

Cohousing Definition - June 2 2022

The term cohousing does not include a hyphen. Many people use the hyphen, but the spelling used by the Canadian Cohousing Network, the Cohousing Association of America, the UK Cohousing Network and Cohousing Australia, is without the hyphen.

Cohousing is the name of a type of collaborative housing that attempts to overcome the alienation of modern housing, where few people know their neighbours and there is little sense of community. The future residents are integral to the design and development of the community. Cohousing combines the autonomy of compact self contained private dwellings with the benefits of shared, spacious community amenities that typically include a large dining room, kitchen, recreation spaces, meeting rooms, children's play spaces, guest rooms, workshops and gardens. Cohousing neighbourhoods tend to offer environmentally sensitive design with a pedestrian orientation and have documented lower vehicle use than conventional neighbourhoods.

Although many multi-family developments include some amenity spaces, in cohousing the extensive common spaces not only make it possible to live in a smaller home, they also function as the heart of the community and offer many opportunities for social interaction. Although each home has its own private kitchen, shared meals are one of the many regular events that support relationships among neighbours.

The physical design provides opportunities for spontaneous connection as well as maintaining the option for privacy. This can be achieved with a variety of building forms. Completed cohousing communities vary in size, but typically range from 20 to 30 homes. Some have a special focus (e.g., for seniors) but most are intergenerational with a mix of family types and ages. Building forms mirror the range found in the larger society: single family, townhouses, duplexes and apartments.

Cohousing is not a particular legal form or means of holding interest in real property. The legal ownership form generally chosen for the completed community is the strata/condominium, however some communities have chosen to use the co-op/share structure. Although community decision making is non-hierarchical and usually by consensus, this does not impact the ownership form. Regardless of the legal structure chosen, the community is ultimately bound by the rules and laws set out by the provincial acts governing strata's/condominiums or co-ops/share structures.

The cohousing development process does not of itself generate below market priced homes. Although the development process does not include profit if the resident group is the developer, the homes are often of higher quality with more green-built features than conventional housing. This makes them less costly to maintain and operate, but does contribute to higher construction costs.

An aspect not often considered when looking at affordability is the cost of living. Because of the social structure and easy access to shared resources, cohousing homes provide opportunities for reducing living costs that are not available in conventional neighbourhoods. The homes can be smaller without negatively impacting lifestyle and the sharing reduces consumption. As a result cohousing contributes to the affordable housing continuum.