripped them of paid time off and comparable health insurance. Executives would make "strategic" decisions that would upend the lives of workers as though they were expendable resources. The vision of Alpha Farm felt to me to be a needed medicine for these times.

Facing Reality

The structure of Alpha Farm and similar income-sharing communes does make it more accessible to folks of varied class backgrounds than most other community structures given that there is no requirement to have money saved for a buy-in and

Photos courtesy of Adam Reich

no monthly rent to pay. However, there are still various ways in which one's economic status can limit access and shape their experience in community.

A. Obstacles to joining

Before a person or family is invited to join Alpha as a provisional member, a two-week visit is required to give the community and prospective members the chance to experience living and working together. Though two weeks is hardly adequate to get to know a person well, this is also a lot of work to miss out on when money is tight. The cost of travel can also be an obstacle. The challenges of arranging a two-week visit are further compounded for families, who have to contend with multiple schedules and school absences. While accommodations are offered to address some of these issues, the burden remains outsize for some.

Making the decision to join Alpha and committing to sharing your earnings with the community is a decision which can land very differently for different people. For those who have experienced financial insecurity in the past yet have prospects for a well-paying career, participation in an income-sharing commune like Alpha Farm can represent a major financial sacrifice; relinquishing the possibility of upward mobility can be a particularly hard pill to swallow.

B. Unequal access to resources during membership

Alpha Farm's collective earnings generally fall below the federal poverty line based on the average per-person annual income. With numerous buildings and vehicles to maintain, and ambitions for building a more robust garden and livestock program, the current income does not permit a sizable personal-spending stipend. For those members who wish to make additional money, it is possible to take jobs outside of the 40-hour commitment and keep 100 percent of those earnings. However, it can be difficult to make the time and to find available work given the rural/remote location.

What that means in practice is that those with outside financial resources or supportive families have an easier time paying for trips away from the farm, or buying nice-to-have items that the farm doesn't provide. To address this discrepancy, some egalitarian communities ask that members refrain from accessing any personal funds while they are living in the community. Currently Alpha Farm does not impose any such restrictions on use of personal funds.

C. Challenges with leaving

In the romanticized projections of how one's time at Alpha will unfold, there is often a hope for "forever." I came here looking for *home*, with the dream of investing my time and love into the place and the people here, with the hope that this love and care will be reciprocated in my times of need.

However, this promise often fails to manifest. High turnover rates have meant that the majority of the people who come to Alpha ultimately leave, taking with them only memories, and often less money than when they arrived. Some of the turnover has been due to interpersonal conflict, and the community's lack of internal resources/skills to hold the complex trauma that our world burdens so many with. Some turnover has been due to burnout, resulting from some members pulling more than their fair share until resentment or exhaustion overtook them. And some people leave simply from a desire for new experiences/opportunities.

For those members who do not have personal savings or access to other resources, it can be jarring to be thrust back into mainstream society where rent, food, and other essentials require upfront payment. There is no safety net, which is not always fully grasped when a new member joins with ideas of forever. For members leaving on good terms, the community will often provide bus/train fare or adjust work-hour agreements to make it easier to save money before leaving, but the transition can still be challenging.

This dynamic can also have a psychological effect while still in community. In difficult moments when the thought of leaving surfaces, those with the means to leave easily have the option to

choose to stay and work through challenging circumstances with patience and perseverance. For those without the means to relocate easily, the same experience can lead to a sense of stuckness and disempowerment.

Acceptance

After nearly two years of living at Alpha Farm, I have a greater understanding of the limitations for idealism and good intentions to offset the economic and social forces of the surrounding world. Though Alpha strives to be inclusive and foster an egalitarian environment, the examples above highlight some of the ways that it falls short of that ideal. Still, I remain deeply inspired by the values at its core.

At a time when the world seems to be facing many crises and there is so much cause for grief, I sometimes find myself wondering if I am doing the right thing. While income-sharing and non-hierarchical governance are a radical rebuke to the status quo, my inner critic frequently suggests to me that this project is too small to make a difference. I try to remind myself that the impact and value of this work cannot be quantified via conventional means—a deeply confusing notion for my engineer-trained brain. This is but one project among many that may be a seed for a different culture and economy, which may emerge in some non-linear way that cannot be predicted or planned.

Despite my own desire to enter into deep relationship with the community and surrounding land/ecosystem, I can feel the lingering fear of truly committing to a place. The highly individualistic mindset of my old career and lifestyle offered an illusion of control and security that was reassuring, though unsustainable and isolating. The adjustment to a more communal mindset has been slow and at times uncomfortable, yet has provided a richness in personal growth.

Emergence

I have been deeply proud of the changes our community has made in the two years since I first arrived. Recognizing clear opportunities for improvement, Alpha Farm stepped back for a year—pausing visitors and new members to focus inward. During that time, we revised our bylaws, community agreements, and mission, vision, and values statements; redesigned the new-member process; adjusted policies to create greater equity between full and provisional members; and experimented with new systems of accountability. A new 2,500-square-foot greenhouse stands ready to extend our growing season, and common spaces are now cleaner and more organized, ready to welcome new members.

Alongside strengthening our internal systems, we have also been working to deepen our interdependence beyond our small intentional community. We are pursuing membership in the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, aligning with other income-sharing communes and connecting more intentionally to the broader movement. We have also taken the first steps toward establishing a nonprofit, Alpha Foundation, to advance the practice of communal living and to more effectively steward and protect the land. And our growing presence in Deadwood has been warmly welcomed by our neighbors.

I am looking forward to working alongside our neighbors to explore new services Alpha might offer which will diversify our income while strengthening the resilience of our local watershed and the broader Deadwood community, from brush clearing with sheep and goats to small-scale lumber milling. I am equally eager to deepen our practice of consensus within the community and to learn new tools together, like co-counseling, so that both current and future members are better supported in tending to the grief and trauma we each carry.

The work that remains to be done at Alpha is a microcosm of the work of the world today. We will continue striving towards egalitarianism, learning to live more lightly on the land, and learning to hold each other with grace and care as we navigate the uncertainty of the climate, economy, and politics. As we learn from our missteps and successes, I feel both excited and hopeful that we will keep growing towards a thriving, resilient community. ❧

Adam Reich lives and works at Alpha Farm in Deadwood, Oregon. He dabbles in all things including gardening, cooking and baking, mail delivery, maintenance, administration and planning, community-building, and questioning the nature of reality. He can be reached at adam@alphafarm.org, www.alphafarm.org.

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1. See Laird Schaub's "Remembering Lina," COMMUNITIES #197, pp. 64, 62-63.

Black Economic Power through Collective Naturing: Our road to remembrance

By Danyale Brown

Earthskills friends—all people of the global majority; all earth tenders.

Me learning to love my cultural foods from the seedling to stew.

***Adapted from an article posted May 29, 2025 at** embracetheorganic.com/blogs/news/remembering-earthskills-as-black-indigenous-and-poc.*

Over time the Black community at large has forgotten how to live with and from Earth. Whether through fear or greed or confusion, we've given up our powerful legacy. To be fair, my aspiration while growing up smelling manure in my country California cow town was not to raise cows. I associated raising cows and my high school "grower" program FFA (Future Farmers of America) as an annoying reminder of my connection to the institution of slavery and I wanted nothing to do with it. In fact, I wanted the opposite. I wanted a cozy desk job with a salary and project opportunities that management hinted might be available. A nice building to work in every day. My own personal chosen enslavement.

The corporate game is to strategize and manipulate for the dollar—so both I, and the company I worked for, could make a whole lot of it. And I did. And once I saw through it, I eventually hated it. All the while I allowed the murky cloud of subjugation of my ancestors and the culture they built to destroy the connection to the Earth that held me.

I did myself a huge disservice because the peace I feel in nature now is unprecedented.

What's more unfortunate? Black men and women of the past, our ancestors, sought out open land to escape prejudice and racism, to find peace and work for themselves and their families. In hindsight, I realize that I turned my back on the basics of my culture, passed down through organizing and saving coins in old tin jars and under mattresses, and rebuilding after what you created was destroyed by a jealous racism or the system that enables it while promising much and giving loose crumbs, and only when it benefits the system.

What we have learned over the past 250 years of legal enslavement, oppression, and manipulation for our labor and culture is that living in the dominant culture steeps the soul in greed, cruelty, and capitalist ideals that extract labor, to some degree, from all areas of life, and in every way possible. Is it just my social media algorithm that makes me think there is a collective whisper getting louder, encouraging the rest of us to revise the "American Dream" and live like our people did before when they could? With autonomy. On the land.

We are natural beings living on a finite natural planet, gifted with the opportunity to give back to it by the indigenous peoples of lands all around the world. We've taken the wrong path for long enough. Not through years of lazy recycling as the culture will have you think (though recycling is another corporate-created activity designed to put the onus on consumers; guilting us about our consumption while simultaneously promoting overconsumption), but by our collective negligence to learn to give back to the land we commute on, hike through, fly over, and road trip across. We have forgotten to feed it back what we take from it. To create compost piles. To throw fruit, nuts, and seeds back to Earth, and to give them the pleasure of doing what they do best… Grow.

Through this act of giving back we develop new relation-

ships. Planting flowers, grasses, and trees, or starting a garden. Welcoming pollinators to spaces not infested with pesticides and remembering how to have them around without feeling a threat to our lives. Discarding the dead and allowing time to decompose and prepare for life again. These are our love languages to Earth—and they are languages we all can speak.

A very successful thing this system has done to communities of color is to quietly dare us to embody a stereotype. Don't get caught loving chicken or watermelon too much or trying to get a deal on a purchase or you're instantly tossed into the bucket of just another typical poor Black person. To be honest, this is a trigger point for many of us—myself included at many times of my life. I craved to be perceived like those succeeding in the dominant culture. Like middle-class corporate white folks. The standard. We want equality but we are losing teeth fighting a battle for equity that is impossible for us to win. The easy blame to cast is class or more obviously, our skin tone, challenging our proximity to whiteness.

Yes, we want the degree (Black women's excellence tends to earn us many), we want the well-paying job, we want the entrepreneur title making six figures. We want to fit into American society. But alone, each of these activities is extractive; stripping from nature and Earth's finite resources. Because in pursuit of these western symbols of success, we become resource-centered and resource-reliant. In pursuit of more money, we lose the time and the energy to focus on how to keep ourselves in a balanced state. We are, therefore, in no energetic shape to nurture the planet; to inspire her to turn for another 100,000 years without kicking us the hell off. Instead we pursue more: more food, more cocktails, more petty cash, more clout; even at the expense of our own health, relationships, and our lives.

I'm not here to place blame, because the way we live when we don't think critically about how we're living is no fault of our own. If you grew up in poverty or with less, naturally you'll crave, and fight, for more. Similarly, if you grew up in some smelly cow town avoiding main street to save yourself from the stench of livestock, naturally, [some] will search for other, more luxurious paths of success.

But as we see when we traverse across state lines to attend any earth-focused or grounded tent music festival or gathering, when we are closer to the land, when we ground ourselves in the dirt, when we can identify and appreciate nature's goodness either by foraging or tending the land—we are happier. We are more fulfilled. We are less pressed about what we don't have or how much more we need.

Black folks have been robbed of our wisdom as it relates to the land. This American soil. Let's not forget, we are the ones who tended this land after it was unceremoniously and barbarously stolen from our indigenous brothers and sisters. We established ways of innovation and growth like no other. We uncovered and understood how to make lifeless, depleted soil life-giving again, and we, willingly or otherwise, taught these practices to our European neighbors and enslavers. Fast forward generations where descendants of the brilliant enslaved botanist educators all over the South were inspired by violence and a hope for fair wages to move north and west, into concrete ghettos; while others who were actually able to prove ownership to pass down land to their descendants, despite sabotage from our nation-state, were ignored, violated, or worse. With few allies to push forward fairness and truth, we lost much of our land knowledge.

We have earned our right to remembrance. The indigenous community famously has the Land Back initiative, a decade-long effort to consolidate and return land to Tribal ownership. It is my opinion that Black people of America and all around the world should engage in mass wisdom take-back where we remember how our ancestors survived and thrived. How they tended and created and took care of one another and the land. On the promise of one day holding it on our own, in sovereignty.

I propose we spend time composting and planting seeds. Not just if we're locc'd (or "dreadlocked") or greet one another with "grand risings." Corporate bosses and baddies have earned the right to remember too. For those who own a home, grow and

On High Hog Farm.

Growing ginger root at the farm.

Creating new traditions crafting with natural materials and spruce clippings.

Photos courtesy of Danyale Brown

Playing with Indigo dying vats.

compost. If you can afford to hire someone to tend a garden for you, do it. If you're in a college environment and can petition for a community garden, fight. Grow your herbs in two-liter bottles and place them in your window for later days. It is time we take back the wisdom of tending this beautiful utopian rock we call Turtle Island or the United States of America. Let's remember the practices that our granny's granny's granny held for safety, for health, and for community.

In the '90s the Black communities had the habit of accusing one another of being "crabs in a bucket."[1] Neighbors, friends, and family have been saying it since I can remember. Decades later, we recognize that trope as another lie fed to us by the dominant culture to protect itself from our collective knowing. Read *Collective Courage* by Jessica Gordon Nembhard and see just how massive a lie it is. But just like we recognize the scam of capitalism, the way that it convinces us of limited resources—as if there is only so much money and we have to fight to take our piece—we must recognize and remember that this planet, and those of us who inhabit it, are abundant and rich in resources.

There is plenty for everyone as long as reciprocity lives.

Similarly, if we rely on a system that reduces us to what we can create individually, without support or sharing with our neighbors and friends, then yes, we may have to fight tooth and nail and convince the system that we deserve more than our neighbors and friends do. If we're being honest though, that's not an option for many of us. We are naturally community-minded people. We love, and choose through proximity, our neighbors-turned-family, and we cherish our friends. But if we create our own resources: tend the land and share, learn new skills and share, engage each other in community while sharing, we are rich. And that's not cheeky hyperbole kumbaya crap. It's facts.

We do not need this system if we invest in one another. If your neighbor has an overabundance of tomatoes, you never have to go to the store for salsa. That's money in your pocket. That's time back in your life. True that that example keeps this idea very surface-level, but you get the gist. If you have a friend who can fix cars and you know how to sew, be creative and trade to save you both the time working for a limited wage to buy more clothes or a new car. Organize a barter and pay no one. When we work in solidarity, we save in every sense of the word. We save each other through community, through love, care, and connection. We save money and therefore we save time. We save our children because we have time and money for them and they see us making the time to create lasting communities which they will recreate and strengthen with ease.

We save ourselves because we are no longer tied to a capitalistic organization and to whether or not they give us more hours and treat us with respect or extract from the neighborhoods we love. And we save the planet. We feed it more, we listen to it. We get to know it again. We learn its eccentricities just like our Ancestors did. We learn what it needs. We remember these things because these are all things that we know or have known that we have lost. It's time we take our wisdom back. ❧

Danyale Brown is a mother, herbalist, agrarian steward, and cooperative economics advocate. Her dedication to community care and self-determination inspired her to rebuild her life, leaving corporate marketing behind, to embark on a life path in Earth reverence and solidarity economy work. Danyale is passionate about the land we live on, food preservation strategies, ways to enjoy food as medicine, and herbal medicine for optimum health. Danyale practices living in ways that avoid the dominant capitalist culture; she's currently collaborating to organize a farmer cooperative in Metro Atlanta to address small farmer economic security and community building around the real food movement. Contact Danyale at dmonetb@gmail.com and see embracetheorganic.com.

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1. A term "[u]sed to describe a person (or subculture) that does everything in its power to destroy the ambitions of those among them who wish to improve themselves." [Per urbandictionary.com.]

Welcoming Immigrant Neighbors into Our Communities

By Anonymous

Many intentional communities desire and have attempted to achieve greater inclusivity. But this dream has often not been realized because of many obstacles, including financial or cultural ones. Our community has been able to welcome people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds by building relationships with and welcoming recent immigrants to join our community. This article will not indicate the name and location of our community so as not to receive attention of the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).

In 2016 our community formed a Circle of Care under the auspices of Catholic Charities, a US State Department-designated refugee resettlement agency. We were paired with a family of Congolese refugees to help them resettle. With the generous help of an owner of a large unit we were able to rent a four-bedroom, two-bathroom unit to the family of eight—two parents, four young adult children, and two school-age children. Though they were not as active in our community as we may have wished, we got to know each other. They came speaking Swahili and French, so learning English took time. They lived in our community for five years. The older brothers enjoyed shooting baskets with other children in the community, while the youngest joined in playing soccer. We helped tutor them in English and offered advice when sought about adapting to life in the United States. One of the adult children got married in our Common House. Our community was happy to have this Congolese family as our neighbors.

Where are they now? All eight are proudly United States citizens and the adults have good local jobs. The oldest son and his American partner have two children and bought a house two years ago, as did the parents. All the adult children are now married and all but one are parents. We were happy to see them when they came to the community celebration of our 20th year.

In 2019, a young mother seeking asylum from Central America moved in with a family in our community, sharing a home together for three years. She had a severely disabled child and members of the community have rallied around the child and supported her. Just two years later, her two sisters came with two other children, and two male partners came soon after. And just a year later, one sister gave birth to a baby born here, who is growing up a cohousing child—eager to chat and connect with everyone, adults and children alike. They were able to occupy the house left by the Congolese family and a small rental unit. A number of our residents speak Spanish so we have been able to have deeper relationships and connections than we had with the Congolese family. Two of the sisters make pupusas for sale weekly that residents and neighbors love.

Through creative planning and the generosity of our community we have sought ways to incorporate immigrant community members into the community. Through loans and the volunteer labor of our members and the resident Latinos, the one large unit has been converted into three separate living units in a shared home. Several of our members put up funds for a mortgage to purchase the house from the original owner, who bought a smaller unit that became available. Now one of the sisters is an owner-member and thus fully a part of our community. Our children are learning Spanish and the Latino children, English, as they play together daily. Families have become close and connected, building friendship across race, class, and language. We interpret English-Spanish at community gatherings, and at the dinner table at common meals or inside conversations you'll hear a mix of Spanish or English or Spanglish. We have valued becoming friends and neighbors of these new Americans. All our lives have been enriched.

Our major concern is whether this nation will allow these newly contributing members of our community to stay in our country. We have developed and adopted a protocol should ICE show up in our community. We ask readers of Communities to consider the information in this article with discretion.

We have found that by inviting immigrant community members to join our cohousing neighborhood, we are living by our values of inclusivity and enriching our community.

Gifts and Challenges in Radical Affordability

By Kyla Wargel

As winter trudges along and I find myself living alone, I reminisce often about the intentional community I used to live in, and I long for the comfort—and perhaps even the friction—that sharing a household brought me.

I'm reminded of something a wise Quaker, Lloyd Lee Wilson, once said when I was living in that community: "Rejoice that you live in a way where someone can go into your room and take something from you—what a privileged way to live." I had just told him that one of my roommates took cash out of my sock drawer.

For context, the community was the Bloomington Christian Radical Catholic Worker—a real mouthful of a name that sometimes creates more confusion than clarity. One of the founders sometimes likes to explain, "but we aren't Catholic, and we don't work."

The community began in 2008 in the tradition of the Catholic Worker (CW) movement, which Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin started in 1930 as a response to social issues, especially those stemming from the Great Depression. Catholic Workers are self-organized communities where people live simply, practice nonviolence, and do the works of mercy, especially providing housing for those who need it. The Bloomington CW community morphed and changed over its 17-year life but generally consisted of four houses on Blair Avenue occupied by a mix of families, couples, and single adults—some of whom were there because of a drive or calling to live in community and others as "guests"—adults or families who might otherwise be houseless.

Guests could live in the community for up to one year for free in exchange for about five hours per week of participation in our shared life, including four dinners, a community hangout, and a one-on-one check-in. If guests had income, we asked them to save half to use when they moved out.

Most of the adult community members had part-time jobs outside the home. Those of us with income contributed a percentage of it, 25 to 50 percent, to the community, which then covered all basic housing expenses as well as various odds and ends for the community and the guests. We received donations from extended community members as well.

This structure made housing affordable for some of us and entirely free for others. It also meant that we were living across real differences in income, stability, and power—differences that would eventually show up in my sock drawer.

A dreamy "day in the life" looked like a handful of us waking up before dawn to sing and pray together in our handbuilt tiny house chapel, heated by a woodstove in the winter. I'd go to one of the families' houses afterward for oatmeal with delectable toppings—homemade yogurt, mulberries or blueberries or strawberries from the property when they were in season, nuts, nut butter, honey. Over breakfast, we'd talk, or read, or try to solve the Wordle together, or make up Wordles for each other until the kids left for school and the rest of us went off to our various jobs or projects for the day. Once a week, we'd have a morning meeting and afternoon work session around the houses. Another day, we'd have a big evening potluck open to anyone, often followed by a themed discussion, house show, or game night. We might simultaneously be celebrating a birthday, the end of someone's parole or probation, or a milestone in sobriety.

Indeed, a privileged way of life, with many reasons to rejoice.

The first guests I lived with were Hannah, who was in her early 20s, pregnant, and worn out, and Vikki, who was in her late 30s and energetic, spunky, and always looking her best.

About two weeks into living with them, I came home late one night, so I didn't want to be loud or turn on too many lights before I slipped into bed.

I noticed that my backpack was on the chair in my room instead of on the floor where I thought I'd left it, but I didn't think much of it.

In the morning, in the light of day, I realized several things were slightly amiss in my little bedroom—the curtain over the closet not completely closed, knick-knacks on the top of my dresser askew, a drawer slightly ajar. I started to develop a theory that someone—perhaps Hannah or Vikki—had been in my room the night before. I looked around to see if everything still seemed to be there. Laptop? Check. Wallet? Check. Then I checked my sock drawer, where I'd stuck $200 or so—gone.

I was surprised. Just the day before, I'd been helping Vikki's daughter with her chemistry homework. Hannah was out of her room and hanging out with us in the common spaces, too. I felt like we were really bonding. I wasn't sure how to process that in hindsight. Was the kindness and relationship building from last night fake? Was it intended to get me to let my guard down and not suspect they'd take something from me? Did they just see an opportunity and seize it?

Also, I was new to living with guests—was this normal? It certainly broke our expectations for one another. Even before people moved in, we would tell them that communication, honesty, and trust are the most important prerequisites, more so than incarceration history, diagnoses, substance use, or even recent bed bug encounters.

I ran into a fellow community member, Andrea, that morning in "biketopia" as I was grabbing my bike to head to work, and I told her what happened. She took it very seriously (it was not the norm) and said she would talk to Vikki and Hannah. I wasn't sure if that was the right move, having someone else talk to them, but I trusted Andrea. Pretty quickly, while I was at work, Andrea talked with both of them. They admitted to going into my room and taking the cash and even handed it over to Andrea, which I hadn't expected.

Later, Hannah apologized for taking the cash, and Vikki apologized for knowing about it and supporting the operation.

Although I was surprised by Hannah taking cash from my room, I didn't have negative feelings toward her. She was obviously going through a lot—she was sick often, pregnant, trying really hard to stay sober, trying to be in her three-year-old son's life as much as possible, and didn't have a job. I wasn't too bothered by Vikki, either, for knowing about Hannah going into my room and maybe helping, and, funnily, accusing me of stealing her huge false eyelashes in the process, which is really truly not my style.

The supportive community around me made all the difference. It was never just me left to navigate living with Hannah and Vikki on my own. The community had my back, and together we asked ourselves, "how can we love them well?" and "how do we love each other well?"

In my journal that day, I asked myself why I felt relatively pleasant about the situation and responded to my query that "this is the real messy stuff that is life." We were trying to live in a different way, across differences in stability and income and life experience, and it wasn't clear how to do that well. We were bound to have bumps along the way.

I could see the huge imbalances in our lives—in trauma history, education opportunities, income, and addiction history. I had a part-time job where I made $12 an hour—not much by most American standards, but still, I had money. Vikki had money from time to time—she would do sex work occasionally to gain a bit of buying power, a bit of choice, a way to buy a vape or fake nails or makeup. Hannah didn't have any form of income—of course it made sense to poke around for cash and take some.

The theft forced us to confront something uncomfortable about our model. We had made housing free, but we hadn't made dignity free. We required shared meals, meetings, and emotional labor, but we hadn't accounted for the quiet humiliation

Photos courtesy of Kyla Wargel

of having no discretionary money—no way to buy even a snack without asking someone else. The sock drawer wasn't just a breach of trust; it was a reminder that while our structure changed the dynamic of having to pay rent, it didn't redistribute power or money.

As a community, we realized that our guests had a need for cash that we had not seen clearly and that they didn't feel comfortable asking us directly for, so we gave them cash from the community funds and worked on rebuilding trust and communication with Hannah and Vikki.

It wasn't easy or straightforward. A couple of times, Hannah and I tried to normalize things by watching her favorite cooking show on the one TV in the community. She drifted in and out of sleep or excused herself to be sick. With her pregnancy, recent sobriety, and anxiety, her health made it difficult to fully engage.

The house often carried the sour smell of sickness, sometimes layered with whatever fragrance Vikki was using to mask it. Once, we found stiff, frozen vomit-soaked clothes in the outdoor recycling bin and moved them to the trash.

We were able to hold and work through a lot.

At one point, we decided that getting pedicures would be a good bonding activity. We used community funds for a handful of us, including Vikki and Hannah, to go to a nail salon, which was fun but perhaps didn't have quite the bonding effect we'd hoped for.

Within a few weeks, we asked Vikki to move out. She had asked Hannah to do sex work, and Hannah felt pressured. It was a new scenario for us, and we realized we couldn't ask Hannah to continue living under that pressure. Luckily, Vikki had some options for another place to live.

I moved into a different community house around the same time, and Hannah's mom, Samantha moved in with Hannah. Samantha and Hannah had often lived apart during Hannah's childhood, due to split custody, periods of addiction, and periods of incarceration. The dynamic wasn't perfect, but for a while, Hannah got to soak up care and love from her mother.

Hannah's three-year-old son, Peter, lived with his dad and grandma. When Hannah was feeling up to it and could find someone with a car seat to give Peter a ride, or if we could drive her out to him, she could spend three hours with her child, sometimes twice a week. Once, a few of us from the community went to a meeting with Hannah and her Department of Child Safety worker, as a show of the support she had around her. She was continually progressing and regressing according to the standards DCS wanted her to meet and was eventually granted overnight visits with Peter at the community.

Before Hannah's new baby was born, Hannah moved in with her dad in rural Indiana. She briefly had custody of the baby before DCS intervened. We've since lost touch.

Over 17 years, we hosted dozens of guests, and, like Hannah, each was carrying immense trauma in their bodies and histories. The Catholic Worker was a steady reminder of the harm and instability our society creates and was an experiment in using community as a balm for that harsh reality.

We didn't produce many by-the-book success stories, but we did create moments of respite, connection, and relative stability. An address helped one man secure early release from prison. Another, after decades incarcerated, reunited with

family once he was staying with us. Some guests eventually found stable housing or work; many remained entangled in low-paying jobs, bureaucratic mazes, and poor housing options.

We said our measure of success was whether a guest felt loved. Sometimes we succeeded, by marking anniversaries of loss, celebrating birthdays and holidays, and listening to stories for hours. Sometimes we failed. Guests grew tired, and sometimes resentful, of the required dinners and hangouts. For better or worse, we sometimes imposed our own ideas of what health and love look like—like offering water when someone might prefer Mountain Dew.

We were gifted with the presence of these guests in our lives, through shared meals, jokes, stories, and experiences. We witnessed each other's lives on a daily basis and challenged and expanded our perspectives. I felt a small sense of agency against the societal forces that made such housing necessary.

However, the lifestyle was draining as well. My weekly "ally meetings" with a guest—which could involve rides to appointments, hearing traumatic stories on repeat, navigating social service agencies—could feel frustrating or heavy. I put time and emotional energy into those relationships and often met my own needs elsewhere.

I don't think we found a one-size-fits-all solution to how to make housing radically affordable or inclusive, but we experimented with what made sense in our context and adapted as we learned.

It's been five years since I lived with Hannah. As I move through this post-community or perhaps a between-communities phase of my life, I'm reminded of Lloyd Lee Wilson's words on this type of proximity—"what a privileged way of life."

At the time, his words felt clarifying, giving me a sense of perspective to the strange lightness I felt around the sock drawer situation. Of course it was a privilege to live near others rather than in isolation, even if it meant they might inconvenience me or take something from me. My life was rich with proximal relationships.

Other privileges were at play as well—I was choosing how close to be to risk and instability (which Hannah, Vikki, and others carry despite not wanting to). I had the resources to easily leave the community if I wanted. I had a position of relative power, as someone interested in a long-term life in the community.

Now, in my little house, no one opens my sock drawer besides me. I can live alone or seek out housemates whose lives look similar to mine, if I want.

I wonder, though, what inclusivity and affordability look like from the space I currently occupy. Perhaps it means inviting neighbors into my home for meals or even offering a bedroom for free for a period of time.

More broadly, in my loose network, or in intentional communities who are wrestling with inclusivity and affordability, I wonder what small experiments we can undertake. Of course many examples abound—from income sharing and communal ownership; to solidarity funds and free membership. What does a small step in one of these directions look like? How can we live less insulated lives? What can we all gain when we lean into radical affordability and inclusivity, and what are the costs?

I don't have a blueprint. I only know that once, someone opened my sock drawer and took some cash. The world did not fall apart. My community helped sort out what to do next. Living close—across real differences in power, money, and stability—was still a privilege. ❧

Kyla Wargel lived in the Bloomington Christian Radical Catholic Worker community from 2021 until the community's closing in 2025. She enjoys hosting dinners, game nights, and mending hangouts, and she loves calling contra dances and square dances throughout the Midwest.

Affordable, Inclusive Cohousing?

By Kathryn-Jane Hazel

Is cohousing affordable and/or inclusive? That question is one we struggle with at Pacific Gardens Cohousing Community here in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

The simple answer would be sometimes yes, and sometimes no. Yes, when it comes to creative and compassionate ways of reducing the personal costs of living here. No, when it comes to the cost of the units and maintaining our building, with its 8,000 square feet of common space, and four acres-plus of land.

We've worked hard to attract families, as being a multigenerational community is central to our identity. But the bigger units—three-bedroom-and-den—carry a hefty selling price. And because they are bigger, that means utilities, insurance, taxes, and strata fees cost more, which puts stresses on families, who, as one Mom put it, "get pinched first and hardest."

We've made a concerted effort to tackle the affordability crisis this year, discussing our budget process in several meetings and debates, both online and in-person, with the result that for the first time, we actually reduced our annual budget, and our monthly strata fees. By taking a deep dive into our finances and what's costing us and why, we came to a new and more complete understanding of how they work.

We've also taken actions to help those who are struggling with mortgage payments and special assessments, with owners who had the resources setting aside funds to help those on more limited incomes. In addition, we've taken the time to explore our feelings about money and especially, our individual levels of comfort with spending.

Last year when we had to have a special assessment to upgrade our parking lot, we held a meeting focused entirely on our emotions around money. For me it was one of the most moving in our community's history, as people spoke from the heart about how living with financial insecurity had affected them.

Going into the meeting, I had thought most of us were doing okay, but as we went around the circle, it became clear that this was not the reality. Yes, there were a few who felt secure, but many of us were, if not deeply worried about their financial survival, feeling some anxiety about the future. And that helped inform the budget discussions we held this year.

However, even with all these actions, we can't do much about the rising cost of housing, utilities, insurance, or taxes. But we do have a multitude of other ways we reduce costs while living here!

We save on transportation costs by having a Modo carshare parked on property, available for booking not only by people who live at Pacific Gardens, but in our neighbourhood; we installed three EV chargers with a combination of grants and our own labour; we happily provide rides to the ferries and seaplanes, as well as to doctor and eye appointments; we carpool for grocery-shopping and protest marches and arts events; and several of us walk or ride bikes to get to where we want to go.

We save costs on amenities in our building, with our shared internet system, which, at $10 a month per household, is a fraction of the fees Canadian telecoms charge; the solar panels on our roof provide revenue from BC Hydro, our electricity provider; our shared laundry costs $1 to wash and $2 to dry, and in the summer, residents can skip using the dryers for outdoor drying racks; we have several concerts a year, ranging from pop to folk to classical, all for a suggested donation of $10; free showings of award-winning films; guest rooms available for $15 a night; our freecycle cupboard, where people leave housewares, CDs, DVDs, clothing, tools, supplies, and cosmetics they no longer want, for anyone who needs them.

By switching to a drip irrigation system for our gardens, we kept our water bills in check; and thanks to the persistence and hard work of one of our residents, have been able to remove invasive species and rewild areas of our property with guidance from experts and assistance from local gardening businesses, funded by the city grants he so diligently applied for.

And then there's the harvest bounty we receive during the summer months, which our gardening team gleans for us all—a plethora of fruits and vegetables, from figs, to berries of all kinds, apples, pears, and cherries, and tomatoes, kale, lettuce of all kinds, peppers, zucchini, squash, pumpkins, potatoes, and bags of garlic personally delivered to each home.

Most important, though, is the whole "we don't want to keep up with the Joneses" vibe that permeates our cohousing community's culture. We're happy with second-hand clothing, household goods, and furniture. We have no desire to follow the latest trends in home décor or fashion, and we have raised re-gifting to the status of an art form.

Items of furniture make the rounds of different households as their numbers expand or contract with children leaving home and then returning, or siblings swap rooms and neighbours change places. The pretty dress rejected by a teen ends up in the closet of one of the younger Moms. The faded T-shirt formerly worn by a senior ends up on the back of a millennial. We have clothing swaps where we look for dresses, shirts, jeans, sweaters, and jackets that are old to someone else in the building but new to us.

We borrow kitchen equipment, tools, paper shredders, steamers for curtains; gift extra groceries by leaving them out on the little table in front of our strata office; circulate copies of magazines ranging from *The Guardian Weekly* to Canada's

magazine of current affairs, *The Walrus,* and BC's environmental magazine, *The Watershed Sentinel*; and have two bookshelves where we exchange books.

Our team of Recycling Queens—as they like to call themselves—make enough money from the returns of cans and bottles to our local recycling centre to host a pizza party for everyone in the building twice a year. We put out so little trash we only have two bins for pickup—not bad for a building of 25 units and more than 50 people! And the six different forms of composting we use make waste removal not only a lot more affordable for us, but affordable for the planet.

We have several budding entrepreneurs amongst the kids in our community, who raise money for play equipment and games by selling everything from scrumptious muffins and other baked goods to elegant earrings, fruit smoothies, and their personally designed and illustrated Christmas cards.

And when owners want to sell their units, we have an in-house team to help them if they so choose. Some donate a percentage of the proceeds from these sales to our Community Chest. Once a year, we have a fun meeting where we decide what project or amenity we'll use those funds for, be it solar panels, raspberry canes for the garden, a cart for moving stuff, or a new movie projector.

We save thousands of dollars in maintenance costs by doing as much of the work as we can ourselves, drawing on the expertise and labour of our residents. One example is how we handle snow-shovelling. When we explored hiring a snow removal company, the community decided against it because we thought we could do it ourselves, and much better—and we were right.

We consulted with one of our octogenarian residents who had spent his boyhood in the cold winters of northern Ontario, and was an expert in all aspects of snow removal. Mr. Grit, as we dubbed him, gave us tips on when was the best time to start clearing snow, and the application of sand on slippery sidewalks.

The result? We saved some $3,000, did not use environmentally-damaging salt to keep our sidewalks safe, and provided personalized service, digging out those who had to get to school, work, or medical appointments first, plus, we started as soon as necessary—something no commercial snow removal company would do. And, we had fun doing it, with both elders and children shovelling, and the reward of hot chocolate and baked goods after.

So, buying a unit in our cohousing community is hard, especially for young families. But within the constraints of the BC housing market and the cost of living here, we are doing our damnedest to make it affordable—and that's something to celebrate! ❧

Kathryn-Jane Hazel is one of the founders of Pacific Gardens Cohousing Community in Nanaimo, BC. She has lived there since 2009, and loves it!

Snow shovellers extraordinaire.

Karen Grunau

Hallowe'en fun at Pacific Gardens.

Craig Matsu-Pissot

A Prescription for Community

By Philip Mirkin

As someone who's lived in 10 countries and perhaps 20 intentional communities and ecovillages, I'd like to address the legal ownership of land and the tricky job of sharing land. My experiences suggest that if you want to keep your nervous system intact, it might be best to build outside the Divided States.

Our island in the South Pacific Ocean is owned by our clan, and all 250 people had to sign off on our lease for us to build our Ecovillage and Homestay lodge on the Blue Lagoon in Fiji. We certainly don't own it, but that doesn't matter as we have it for 85 more years (on our 99-year lease) without any hassles from the government or anyone. In fact, my brother is the chief of our half of the island and so we are the authority on the island.

Fortunately, no police are needed here as there is zero crime. Criminals get banished from the island. And that's the worst thing you can do to an islander, banishing them from their home island and culture.

When American tourists or aspiring community members become the Ugly Americans (or when Germans and Austrians get Ugly, meaning they have an inability to share)—if they bring drugs, get racist on their "servants" at the resort, or cheat people, as many Americans in Fiji have—they might just get deported from Fiji (legalized banishment).

This is how land ownership could look over there in Gringolandia, if the British and Dutch capitalists didn't start such an evil system of land ownership on yet another continent. And the ignorant sheeple went along with it! Not the natives of course; they were focused on sharing their resources, and resisted bravely for a while. But then the Europeans brought smallpox and guns to take their land.

I personally have never really lived in the mortgage- or rent-paying world. My third homestead cost only $6000 in the middle of nowhere in Colorado. So it was only a cash purchase. I tried out mainstream life for a couple years here and there (they offered me a great job making maps and I took it), but found paying rent and running on the proverbial hamster-wheel rather distasteful. Now I have a home on 17 acres on the Blue Lagoon—just for being a good guy who shares, knows the meaning of hard work, and can make almost anyone laugh given the opportunity.

Housing should not be an investment industry, taking much-needed housing off the market. And "real" estate is not an investment that serves society. That is unless you allow people to share in the land in exchange for their hard work, and eventually give them the possibility to own it or at least live in their own tiny house until they are worm food.

The real division in the US is between the rich and poor, not between men and women, white or black, or any other groups. There can be a local revolution in most any town in the US and other arch-capitalist nations like the UK, by enacting local laws and rent control and making it contingent upon supporting community efforts not just through taxes, but also volunteering and contributing to community.

Fijians, like most real people, love to share what we have. Sharing meals and hard work is the key to life and community. If you know how to work hard, especially if you're a nurse or a doctor, you are welcome on our island. The clan made me the accidental nurse because I set up the first-aid outpost. But honestly I'm not qualified or educated enough. However, I've done my best and saved a few people from dying from skin infections and other nasty tropical adventures.

What's my prescription for a happy life?

As with any medication, success depends on proper dosage. And following directions. Not the ones they told you, like being a good member of society by getting rich from working 50 hours a week, just to spend half your income for rent. No, not those directions, but maybe the ones I'm suggesting:

Simply:

• Give more than you get.

• Have few or no expectations.

• If you can, have little desire, You can gain freedom from living in gratitude.

• Help the people around you and work hard to make their lives better, not just yours, and you will have lifetime friends. ❧

Contact Philip Mirkin at fijiorganicvillage@gmail.com.

Living in Community at 75

By Bruce Dobb

I'm living in the very urban Los Angeles Ecovillage near downtown LA (laecovillage.org). It's a community with lots of contradictions:

• Our cooperative offers a "car-free discount" for member tenants, yet more than half of our members own cars.

• We compost kitchen scraps, yet half of our take-away trash is full of our kitchen scraps.

• We grow some of our own food, but that's no competition for the two supermarkets at the end of our block, which supply most of it.

What was that quote in *A Tale of Two Cities*? "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief"...in short, that period was so much like the present period.

That pretty much sums up life here at the LA Ecovillage.

We're ecology-minded and planet-friendly, but we're urban. We do need to tolerate dirty streets, obnoxious motorists, terrible traffic, and too little green space—except for our learning garden, of course. We need to compromise with the community we live in and not scold anyone. Our members weather it all successfully—even the occasional crime. It all seems to work for the most part and helps keep a low carbon footprint.

There are huge advantages to living in our community. Lots of folks met their spouses here, lots of babies born here, many successful demonstration programs and cooperative ventures launched here, and recognition galore. (We are quite marvelous! All the co-ops think so.)

But then there's the grind of living in a gritty urban demonstration program located too close to a congested part of downtown LA known as "K-Town." That's what I want to talk about right now.

Here's How I Do It

I'm 75 and live in a 700 sq. ft. cooperative apartment with an outdoor patio and high ceiling. I have a formerly feral cat who shares the space because it's on the ground floor and he can come and go through my backdoor in a wink (often because he sees a mouse in the courtyard). There is ready access to a handicap ramp. I moved in here 11 years ago from a 5,000 sq. ft. house that I never liked and don't miss. My place works beautifully for me because I hate housework and there isn't a lot to clean. The only thing I miss is a garbage disposal—but no one really needs one. Air conditioning would be a nice thing here—and our co-op (Urban Soil/Tierra Urbana—USTU) is tackling that issue with membership fundraising.

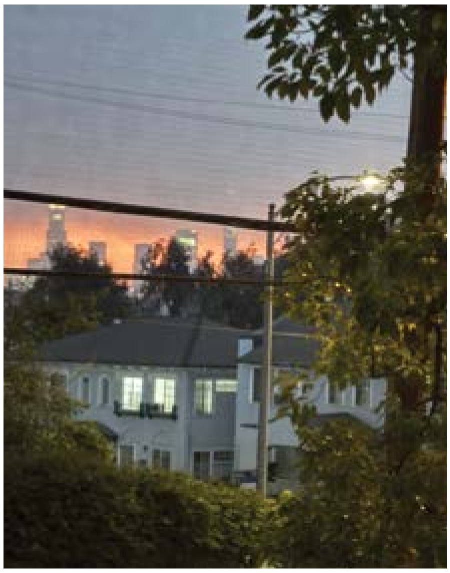
The reason I know about the Village is that I bike a lot and a worker-owned co-op (The Bicycle Kitchen; bicyclekitchen.org) started in one of the unit's kitchens. I went there before they went big and moved that co-op up the street to Fountain Avenue. I always loved to bike and embraced the opportunity to live without a car. No sacrifice, but rather a joy. It helps to be a bike freak when you live among all the bike mechanics. (Also helps that I'm a former loan officer for the National Co-op Bank and understood co-op principals.)

We're located between two subway lines—both with walkable stops close by. We are one block from the street with the largest number of daily bus riders in the nation, Vermont Avenue, where the 203 bus goes from Inglewood in the south to Sunset Boulevard in East Hollywood, to the north. I ride that bus a lot with many very poor folks and recent immigrants.

Poor people in LA are very resilient folks—they have to be. LA is their first stop in America and for many their last. They add to the fast pace of living in LA—everyone's got to hustle to make a living. Riding the bus helps keep my immune system strong and healthy. Covid ain't nothing on the 203; we got the biggies on our bus: chorelia, bubonic plague, bird flu; hell, it's all on the bus. I never catch colds.

Another plus about car-free living is that it's cheap. I save an

Photos courtesy of Bruce Dobb



easy $500 a month without a car. And I am 75; at some point, they want to take your keys because you're a danger to yourself and others on the road. I will be ready for that day. I get around beautifully right now, without a car. Bus, train, rental electric bikes and scooters, LYFT, and don't forget the city's free transportation services for seniors (up to four one-way rides totaling 40 miles per month at no cost within Los Angeles County). LA also offers discounted taxi fares and shared rides for seniors. Thanks to discounts on public transit, I pay 35 cents every time I get on and off a bus—about the same if I rent a city rental bike from Metro.

And with all that (not-white-specific) privilege, what do I do? I take pictures; lots of pictures.

I get together with buddies all the time, visit art exhibits, work when I need money, and ride in monthly CicLAvia (ciclavia.org) bike rides. (This is where a main transit street in LA closes to cars for the day.) Mostly I get to push the world in a direction I wish it would go. No cars, no meat, and one-on-one encounters every day with real people—not just digital images. That's just baked into living in community and it's the best part.

I live a great lifestyle in LA because I can ride a bike here nine months out of the year, but you DO need options for those days you can't bike. If I'm feeling particularly arthritic at the start of the day and need food, I order groceries for a $10 charge and they always come in an hour.

Our community is the best part. All ages, all backgrounds and profiles—I live in a very liberated community. Every Sunday we have a community potluck, open to all, where folks bring "cover dishes"—all vegetarian-only (cow meat means lots of emissions), which can be very bland and tasteless unless you season it right and don't overcook the veggies. It's good to be a vegetarian, but not if you have to martyr yourself to tasteless food.

That's the one gripe I want to air in this firsthand account of life at the LA Ecovillage. The cooking on Sunday night at the potluck is godawful—not always, but most of the time. That starts with the fact that many folks just use it as an opportunity to clear out their fridge. They swipe it all up with a rag and boil it in a pot. Just add water. And then there's the fact that veggies are difficult to cook, even if you're a good cook—unless it's potatoes. My fellow members beat the hell out of their asparagus and manage to combine black beans with every last dish.

But that's ok. I've learned to always eat before, and try to cook something wonderful for the crew (something that's fresh!). At 7:30 promptly, every Sunday night, I hobble up to the community dining room on the second floor with a pleasant smile and always get into the best conversations and interesting meetings with visitors. It is well worth the mangled food stuff for the lively talks and fun of being with others.

Apart from that, it's great to be in our community. When most folks at 75 seem to get more and more isolated, I find I have lots of duties and responsibilities that I don't really notice because it's just part of being in a community. No one can hide in this community. There's lots of commotion here and plenty of people to pass the time of day with and take pictures of. I guess that's the sort of life I live. ❧

Bruce Dobb is an owner-member at Los Angeles Ecovillage (laecovillage.org), where he's lived for nearly a dozen years.

Why I Choose to Live in Community

By Mac Maguire

Over the years, when asked, I've given many reasons for living in community. Here are most of those reasons in one place.

Because I'm an old dodger, I need to exercise to keep myself alive and well. In Community, there's plenty of work outdoors that keeps both me and my community alive and well at the same time. For me, that makes it a little less vain than if living alone in the straight world.

If I lived in conventional society, I would have to spend lots of time trying to stay engaged with a variety of folks who share my political, personal, and social values. In Community, my immediate neighbors mostly share those same values.

If I lived in conventional society, I would have little opportunity to shape my neighborhood in positive ways. In Community, the folks want me and others to join them in continually improving our life here.

In conventional society, folks can feel uncomfortable about asking for help from others. In Community, seeking help from time to time is the most natural of interactions.

In conventional society, I might meet a new adult or child from time to time. In Community, there is just enough turnover to make such new relationships quite common. If I don't recognize someone here, the most natural thing is to just walk up to them and say—"I don't think we've met yet."

In Community, it is more common for men and women to become close friends, married or single, than in the conventional society. The sense of experiencing neighbors as fellow members in a kind of extended family makes this work, I think.

In Community, single parents probably have more access to surrogate godfathers and godmothers than in conventional settings. In Community, I have often felt those same kinship impulses and feelings, familiar to me from years of parenting and grandparenting.

The resources of community life make it more probable that the elderly can avoid winding up spending their last years surrounded by "old folks" in retirement homes—my mother's complaint, I recall.

In Community, mere spatial proximity and shared values makes for a life that is more intense and interesting than that in conventional society—regardless of one's age.

Folks who live in ecovillage communities not only reduce their extractive impact on the flora and fauna of Earth, but they also heal a portion of Earth by sustainable, diverse farming practices.

A community designed to be maximally self-reliant could provide meaningful employment for folks challenged by automation, climate change, and conflict. See sirno.org for more.

More generally, community life can help heal the many wounds of nature, nurture, and neglect. ❧

Raised in an Irish Catholic parish, Mac Maguire is 85 years old and has a daughter, Leah, and two grandkids, Zoe and Hunter. He spent over five years in regular Army and reserve and worked blue-collar jobs for a living, especially 20 years as a railroad brakeman working in crews of five—his favorite employment.

His interest in community living began with barracks life and work in the Army and reading historical accounts of the Kibbutz movement. In the service, as in community life now, he formed close ties with a diversity of folks. Mac tried to establish community life in several houses in Detroit after the riots of '67—always ultimately without success. He joined the planning and building effort of the TREE neighborhood at Ecovillage at Ithaca more than a dozen years ago and has lived there since it was completed.

Affordable Communities Policy

Our community was built by folks with earnings from solid middle-class lifeways. It could not be afforded by folks of modest, low, or no income. After wrestling with this affordability issue over the years, I developed a website that outlines how our lifeway here might be made possible for such folks. That website is an Affordable, Maximally Self-Reliant Communities Policy at **sirno.org**. It advocates for a publicly sponsored Community Conservation Corps, designed like the Depression-era CCC, to provide for folks whose employment will be challenged by ever-increasing AI-enhanced automation. Since it would require government support, my target audience has been journalists and politicians. So far, responses have been lukewarm.

Time, technology changes, and the challenges of war, climate change, and consequent migration mean that I will be working on this website for what's left of my life. I think that in time politicians will be scrambling for unemployment solutions. Universal Basic Income may be one. A maximally self-reliant communities policy is another that might be useful in offsetting inevitable right-wing opposition to the latter.

–MM

Affordable, Small-Footprint Living in an Inclusive Urban Group House

By Cathy Holt

The problems of living alone

Many older women I know across the US live alone, often in a condo or a mobile home, with their own appliances, car, and furnishings—but lonely and sometimes isolated. The "American Dream" of single family home ownership has been sold to the public for decades promoting a culture of separation and consumerism. Once children have grown, the cost of maintaining a home and paying property taxes is more than many older women can afford. It's out of reach economically for many, wasteful of resources, and environmentally destructive.

In Asheville, North Carolina, where I lived for some 20 years, except for some high-rise, low-cost senior housing downtown, affordable housing meant living a distance from town and having to drive. Public transportation was underfunded, infrequent, unpredictable, and limited in hours.

Communities I have known

Cohousing communities I visited or rented a room in were expensive and seemed to squander resources, with a large central kitchen/dining room plus a separate kitchen in each small house. I've lived in shared housing where people bought most food separately, with only one shared meal a month. People bought a lot of packaged convenience foods and there was never enough refrigerator space.

I lived in a permaculture-based off-grid rural intentional community from 2002-2004. With some 50 residents, it was still a work in progress. The neighborhoods were rather far apart, and a common unifying value was rebellion against mainstream ways of life, leading to clashes in styles of emotional expression. We attempted consensus decision-making with mixed results. Social permaculture had not caught on yet.

A rare find

When I learned about the Du•má Community in Eugene, Oregon, I was amazed that such a place even existed! Ten (usually) unrelated people of varying ages live together under one roof, sharing food expenses and meals five nights a week. We raise chickens; grow a myriad of fruits and vegetables; compost; and buy food in bulk. A 1200-gallon rainwater tank supplies toilets during the rainy season; solar panels produce both hot water and electricity. The kitchen includes a well-stocked pantry and practically every appliance you could want. We have a guest bedroom with a bathroom, an outdoor cob pizza oven, a sauna, and a hot tub!

Du•má is on a street with more bicycles than cars, near a bus line, and walking distance to the Y, a neighborhood natural foods store, restaurants, coffee shops, retail stores, parks, churches, an Urgent Care facility, etc. Had I been living in an affordable apartment or sharing a small house in Eugene, I would not have such an amazing quality of life. Where else

River outing with Emily, Alli, Estella, Cathy, Benji, Michael, Allen; front row, Angie with Libby, Mika.

Allen with seriously tall water tank!

Alli has made falafel!

Beekeeping at Du•má.

Photos courtesy of Cathy Holt

could I cook once every two weeks and share a delicious vegetarian, mostly organic dinner five nights a week? I moved in April 2025, becoming their oldest-ever member at 78. I'd just spent three years in Colombia, involved in work for cleaner water and sustainable agriculture. All I owned when I arrived from South America fit into three suitcases and two boxes.

Community is more than amenities and convenience, it's about relationships. One of the many ways we strengthen community and build goodwill at Du•má involves sharing appreciations with each other at the end of house meetings. We've also celebrated birthdays, pressed cider, attended a housemate's choir performance, and hosted a pizza baking party. Sharing group meals is a key part of creating community, and welcoming visitors to our table grows connections with people outside our own circles.

Du•má Community

Du•má (the indigenous Kalapuya word for "home") was originally built by the Eugene Bible College as a home for "wayward" girls (single and possibly pregnant) in the 1920s, according to Allen Hancock, a founding member of the community. He likes to joke that it's become a "home for wayward adults." Allen was a young man when he joined a small group of friends that shared a vision of living collectively and cooperatively purchased the house together in 1990. It had been converted into five apartments decades earlier, housing six people. Over the years unneeded kitchens were converted into bedrooms. Now 10 or more people can call Du•má home.

Allen, now aged 60, became the sole proprietor 18 years ago at a difficult moment when the community needed continuity for it to survive. At the time, despite efforts to find a solution, simmering interpersonal conflict ultimately led an extended family of five to move out. Another couple had already moved out not long before (in part due to the unresolved conflict). Having lived at Du•má for nearly two decades, Allen didn't have the stamina to seek a new group of co-owners committed to the original vision or endure the process of creating a new vision with a new group. Instead, he decided to experiment by assuming a more traditional role of property manager and seeking people who wanted to live in community without the extra work of home ownership.

"How do you pick up the pieces when so many members leave all at once?" Allen sighs, recalling how difficult it was to rebuild with few people shouldering so much responsibility. "Vacancies represent one of the biggest costs for both landlords and collective owners." Unlike most rentals, an intentional community requires an extensive screening process. It can take two months for everyone to meet a prospective housemate, spend time together, and decide if they are compatible.

When a room remains vacant for a long time in a collective house, there's a financial temptation to accept someone who's not a great fit. The consequences of making a poor choice can be disastrous for a small community when people get pushed to their emotional limits. It can lead to more departures and an even more financially precarious situation. "In an ideal world," Allen muses, "there would be a mutual aid pool, like a local insurance pool of member-run households, providing help to those shared households with acute needs."

Fortunately Allen had the time and financial resources to keep paying the bills and find new people to live with during this transition. "I was lucky to be in a position where I could keep things going. Otherwise Du•má would have folded."

This shift away from a collective didn't entirely square with his ideals but, importantly, it meant that other people living at Du•má could focus their attention on nurturing relationships rather than the often stressful responsibilities of owning and maintaining a 100-year-old home. Allen knew the house intimately so he was able to readily handle most repairs quickly and expertly. When work was required beyond his expertise he drew upon his relationships with professionals he'd established over the years.

Living at Du•má

Living at Du•má is affordable, in part, because we share one kitchen and one washing machine. Allen points out that the

Estella and Michael at cob oven pizza party last summer.

kitchen is often the most expensive room in any house. Bathrooms are also expensive, but Du•má members enjoy six bathrooms that have been part of the house since its beginning. We also reduce grocery costs by buying in bulk, hosting a farm-share drop site (with occasional free produce), raising hens for eggs, and growing vegetables and fruit—pawpaws, apples, pears, Asian pears, grapes, figs, persimmons, quinces, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, and too many mulberries! We don't purchase many packaged or processed foods, which tend to be more expensive. Cooks usually make extra food so we can bring delicious leftovers to work or school instead of having to purchase lunch.

The current ownership arrangement also saves residents a substantial amount of money. For example, when it came time to refinance the mortgage, Allen was able to secure a low-interest loan based on his personal credit score, saving tens of thousands of dollars in payments over the years. A cooperative would struggle to find an institution willing to make a loan to an unrelated group of people, and the few lenders that do make such loans require a tremendous amount of paperwork, charge extra fees, and have higher interest rates.

Allen passes the savings along to the residents of Du•má in the form of shared amenities (such as the hot tub), affordable rent, and reserves to cover expenses during extended vacancies. "It's discouraging," he told me, "that our economic system often makes shared ventures more expensive than traditional forms of ownership, requiring communitarians to decide between ideals and affordability."

Inclusivity

Diversity can be a source of resilience and sustainability, as in a polyculture of plants; but not just any plants will synergize well. With more diversity, there's more potential for conflicts. Allen recounts that the community founders were all white, in their mid-20s, and ecologically-minded, with some differences in economic class and sexual preference. Despite a shared goal of embracing diversity, the relative homogeneity made it easier for the founders to relate with one another during the intense start-up phase, a time which required shared understanding and trust. Had the founders been a more diverse group, the community might not have weathered the challenges of starting a collective enterprise.

Each resident of Du•má devotes time to the community, but the amount of time and labor people are able to contribute varies because some people work full-time or have other obligations outside the community. Sometimes what's needed is the work of listening, seeking to understand, and resolving conflicts. Allen reflects, "The emotional labor involved with living in community is often undervalued or unaccounted for. Unfortunately, not everyone has the time or skills needed when conflict arises."

The disparity between those who have time and skills and those who don't is often related to class, race, age, and gender. Ironically, unpacking and addressing identity and oppression takes even more time and emotional resources. "Sadly, these well-intentioned efforts can overwhelm members," Allen says, "causing communities to crash and burn. Some of the most passionate people write off shared living forever. We need to balance social progress and idealism with simply getting along."

Over time the Du•má resident population has come to include folks from Kenya, India, Ecuador, Wales, and China. The percent of people of color has roughly corresponded to their representation in Eugene. More LGBTQ+ identified people have called Du•má home than their percentage in the general population. The range of ages now spans from 21 to 79 years old.

Other housemates' perspectives

Alli, an urban planner in her 30s, has lived at Du•má since June 2024. She greatly appreciates the quality of life, including the vast, diverse collections of spices and teas, kitchen appliances, the orchard, garden, and sauna. Alli rides her bike 10 minutes to work, using her car only a couple of times a week, making her lifestyle both affordable and sustainable. She appreciates the availability of people to connect, collaborate, and communicate with, and to give and receive emotional support.

"You can learn a lot from living with people who have different backgrounds, and have a lot of fun too," she comments. In a year and a half, Alli has experienced 15 different housemates due to turnover; four people left in her first few months, including one because of inability to pay the rent, which led to conflict. "And sometimes conflicts help us to rub off our rough edges."

Alli served as meeting facilitator for 10 months, and is quite proficient; she initiated the idea of rotating facilitation to promote skill-building and power-sharing. "Everyone brings a unique skillset and value," she observes.

Something we both appreciate about Allen is the spirit of fun that he brings, through outrageous statements in shared documents; hilarious games he's introduced (pantyhose croquet, and a riotous card game he invented from humorous animal photos); and traditions such as the "Mad-libs" Allen writes for

birthday parties. The whiteboard for shared messages also gets many laughs. Our well-being meetings often include a game. Humor contributes to good spirits and eases frictions.

Michael, age 29, a grad student at University of Oregon, has lived at Du•má since September 2024. His girlfriend Estella, an undergrad in the same field, moved in last May. He sees the benefits of a rich social community, and believes that the energy output needed leads to a high quality of life. Always friendly and polite, Michael can frequently be seen caring for the compost pile or helping harvest fruit.

Michael is aware of the importance of a keystone species like Allen, with his leadership, dedication, and skills. He's also aware of the hierarchy: executive decisions can be made by Allen (as owner) that not everyone agrees with. Michael doesn't see Du•má as a long-term home—someday, he'd like to be building equity through home ownership.

Michael enjoys the diversity of perspectives from people of various age groups and ways of life. "People we wouldn't necessarily seek out can become friends," he says. "This might work less well in a smaller group. Ten folks is a large enough group to diffuse interpersonal conflict somewhat. Other people give perspective and advice, also validation."

Benji, age 33, works as a child therapist and has lived at Du•má since August 2023. Born in the US, he is half Filipino and half German—but identifies more with German culture as a result of more frequent family visits there. Although he's modest about his cooking abilities, he has perfected his Thai vegetable coconut milk curry and air-fried tofu.

"The challenge to accessibility here is that we try for a balance of age, gender, and gender identity; so a man can get turned away if there are more men than women in the house," he notes. "Also, we want people who feel good to live with, so we hold high standards for emotional intelligence, relational capacity, and consideration of others. A neurodiverse person may feel difficult to live with."

Benji sees that the physical beauty and sustainability of the household give a sense of thriving, "a lightness and brightness of energy." Although the cost of renting a room in any shared house in Eugene is roughly similar to what we pay here, "we get a higher value than what we pay for. There's a sense of thriving and collaboration. We're not all best friends, but we have relatively similar ways of being."

Benji expressed gratitude for Allen: "He has taken on the hard work of keeping the house functional, as homeowner and steward. He has provided structure and leadership, which can be lacking in other co-ops. Allen has ownership and power, but he uses it for the good of the whole."

Takeaways

Allen notes, "By any measure it's become less affordable to both purchase and maintain a home, making it more challenging than ever to establish and sustain a cooperatively-owned household. To reap the benefits of older folks living with younger folks, white people living with people of color, and all genders sharing a home together, we need new models so that it's affordable for people of a wide range of financial means. The story of how the Du•má Community adapted to circumstances is unique and might or might not provide a model for other shared households."

There are unanswered questions about what will happen when Allen chooses to put his energy elsewhere or is no longer able to keep the house going. "I've been thinking a lot about succession. How can people who want to carry on the legacy of this community build equity in a way that is both affordable and fair for all involved—including those who may be members in the future? In time, however, the current arrangement might not serve the community and a new one will need to take its place."

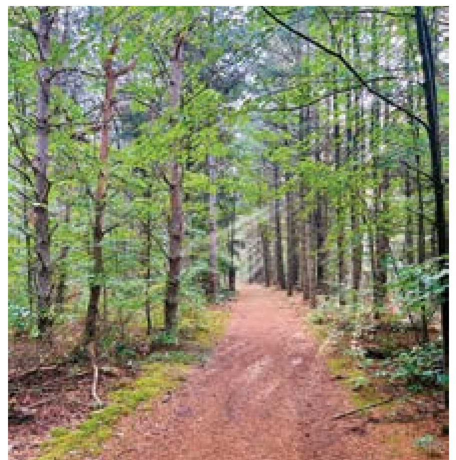
Meanwhile, I am grateful for the opportunity to share life at Du•má. As a person with few possessions and a desire to live simply and ecologically in my older years, I believe Du•má has raised my standard of living immensely. I knew only four people when I arrived in Eugene, and it was wonderful to land in a warm community. If you value small-footprint living, there just might be an affordable community out there for you too.

Cathy Holt, age 79, a lifelong environmental and social justice activist, has lived in various collective arrangements. With a Master's in Public Health, her careers have included respiratory therapy; community organizing; teaching community college health education, stress management, holistic health; writing; biofeedback therapy; teaching compassionate communication; and HeartMath coaching. For three years in Colombia, she helped fund and build biogas digesters on farms for cooking gas and fertilizer. Cathy's current small business is Breathing for Health (conscious breath coaching and classes). Please see breathing4health.net. Write her at cathy@breathing4health.net. Cathy's monthly environmental blog, "Earth & Us," is on Medium.com.

Alli, Benji, and Sophia on the front porch.

The Neighborhood Lore

By Paul Graham



Photos courtesy of Paul Graham

Turtle Hill's founder, Ann, built our community over the years by selling pieces of the 200-acre parcel she bought in the 1970s to friends she wanted as neighbors. Her idea birthed a special place: six houses crouch in this woodland on the Grasse River in upstate New York, all of them quirky, biophilic, and linked by ties of history and kinship running between them like mycorrhizal magic.

My wife and I bought our house, timber-framed and entirely off the electrical grid, when the previous owner, Jan, a Unitarian Universalist minister, answered a call at a Vermont church.

The story goes that while Jan knew she wanted to live here, she didn't know where on the 200 acres she wanted to be. So Ann sent her on a walk, and Jan headed down a mile-long lane to the river through the maples and birches and ironwood. Maybe Jan saw remnants of the original sugarbush, though an older story goes that the previous owners cut the sugarbush down to sell as lumber and firewood in their failed attempt to avoid foreclosure.

Half a mile back, something pulled Jan to a glade.

She arrived at a steep downhill—a place my wife and I now call the Slide. Facing south, Jan sat down to contemplate joining the neighborhood in this spot, and, I imagine, other things, like whether she wanted to build a house here at all, and what kind of house, and how she could possibly afford it. All the things I would wonder if I built from the ground up, which I've never done.

The story goes that as Jan meditated, a pair of scarlet tanagers—black-winged redbirds—alighted in a nearby oak and looked down at her. And she was sensible enough to take them as a sign to build.

But it turned out that Ann *didn't* own the land, not quite. She'd actually co-bought the parcel with a man named Ed. Ann was fine with Jan buying a piece, but Ed, when Jan asked him, said he didn't believe in buying and selling land. Never mind the contradiction. Never mind that he was a deed-carrying member of a club he repudiated, to the tune of 200 acres!

So, the story goes, Jan said to Ed, "Well, you could just *give* me the land."

And just like that, she checkmated poor Ed, and he gave her eight acres.

Jan built and lived in the wooded community for a decade, deeply and lovingly, then rented while at seminary, during which time I imagine she pined painfully, nostalgically, for her magical house. Eventually she decided to sell, and we came along.

For a year my wife and I fed the birds, we watched the birds, we learned their calls and habits, and neither of us saw a single scarlet tanager.

The story ends when Jan returned for a neighbor's memorial and Ann hosted a picnic potluck at the end of her visit. Shortly before dusk, Jan pointed to a pair of tanagers sitting on a birch limb, flame-red in the long shadows, looking right at us. I dropped out of the conversation to watch them in agitation and awe, seeing before me proof of something I've often thought but hesitated to voice because it sounds a little, well, woo-woo, concerning, as it does, how the hidden energy in this neighborhood (and all places, if you're attentive) bends and twists and flows. Already, within hours of Jan's arrival, our kitchen drain line had ruptured, spilling wastewater into the basement. Then our solar batteries temporarily fritzed. Then a barred owl crashed the memorial procession as we walked to the river to scatter our friend's ashes in the sunlight. And now these redbirds.

What I'm saying is: sometimes coincidence is completely reasonable and terrifying. It makes me wonder what happens at Jan's new house every time we replace or improve upon something here, or what happens when *her* sellers come back to town. Because who'd have guessed, Ed knew what he was talking about, you can't own the land and you never will, no matter what the banks and tax assessors say. ❧

Paul Graham is a teacher and writer of nonfiction and fiction based in Hermon, New York, where he and his wife live deep in the woods with more nonhuman neighbors than they can possibly count.

Who Shares?

How the communities movement is inspiring international research on willingness to share residential spaces

By Robert Boyer

CDCUL consortium.

Living in community was a turning point in my life. Between 2010 and 2011, I spent a combined 12 weeks at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage and six weeks at Earthaven Ecovillage. I also briefly stayed at Los Angeles Ecovillage and Ecovillage at Ithaca, and I've toured cohousing communities around the US and Europe.

This admittedly short period of time "living in community" changed my life. Firstly, I met Klara, my wife and coparent, at Earthaven's Beltane festival, where the magic worked! I have also made it part of my job as a researcher to find ways to translate the lessons of ecovillages and cohousing to "the real world."

The main reason I visited communities in 2010 and 2011 was to collect data for my doctoral dissertation, which describes how North American ecovillages and cohousing directly and indirectly influence mainstream urban planning. I was particularly inspired by the intersection of social and technological innovations that make low-consumption living possible; for example, how managing collectively-owned spaces and resources requires interpersonal communication skills that most people don't learn. Dancing Rabbit's carsharing cooperative was a miracle to me—meeting the transportation needs of 75+ residents in rural Missouri with two cars and a pickup truck. I was also impressed by different communities' complex layers of shared-access spaces and facilities and how sharing helped people live at dramatically lower-than-mainstream levels of consumption in a still abundant way. For example, common houses in almost every community serve so many purposes to so many people, slashing the amount of private space that individuals need in their own homes and thus lowering total resource consumption.

For over 15 years I've wondered how the strategies of ecovillages and cohousing can be translated, practically, to the mainstream. How can cities be built and re-built to encourage sharing? Are there pragmatic ways to integrate communitarian principles into cities without building an intentional community from the ground up? (Los Angeles Ecovillage was a big inspiration for this particular question.) I've carried these questions with me in my career, first as a professor of urban planning at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and now in Sweden, where I work as a researcher to help Swedish public- and private-sector organizations transition to circular business models.

This article summarizes some of the results from my most recent research on individuals' *interest in* and *willingness to pay for* shared-access living spaces. This three-year research project, called *Consumer Demand for Circular Urban Living* (CDCUL.eu), was funded by the European Commission's Driving Urban Transitions program, and involves an online survey sent to over 3,000 adults in the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Sweden. Together with other researchers, housing developers, public housing authorities, and architects in these countries, we are trying to understand how housing of the future can be designed and redeveloped so that space sharing is easily integrated into people's lives.

The study's main questions are:

- *Who is interested in shared access to kitchen-and-dining spaces, shared-access office spaces, and shared-access workshops?*
- *For which design and programmatic features are individuals willing to pay more (or less)?*

How did we conduct the research?

One of the most interesting challenges in my research is trying to understand peoples' interest in hypothetical realities. For most city dwellers in North America and Europe, shared kitchens, offices, and workshops are not a part of daily life. If we were conducting traditional experimental research—the kind conducted in highly controlled laboratories—we might pay people to live temporarily in

specially designed shared-access facilities, observe their consumption habits, and ask them what it would take for them to stay in a home like this forever. In fact, this approach has been taken by researchers on university campuses, typically with students as test subjects. While deeply interesting, this approach is also very expensive, complex, and unrepresentative of most individuals' interest and willingness to pay for shared-access spaces.

We could ask people, using a survey, "How much would you be willing to pay each month for access to a kitchen you share with your neighbors?," but the answer is almost certainly: it depends. Depends on what? A lot of things. It could depend on the person—How old are they? Do they live with children? What country do they live in? How large is their current home? Do they have experience sharing in the past? Etc. It also depends on the hypothetical shared-access space: Can I reserve it? How far is it from my door? Who cleans and maintains it?

My collaborators and I took more than a year to consider all the different dimensions of these questions and developed a survey experiment (a discrete choice experiment, for you research nerds) that could help us understand why the people who are interested in sharing are different from the people who are not interested in sharing (a logistic regression model for you research nerds). The way such an experiment works is that it presents different choices to survey respondents over and over and *over* again: Would you prefer option A: a shared kitchen that costs $10 per *month*, is bookable, lies less than a minute from your front door, and is maintained by a professional management service; Or option B: a shared kitchen that costs $5 per *hour*, is not bookable, is two minutes from your front door, and is maintained by a voluntary committee of neighbors?; Or option C: neither of these. In the survey we ask questions just like this, and then we scramble the options and test different combinations of price, pricing model (monthly or hourly), bookability, distance, and maintenance regimen.

We also ask individuals questions about their demographics (age, income, education, gender, etc.), their living conditions (Do you own your home? Live in a house or apartment? With how many other people?), and their attitudes and experiences (Do you believe sharing is good for the environment? Have you shared something like this before? Do you like spending time with other people?).

We sent the survey to over 3,000 adults in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Slovenia—three European countries with three rather different histories of sharing and residential architecture.

What did we find?

Are people interested in shared-access spaces? Answer: mostly "yes" or "maybe." We began by asking people to read a short description of hypothetical shared-access spaces, and then asked people very simply whether they'd be interested in such spaces. They could answer yes, no, or maybe.

We were excited to find that in almost all places and spaces, most people didn't say "no." The exception was shared kitchens in the Netherlands, where about 55 percent of respondents said "no." In most places and spaces, 25-30 percent of respondents answered "yes" while 30-40 percent of people responded "maybe." The accompanying table details these results.

Interestingly: sharing a kitchen is the *least popular* option in each country, while *shared workshops* are the most popular space in each country. Interest in sharing appears generally *highest* in Slovenia, *lowest* in the Netherlands, while Sweden sits somewhere in the middle.

Who is interested in shared-access spaces? Specifically, what demographic, contextual, and attitudinal characteristics are associated with interest in these shared access spaces? The results here are complex, varying across different countries and different shared-access spaces, but there are a few characteristics that are near-universal predictors of "willingness to share." They include *experience, environmental efficacy, and extroversion,* or what I am calling "the 3Es." In summary, individuals who have *any* prior experience sharing these spaces, who believe that sharing is good for the environment, and who enjoy spending time and socializing with other people are more likely to be willing to share these spaces with their neighbors.

The *experience* finding is especially encouraging and has important implications for communitarians. We did not take for granted that experience would be a positive indicator of willingness to share. Experience with sharing could hypothetically backfire! In focus groups about shared-access spaces, we've heard many people describe their miserable and messy experiences sharing kitchens with classmates in college. However, it appears that, on average, having shared before is associated with greater interest in sharing in the future. This finding also offers a very clear role for visitor programs, tours, internships, and general outreach efforts of communities. Our results cannot tell us *how much* experience or *what type* of experience is necessary to increase willingness to share, but optimistically one visit or one virtual tour could make a difference.

What about the other demographic characteristics? First, individuals with at least one child in their household are more willing to share most spaces, at least in the Netherlands and Sweden. It doesn't seem to matter in Slovenia. Second, younger individuals are generally more willing to share than older individuals. When we divided our respondents into age categories and compared it to the youngest age group (age 18-24) almost everyone was more likely to respond "no" than the youngsters. In *most* cases gender doesn't matter: Women are no more or less likely to be willing to share than men. To our surprise, characteristics like income, the size of one's home, type of home (apartment vs. stand-alone house), and home ownership status are rarely significant predictors of willingness to share. In most spaces and countries tested, these variables don't shed much light on interest in sharing.

What about willingness to pay? Individuals who responded "yes" or "maybe" to the initial questions about willingness to share continued to a choice experiment that helped us understand which types of prices for shared-access spaces match which types of space features. In other words: Assuming you were interested at all, for what types of spaces

would you pay more or less money?

In summary, we found that in all spaces and countries, bookability (the ability to reserve a space at a specific time) was associated with higher willingness to pay. Our interpretation of this finding is that uncertainty around being able to access a space when you need it is a major barrier for shared-access space design. We found that in Slovenia, most people preferred "pay per month" price offerings, whereas in the Netherlands "pay per hour" offerings were more popular. In Sweden, the picture was more mixed. The preferred price model offers a clue about how often people expect to use these spaces. In Slovenia, peoples' preference for pay per month offerings indicates that they imagine using shared-access spaces relatively more often, perhaps on a daily basis. By contrast, that the Dutch are more interested in a pay per hour price model suggests that they imagine using shared spaces only occasionally and as a supplement to their existing spaces and facilities.

We tested whether approximate time travelled from one's front door makes a difference in willingness to pay. We compared two options: "less than one minute" from your front door and "one to five minutes" from your front door. Surprisingly, we found that this rarely makes a difference in willingness to pay. One of our strangest findings is that Slovenians will pay *more* for a shared office that is one to five minutes away when there is a pay per month price model, but will pay *less* when the same office is offered in a pay per hour price model. This is hard to interpret. Perhaps Slovenians who imagine using a shared office more frequently would rather "commute" for a few minutes. Or perhaps they'd prefer that a shared office not be so close to their home. Such uncertain findings will be great to test in follow-up focus groups.

Another big surprise was that whether a space is managed by A) a professional management service, B) a part-time resident coordinator, or C) by no particular means at all (e.g., *ad hoc* cleaning and maintenance by neighbors) made little difference in willingness to pay for shared kitchens, but people in the Netherlands and Sweden (but not Slovenia) will pay more for professional management for a workshop.

Conclusions and implications for communities

The survey that my colleagues and I have conducted makes it clear that shared-access spaces are much more interesting to the European countries surveyed than the current market would suggest. We found that in every country, the proportion of people interested or *maybe* interested in sharing was **much higher** than the proportion of people with prior experience sharing. This is an encouraging finding. It convinces me that there is a potential for more sharing in cities, and that if city planners make sharing a priority, it will be met with a real market demand. This finding also corresponds with earlier research that interest in cohousing and other shared housing options are under-supplied in today's cities. We also find that there is no significant gender, educational, or obvious income association with interest in sharing, in contrast to the disproportionately high-educated, high-income, and highly female membership of cohousing communities.

A good sign that research is successful is that it leaves us researchers with lots of new questions. As discussed above, one of the most interesting findings is that people with experience sharing in the past are more likely to express interest in sharing with their neighbors in the future, but we don't know exactly what "counts" as experience. Maybe, just maybe, all it takes is a short visit to a nearby ecovillage or cohousing community to inspire individuals to explore sharing options in their own neighborhoods. The communities movement is an inspiring source of diverse ways of neighborly sharing. Some communities "share it all" while others engage in sharing in a more *à la carte* way. Future research can more carefully trace how exposures through website visits and *real* site visits inspire others to share with their neighbors.

Finally, I would be happy to hear from you and follow up with specific communities about these findings. I am eternally grateful for everything the communities movement has given me, and I would gladly discuss my research and learn about how future research can help further your visions for a more sustainable, more community-oriented society. Feel free to contact me personally at rhboyer@gmail.com. ❧

Robert Boyer is a researcher at RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, where he leads projects related to sharing in the built environment and methods for measuring the circular economy. He lives (car free!) in Gothenburg with his wife Klara and two daughters.

Shared-Access Living Space Survey Results

Shared Space	Would you be interested in sharing this type of space with neighbors?	Netherlands (%) (n = 1011)	Slovenia (%) (n = 1050)	Sweden (%) (n = 1016)
Kitchen and Dining	Yes	19.2	30.4	28.0
	Maybe	26.0	33.5	33.2
	No	54.8	36.1	38.8
Office and Study	Yes	23.5	31.3	26.4
	Maybe	30.5	39.6	36.0
	No	46.0	29.1	37.6
Workshop	Yes	27.1	41.5	36.2
	Maybe	35.4	39.6	38.1
	No	37.5	18.9	25.7

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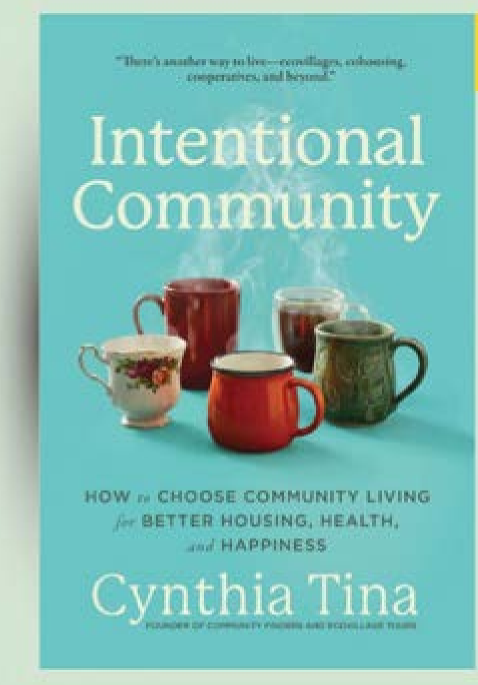

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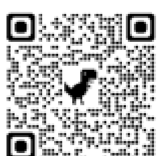

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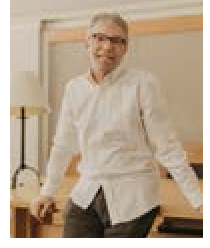

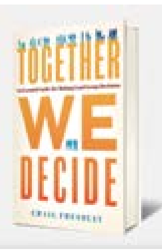

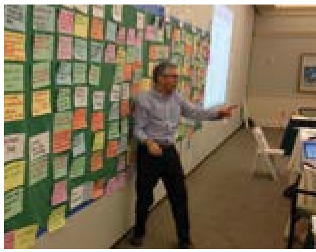

Founder Craig Freshley has lived in a Maine cohousing community for 30 years. He authored Together We Decide, An Essential Guide for Making Good Group Decisions and has facilitated and trained hundreds of groups.

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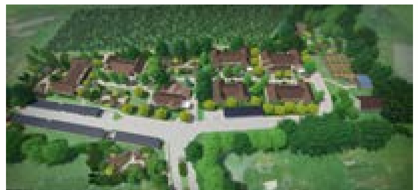

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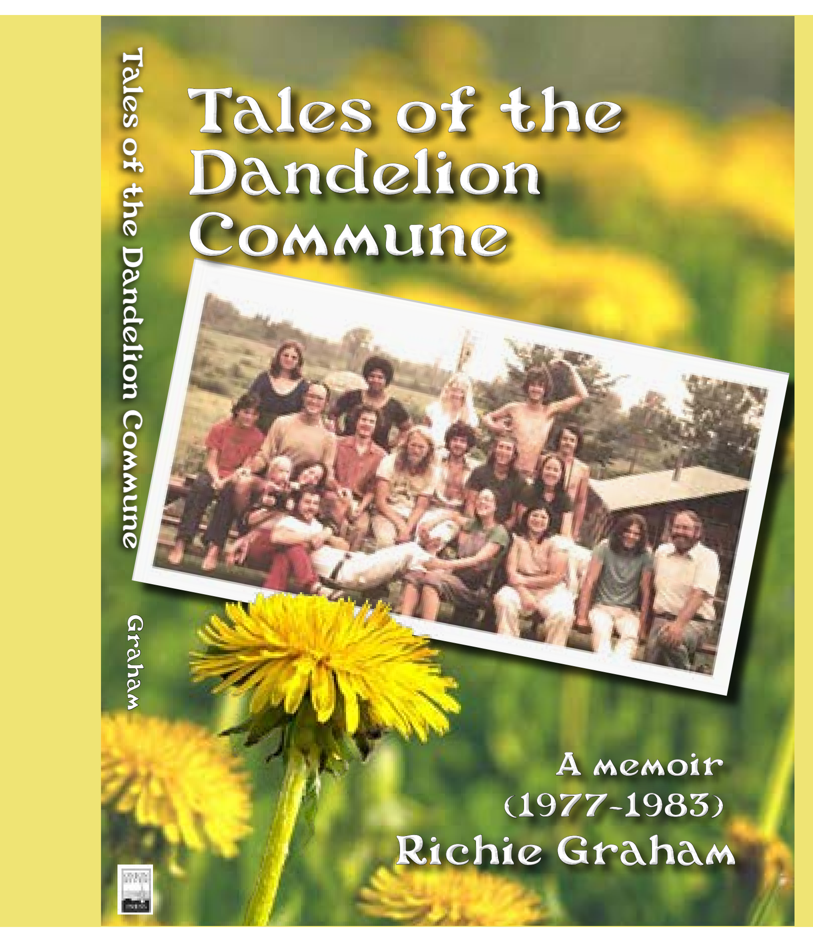

Meditation Retreat Center Seeks Staff Member as Part of Residential Community

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Staff receive room and board plus a modest stipend that supports a simple lifestyle. Staff also has the opportunity to participate in the many retreats we host each year.

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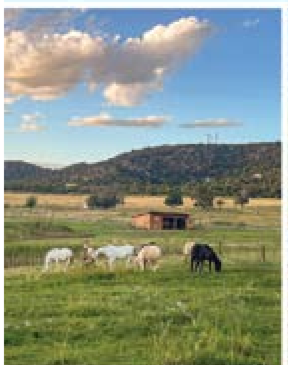

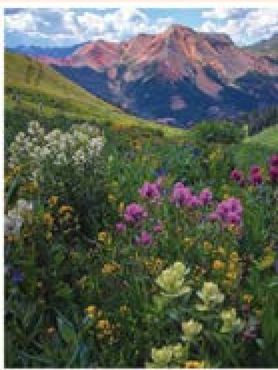

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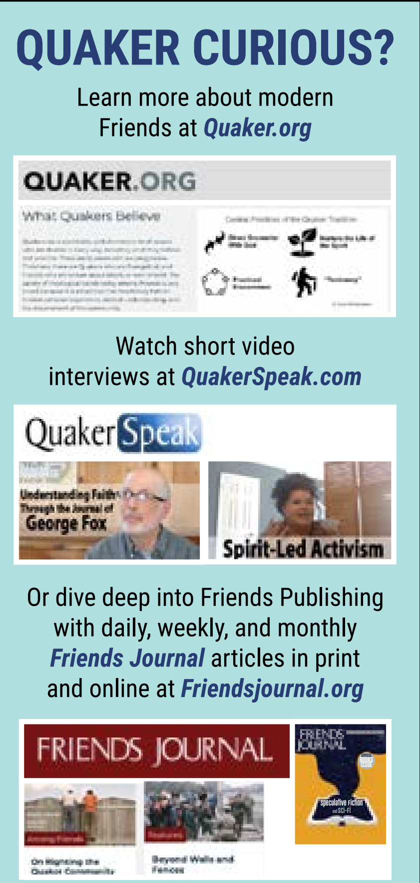

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Systemic change asks us to work in multitudes. To break silos, gather, and roll up our collective sleeves. The Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) is fostering this broader action. Now in its third year, the Convergence of Intentional Communities (CIC) has evolved from a national gathering into a network of regional events, self-organized and hosted locally.

Grown into a mission to mobilize regional systems of mutual-aid between intentional communities and their neighboring organizations, CIC embraces the unique needs and visions of each region. With support from the FIC, a local team of volunteers moves the work forward. Which means *you*, too, can be involved.

The first regional CIC will take place from June 18-21 at Sahale Community, Northwestern Washington. Sponsored by Goodenough Community, the New Economy Coalition, the FIC, and Northwest Intentional Communities Association (NICA), this event is by invitation to support focused organizing efforts.

The second CIC of this year will be held at Sirius Community, Massachusetts, part of a larger event, *Forests of the Northeast*, and sponsored in part by Permatours. This three-part event starts with CIC and ends with a music festival! Visit **ic.org** for updates.

Convergence of Intentional Communities is evolving, embracing local representation and respecting regional needs. Our hope is that every region in the United States builds self-governed, self-organized hubs exemplifying cooperative culture.

If your community is interested in hosting or participating in future CICs, please reach out to our Programs Director at **sabrina@ic.org**. A special thanks to our CIC volunteers: Saman Dashti, Hillary Hepp, Jade Futterman, Brandon Collins, Sky Blue, Sabrina Simon, Rueben Szabo, Yingzhao Liu, Roberto Rodriguez, and Julian Smith.

HELP BUILD A GLOBAL COMMONS

How much did your community's land cost? How long did it take to raise the money? How many people walked away because they couldn't wait, or couldn't afford the buy-in? Some of the most durable models of collective living weren't built from ideology but from necessity, by communities that never had the luxury of doing it any other way.

What does affordability mean to someone building community on communally-held land in Senegal? What does "joining a community" look like for a family in rural Colombia who has never left the village their grandparents built? What can a newly-formed ecovillage in Austin learn from an elder community in India that has been practicing consensus governance for 40 years, and what might that Indian community learn in return?

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) invites us out of our silos and into a world view that welcomes and honors the voices that come from realities that are vastly different from our own. Through **ecovillage.org** and the projects of GEN, you can connect to ecovillages from all contexts and continents and build resilience, together. And now, this connection has gotten an upgrade.

GEN and FIC have joined forces to launch a shared platform built for the movement: a living network where community seekers find their future home, founders discover their collaborators, and communities share the practical knowledge that makes them work. It grows from decades of effort.

The platform is, at its heart, a commons—and like any good commons, it is designed to be accessible to all. Core access is free. A Needs and Offers marketplace circulates resources across the network. A Members Library puts hard-won community documents (bylaws, governance frameworks, land agreements) within reach of anyone starting from scratch.

Join us in making the ecovillage model accessible to all. Let's build resilience rooted in experience. See **ecovillage.org** for more details.

DEXTER, OREGON

THREE PATHWAYS TO TRANSFORMATION

COURSES

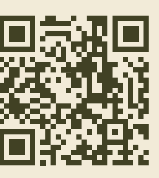
We educate youth and adults in the practical application of sustainable living. We take a holistic approach to sustainability. Our Permaculture Design Certificate, immersive Holistic Sustainability Semester, Social Forestry Course, youth learning adventures, and visitor education program offer participants a unique learning experience within our aspiring ecovillage. In collaboration with Nature's Mystery Awareness School, we also offer Eco-Resilience Leadership Training—an opportunity to become more consciously attuned to nature's support that surrounds and sustains us in every moment.

INTERNSHIPS

Lost Valley's internship is a 3-month immersive learning experience where participants have the opportunity to learn and work alongside some of the Pacific Northwest's finest systems thinkers. This is a great option for you if you are in a transitional period, and are looking to make like-minded friends, develop marketable skills, and experience living in community. Food and lodging are included.

RESIDENCY

Living in community teaches us to care for and respect one another, communicate compassionately, make decisions together, and see individual needs in the context of the whole. It also reduces resource use through sharing. Residents live in a variety of accommodations throughout our 87 acres. We offer several *Community Experience Weeks* throughout the year to give folks a chance to sample community living.



lostvalley.org

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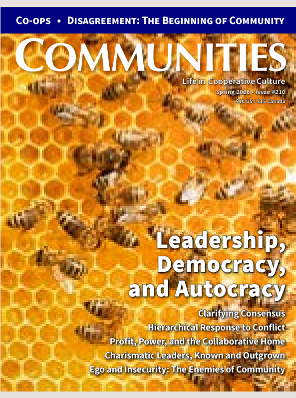

What Readers Say about COMMUNITIES

I love COMMUNITIES magazine. I've read and kept every issue since 1972. Deciding to be communal is the best decision I've ever made in my life. COMMUNITIES has been there from the beginning.

—**Patch Adams**, M.D., author and founder of the Gesundheit Institute

Our mission at *Utne Reader* is to search high and low for new ideas and fresh perspectives that aim to start conversations and cure ignorance. To that end, COMMUNITIES has become one of our go-to sources for thought-provoking pieces about people opting out of the rat race and living life on their own terms. We're pleased to share the voices we come across in COMMUNITIES with our readers because they remind us all of the virtue of cooperation and the world-changing potential of coexistence.

—**Christian Williams**, Editor, *Utne Reader*

I've been subscribing to COMMUNITIES for over a decade. Each issue is a refreshing antidote to the mainstream media's "me, me, me" culture. COMMUNITIES overflows with inspiring narratives from people who are making "we" central to their lives instead.

—**Murphy Robinson**, Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

Community has to be the future if we are to survive. COMMUNITIES plays such a critical role in moving this bit of necessary culture change along. Thank you COMMUNITIES for beating the drum and helping us see.

—**Chuck Durrett**, The Cohousing Company

COMMUNITIES mentors me with real human stories and practical tools: networking, research, and decades of archives that nourish, support, and encourage evolving wholesome collaborations. The spirit and writings have helped guide me to recognize and contribute to quality community experiences wherever I am. The magazine is an irreplaceable resource and stimulus during the times when community disappears and isolation/withdrawal looms; and an inspiration and morale booster when I am once again engaged with intentional and committed group work.

—**Shen Pauley**, reader and author, Barre, Massachusetts

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Bonus: every subscription, print + digital or digital only, also includes **access to all digital back and current issues** for online viewing and/or download.

gen-us.net/subscribe

PLEASE EXPLORE OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS!

Diverse groups help to provide support, education, and networking for those interested in and/or living in ecovillages and other intentional communities worldwide, including:

- FIC (Foundation for Intentional Community): **ic.org**
- BIPOC ICC (BIPOC Intentional Communities Council): **bipocicc.org**
- CohoUS (Cohousing Association of the United States): **cohousing.org**
- CSA (Communal Studies Association): **communalstudies.org**
- ICSA (International CSA): **icsacommunity.org**
- GEN (Global Ecovillage Network): **ecovillage.org** and its regions: **ecovillage.org/region/gen-africa** **ecovillage.org/region/gen-europe** **ecovillage.org/region/casa** **ecovillage.org/region/genoa** **ecovillage.org/region/genna**
- NextGEN (Youth Network): **ecovillage.org/region/nextgen**

We welcome stories and connections from throughout these and related networks, and hope to hear from you!

MORE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

Donate to COMMUNITIES:
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