COHOUSING: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH
TO DWELLING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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ABSTRACT

As elsewhere, British Columbia faces a challenge of how to provide livable, affordable, safe housing for all in the face of public funding cuts. Cohousing may provide one solution. This study begins by analyzing various definitions of cohousing, then develops, on the basis of European and local experiences, four definitional criteria for distinguishing cohousing from other shelter options. It is proposed that the term "cohousing" be limited to housing that involves: joint ownership of common property combined with individual equity in private dwelling units; resident group decisions on design, management, and the shape of common life among the residents; design that facilitates both private living and shared space; and reliance on mainly private rather than public resources. The study then analyzes the potential of cohousing to meet B.C. needs by considering the constraints and opportunities facing its development, under headings derived from the adopted definition of cohousing, namely: organization (legal/financial/group process), design, and government relations. The study primarily draws on interviews with leaders of cohousing projects and government officials related to housing, as well as literature on the experience of other countries with cohousing. Each chapter ends with a strategic checklist for planners in the public or private sphere to consider in their facilitation of cohousing. The concluding chapter draws the constraints and opportunities into the context of the possible future for cohousing in B.C.
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1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 PURPOSE

This study analyzes the constraints and opportunities facing cohousing in British Columbia, providing a framework for the development of this relatively new shelter option in the province.

1.2 OUTLINE OF ISSUES RELATED TO COHOUSING

This first chapter discusses definitional issues related to cohousing, specifically answering these questions:

a. What is meant by cohousing? What range of definitions is given to cohousing?
b. Is it merely a new name for an existing form of shelter?
c. If not, how does it differ substantially from other forms of housing?

Chapter 2 is concerned with general questions related to the motivation and existing practice of cohousing, specifically:

a. Why bother with cohousing anyway?
b. Where has it been done?
c. Where is it being done in B.C.?
Chapter 3 is concerned with organizational matters flowing from the definition of cohousing adopted in this study. The concerns are divided into three categories: legal, financial and group process.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the design constraints and opportunities arising with cohousing. Notwithstanding the unique features of cohousing, we will see that design lessons from other forms of housing can be applicable to cohousing.

Chapter 5 is concerned with governmental factors that come into play with cohousing. If, as we shall put forward, cohousing by definition should represent private or self-help initiatives, then what role, if any, does the public sector play?

At each stage we will be answering the question: what are the essential features of cohousing that determine the opportunities and constraints of which planners of cohousing must always be aware? These features will be summarized in strategic checklists at the end of chapters 3-5 and then brought together in a concluding chapter on the provisions and prospects for cohousing in B.C.
1.3 DEFINITION

In approaching cohousing, the issue of definition is not as simple as one might like. There are two problems: differences in the literature and a deficiency in setting cohousing apart as a unique form of shelter.

1.3.1 Differences in the Literature

Naturally, one must begin with the authors who coined the term "cohousing," Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett. First, it should be noted that their definition is inductively derived. They identified four characteristics of community-based housing developments they studied during a research tour in Europe:

a. participatory process of planning and design by future residents
b. intentional design of neighbourhood or community
c. extensive common facilities, especially a dining area
d. complete resident management (after moving in).¹

It is also clearly assumed in the book that all cohousing developments have private, self-sufficient dwelling units for each individual or family in residence.

A more recent text on cohousing, Dorit Fromm's *Collaborative Communities*, seems to acknowledge the need for definitions directly by means of two glossaries at the end. Unfortunately, the author ends up creating some confusion in terminology. Whereas the subtitle of the book ("Cohousing, Central Living, and Other New Forms of Housing with Shared Facilities") seems to list cohousing as one type of collaborative community, the glossary provided in the book suggests that collaborative housing and cohousing are synonyms. The essential design characteristics identified there for this type of housing are: "common areas and facilities--with rooms for shared cooking and dining--combined with private self-contained units (including private bathrooms and kitchens)." Other features mentioned are governance and maintenance by residents and an emphasis on community. Although there is no explicit mention of design promoting neighbourhood, this definition is substantially in agreement with McCamant and Durrett.

However, Fromm goes on to differ in other details. For instance, in some contexts the author is prepared to relax the requirement for common dining and therefore common dining facilities. Also, Fromm, under close examination, seems to make participation in design and building on the part of

3 Ibid., p. 2.
residents only an option for cohousing, though a highly recommended option.\textsuperscript{4} Finally, Fromm, unlike McCamant and Durrett, defines cohousing as necessarily including an intergenerational mix.\textsuperscript{5}

Before reconciling these differences, it is important to be clear what a definition of cohousing does not include. Both of the sources already mentioned agree that cohousing is not tied to any particular size, design or building type, or ownership structure.\textsuperscript{6} McCamant and Durrett are also clear that construction by residents is only an option.\textsuperscript{7}

Are the essentials of cohousing as suggested in the literature enough to distinguish it from other established forms of shelter? There is a need for definitional clarity.

1.3.2 Distinguishing Cohousing from Other Housing

Definitional clarity is needed first to ensure that in talking about cohousing we are not just using a new name for an old concept. Much of what McCamant and Durrett or Fromm label as cohousing seems to be nothing new. For example, if, following Fromm, design by a group is eliminated as an essential, then cohousing is not much different than any condominium or townhouse development built on speculation. Such developments

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 269.
\textsuperscript{6} McCamant and Durrett, p. 16; Fromm, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{7} McCamant and Durrett, p. 166.
invariably include internal management structures and common areas (including cooking and, potentially, dining facilities), and so would qualify as cohousing under Fromm's definition. But why suggest with a new term that we are dealing with something new, when the form of housing in mind is actually well-established? If the project is a condominium and nothing more, then one should simply call it that and consult the relevant literature on condominiums in one's planning.

Likewise, if the definition of cohousing is not uniquely formulated then a so-called cohousing project may very well be identical to:

a. *congregate housing*. Fromm defines congregate housing as a combination of small living units and common spaces with support services available from a staff to help residents, who often are impaired or elderly. In fact, Fromm explicitly states in her definition of cohousing that support services such as child and elder care can be included in some cohousing developments. Supposing, for sake of argument, that congregate housing residents are consulted in some way about design and management, then the only thing really marking this form of shelter off from what McCamant and Durrett would usually call cohousing is that congregate housing (which would include group homes in North America) is usually owned by private or public agencies. In other words, to be explicit

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8 Fromm, p. 269.
about ownership is vital to the definition lest one ends up with a form of housing quite different from what most would understand as cohousing.

b. *(subsidized or rental) cooperative housing* (which, conceivably, can incorporate a resident design process, and which always involves group management). Again, the only thing that might distinguish cohousing from this well-known category is the concept of occupant-ownership. Furthermore, if the units are owned by the whole group rather than by individuals, then cohousing is really not different than the model of shelter one could call *unsubsidized (market or stock) cooperative housing*, which has existed for years in North America.

c. *shared housing*, where several people rent or buy a house together. If such housing involves a mixture of owner-occupants and renters, then it may just be a sophisticated form of *boarding*. Private, self-contained units is potentially the factor that could set cohousing apart at this point.

d. *communes*, like the kibbutz of Israel? Cohousing so-called may verge on such communities if use of common areas, participation in common life, and group management do not have a certain voluntary character among the cohousing members.
The point of inquiring whether cohousing is distinguished from these other forms is simply to ensure that we are not just inventing a new name for an existing idea. New names for old concepts create confusion and inefficiency in communication, research and planning.

The second reason for definitional clarity, i.e. agreeing on a new label, is that if there is a unique combination of features that has not been named other than cohousing, then this combination is worth studying to determine its potential to make a difference in the current housing market. In other words, the shelter option that "deserves" the new name of cohousing probably should have all the features that will be identified below in order to really have a fresh impact in British Columbia.

1.3.3 Definitional Conclusion

For the purpose of this study, the definition of cohousing will draw more from McCamant and Durrett than Fromm. In particular, active involvement of residents in design will be considered a necessary part of cohousing. Resident group design could be related to conversion of an existing structure, e.g. a condominium, into a cohousing complex. (In fact, McCamant and Durrett themselves live with other cohousers in a converted warehouse. If the final decision of
"conversion cohousers" is to make few or even no physical changes, then that still represents a group design process.)

Before drawing a definitional conclusion, we need to consider whether a "limited equity" rider should be built in to every viable cohousing charter. Limited equity refers to restricting resale profits (e.g. to some agreed measure such as a cost-of-living index) so that the second and subsequent generations of purchasers still realize a savings over land-market rates. In other words, it is a scheme designed to perpetuate an affordability factor. It is true that (as will be seen below) both the Danish experience and at least one local project have emphasized the limited equity approach. It is also arguable that the "community spirit" essential to cohousing can be best sustained when such social conscience and personal sacrifice is woven into the founding charter. There is no doubt that governments would be more amenable to projects ensuring an ongoing affordability bonus (or at least profit-limitation). However, as this thesis is focusing more on private practice than public policy, and as both affordability and the mechanisms to maintain community life are open to debate, we have decided to leave out limited equity as an essential of cohousing for now. However, it remains a strong and worthwhile option to consider, and a leading possibility for amendments to the cohousing definition in the future.
Taking together the practice of what some have called cohousing to date, the need for distinguishing cohousing from other existing shelter options, and some size considerations that will be more fully explored in chapter 3, the definition of cohousing which will guide this study is as follows.

Cohousing describes a living arrangement involving:

a. joint ownership of common property and some kind of individual equity in private dwellings.

b. a resident group sized and committed to make collective decisions on design, development (financing, property acquisition and construction, as necessary), management (membership and maintenance concerns), and opportunities for voluntary common life.

c. a design embracing private, self-contained units in conjunction with common areas and facilities, the arrangement of the whole contributing to community or neighbourliness.

d. a largely private rather than public initiative.⁹

McCamant and Durrett¹⁰ are not as strict with conditions a. or d., but, for reasons given above, condition a. seems critical in distinguishing cohousing from other existing forms of collective housing. The rationale for d., focusing on private

⁹ Although with some possibilities for public sector facilitation, as will be seen in chapter 5.
¹⁰ McCamant and Durrett, p. 43.
rather than government initiatives as an essential part of cohousing if it is to serve as a breakthrough in British Columbia, will become clearer by the end of the thesis.

1.4 SCOPE

The "why" of cohousing, that is, a rationale for its absolute advantages and its relative importance compared with other types of housing will be argued in the next chapter in terms of the attractiveness of cohousing for consumers and governments. Likewise, the "where" and "when" of cohousing, its location and history to date, will form a brief focus at the start of the study. This material is intentionally abbreviated as the main aim of the study is to provide a useful clarification of the issues and a checklist of responses for those already largely convinced about the value of cohousing.

This bulk of the study, then, focuses on the "how" of cohousing, i.e. answering the question: what do groups or facilitators need to be concerned with in the development and operation of cohousing in British Columbia and similar jurisdictions? The real task is adaptation of the model to the North American setting. In fact, excellent reviews of cohousing for the U.S. market have been provided first by McCamant and Durrett and even more fully by Fromm. The
ultimate aim of this study is to provide the basis for planning specifically tailored for British Columbia cohousing.

The primary focus is on implementing the essentials of cohousing as suggested in the preceding definition, that is, covering the legal and nonlegal aspects of organization (definition element a. and b.), followed by design aspects (definition element c.), and ending with governmental relations (definition element d.). Secondarily, the key options that can be considered by the cohouser will be examined, as well as relevant insights from other housing types that can be applied to cohousing.

Private practice rather than public policy will be the main emphasis throughout, though, in examining relationships between cohousers and governments (especially local ones), avenues for public sector encouragement of cohousing will become clear. These avenues will be noted in chapter 5, with "lobbying strategies" for cohousers to adopt with local government consigned to one of the appendices. Prospects for cohousing development in the current B.C. environment will be found in a concluding chapter.
Rationales for cohousing (derived in chapter 2) were based on general housing literature. An overview of the advantages and issues of cohousing were discovered through logical extension from the definition as well as through the experience found in cohousing literature, the two main sources already having been cited above, and through interviews with early practitioners from this region. The interviewees are listed in the Appendix.\textsuperscript{11} Newsletters and prospectuses of cohousing groups also provided helpful background information.

The case studies provided in the key cohousing literature offered the most extensive insight into the organizational constraints derived in chapter 3. Although not treated as an in-depth study, the experience of Providence Shelter Corporation and its project called Vicinia (what will likely be the first true cohousing project built in Vancouver), will form an appropriate local context for the discussion. Several people involved with the founding and development of Vicinia were interviewed.\textsuperscript{12} These interviews especially helped to illustrate the group process constraints associated with cohousing.

\textsuperscript{11} Interviews were held in November, 1992.
\textsuperscript{12} Interviews were held in the summer of 1993, just before the Vicinia project began excavation. The interviewees are listed in the Appendix.
For the discussion of design in chapter 4, relevant insights from other housing types were sought out through selected literature. However, this chapter's approach is primarily a deductive extension of the design portion of the cohousing definition adopted above.

In addition to the interview sources already mentioned for chapter 2, government representatives and documents were consulted to discover more about the public role in cohousing. Interviews were specifically conducted with municipal planners from Delta.\textsuperscript{13} The results of this research comprise chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{13} Interviews were held in November, 1992. The interviewees are listed in the Appendix.
2 RATIONALE FOR COHOUSING

Before embarking on a detailed study of how to make cohousing operational in British Columbia, it would be good to establish whether the trip will be worth making. Why, in fact, might people be interested in cohousing? What has been the range of experience to date? Will interest and experimentation in cohousing be likely to grow in British Columbia in the near term? Answers to each of these questions are provided briefly in this chapter.

2.1 COHOUSING: PROS AND CONS FOR THE CONSUMER

The definition of cohousing selected to guide this study (see 1.3.3) implies both positive and negative motivators for individuals and groups to join in creating cohousing. In what follows, we will essentially be answering the question: for what kind of person might cohousing work?

2.1.1 The Appeal of Cohousing

a. **Combined Resources.** The fact that a larger piece of property and more amenities can be enjoyed through pooling resources in an organized group will be a positive feature of cohousing for many people. If an absolute economy for cohousing can be demonstrated, i.e. if units are available at
less than market rate for equivalent accommodation in non-
cohousing projects, then affordability will be a strong
attractor for future residents (see section 2.4 below).
Residents with a social conscience will even be more
interested if some limitation on equity is in place so that
the affordability factor is maintained in perpetuity.
Affordability actually remains a moot point. This will be
discussed more fully below.

b. Group Process. A group process for making finance, design
and management decisions will appeal to many who like groups
and processes and who are determined to have an opportunity to
influence their living environment in a direct and detailed
way.

c. Creative Design. The possibility of design that embraces
all members' values will be of interest to anyone wanting in
fact to express their values. Typical "expressed values" seen
by McCamant and Durrett in the European cohousing world
included: ecological sustainability (e.g. energy efficiency,
solar power, bicycle repair shop); caring for children safely
and creatively (e.g. playgrounds and daycares); and community
economic development (e.g. on-site stores and restaurants).¹
Above all, people will be attracted to cohousing if they are
attracted to the social life engendered by common facilities
and grounds and the intentional neighbourhood design.

¹ Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, Cohousing: A
Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves (Berkeley, CA:
Habitat Press, 1988), chaps. 4-11.
d. **Do-it-Yourself.** Those with a self-help rather than public subsidy orientation will definitely find cohousing a congenial assignment, especially if they are the rare types also like to "break new ground" in dealing with public officials for zoning and building approvals (a challenge with which many cohousing groups have struggled). Furthermore, the appeal of homeownership over renting remains compelling for many.

2.1.2 The Impediments to Cohousing

a. **Organizational Complexity.** Beginning to look at the reverse of each motivator above, it is possible that certain people will be daunted by the thought of caring for a piece of property larger than a residential lot or for special facilities more elaborate than a garden shed. Also, there will be those put off by the complexity of share transfers in private companies (where rules can even restrict transfer through inheritance) and the potential difficulty of resale given the relatively unfamiliar model of cohousing.

b. **Group Process.** Group processes definitely do not appeal to some people either because of bad experiences or a sense of personal inadequacy when it comes to making contributions to a group. As well, many will realize that group processes, even when they are happy ones, take an extraordinary amount of time—especially when compared to simply searching for and purchasing a private dwelling, or even building a house on
your own. The planning for one project in the United States took 135 meetings!²

c. Fear of Community. People may not be drawn to cohousing because they are not convinced they will be able to find others who share their design values—and they are not sure they want to embrace the values of others. In particular, they may be lukewarm or even antagonistic about the idea of some sort of common life or neighbourhood, or they may be excessively worried about what friends and extended family will think about their "communistic" lifestyle. In the end, there are those who may quite simply not feel that strongly about creative design; for such folks, traditional housing options will probably be more attractive.

d. Self-Help not Helpful. The people who tend to not be self-starters or entrepreneurial will probably not gravitate towards cohousing. Put differently, people who feel they do not even have the minimal amount of time and money needed to launch and complete a cohousing project will likely turn to government-sponsored shelter or (if they can afford it) private housing as a first choice. Philosophically, those with a penchant for a social welfare system might even be suspicious of the equity control enjoyed by cohousers (the rich getting richer?) and the excuse that cohousing activity might provide to governments wanting to bow out of social housing programs. On the other hand, some who might otherwise be attracted to the sense of being a homeowner might not think

that the cohousing option, with its somewhat curtailed privacy and freedoms, is much of a psychological advance over renting.

2.2 COHOUSING AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

2.2.1 The Governmental Perspective

Again, the definition grid for cohousing provides a starting point for positing why governments might be interested in this kind of shelter option:

a. governments generally might like the efficiency factor involved when they can work with groups; furthermore, they might like the social stability and prosperity that presumably accompanies home ownership, though they probably would find any limited equity schemes even more attractive than open-ended plans that only benefited the first generation of owners; if cohousing is more affordable than comparable market housing then any government will most likely be very interested in being supportive (see below on the affordability question).

b. governments, especially local ones, generally are interested in anything that increases a sense of neighbourhood; access to common facilities by the wider community would be a bonus in their eyes; if present and
actualized, values such as ecological living seem to be increasingly attractive to all levels of government. c. governments might be attracted to projects that avoid subsidy funding; on the other hand, all levels of government have land potentially available for leasing to creative housing projects.

The three things that might cause governments to shy away from cohousing are the spectre of social enclaves developing (especially if the housing turns out to be only for the wealthy), design creativity conflicting with zoning and building codes, and any perception that public funds are even indirectly subsidizing market, for-profit housing.

2.2.2 The Social Perspective

What about social goods defined beyond the immediate government perspective? Marcus and Dovey identify four social issues addressed simultaneously by cohousing:

a. community enhanced; here is their observation about European examples: "Most successful schemes have incorporated spatial features that enhance casual neighbouring, and the participatory process used in the design is itself a strong

foundation for future community." Learning to share, to compromise and to identify values beyond consumption are critical elements towards building a sustainable society.

b. changing demography acknowledged; rather than open-plan ranch houses too large for the growing contingent of single-person, single-parent and elderly homeowners, cohousing can offer a variety of housing options and dwelling sizes.

c. raising children made easier in safe precincts with special facilities and plenty of playmates and sitters nearby.

d. sexism reduced, especially for the single mother benefiting from c. above and for all men and women working side-by-side on communal cooking (if it exists) and maintenance.

The social good of affordable housing is not on the list for Marcus and Dovey, because they are not sure the facts support it (see more on this topic below).

2.2.3 The Sustainability Perspective

Beyond the social realm just noted, the sustainability benefits of cohousing in economic and ecological terms are potentially tremendous, though the final extent of these and the consequent attractiveness to governments remain largely up to the desires of the particular cohousing group.
As well as group-specific features such as providing bicycle repair shops, common vehicles, and other encouragers of low-impact lifestyles, resources are generally conserved through smaller dwelling units, shared appliances and (where applicable), more efficient communal growing and eating of food.

2.2.4 The Global Perspective

A wider debate has been happening in the circles involved with so-called self-help housing, especially in the Third World context. Although a world apart from the self-help associated with cohousing groups in the industrialized world, it may be useful to list the social criticisms leveled by academics against self-help housing (also known as the informal sector) in developing countries. For example, Peter Marcuse identifies ten problems with self-help housing:

a. it cannot substitute for indispensable resources like land, materials, expertise and infrastructure.
b. it cannot deal with problems of resources allocation requiring centralized planning.
c. it is likely to produce only temporary solutions.
d. it provides no learning mechanism, no context for progress in housing from project to project over time.
e. it is inefficient because of the inexperienced personnel involved.
f. it is economically regressive, the better off being able to gain more through their efforts than the poor.
g. it will lower housing standards as the cheapest available materials will tend to be used.
h. it can be politically reactionary, distracting from the kind of political action required to improve housing.
i. it can be socially divisive, elevating individual improvement over collective activities.
j. it exploits the labour of its participants.4

It is clear that few of these criticisms apply to cohousing in the developed world, though e. and f. may apply within the context of the middle-class cohousers described in section 3.6, wrestling with their long, sometimes frustrating planning process, but still with much greater means at their disposal than those below the poverty line. For the most part, however, cohousing may be seen as an antidote to the problems of individual, self-built shelter. This becomes clear in Marcuse's prescription for mitigating the worst features of current Third World self-help approaches:

a. collective, rather than individual, self-help;
b. limited equity ownership, with rigid resale and rental controls;
c. a collective democratic decision-making structure, open to others seeking housing;
d. a non-exclusive structure involving those in need of housing but not participating in the immediate project;
e. a strong association with a social movement or political group focused on influencing governmental actions.\(^5\)

Cohousing fits at least part of this list remarkably well, with the expanding network of cohousing enthusiasts (described below) even showing promise for the broader activities suggested under d. and e.

2.3 THE HISTORY OF COHOUSING

Based on the appeal and in spite of the impediments, cohousing has enjoyed a brief but significant history to date.

2.3.1 Ancient Antecedents

Although the indebtedness is not always explicit, cohousing is a reflection of a number of earlier housing types. The ultimate forerunner of cohousing actually goes back to one of

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5 Ibid., p. 21.
the earliest settlement patterns, namely, the model of village plus commons. Here is how Lewis Mumford described this type of living arrangement:

The village, in the midst of its garden plots and fields, formed a new kind of settlement: a permanent association of families and neighbors, of birds and animals, of houses and storage pits and barns... Before the city came into existence, the village had brought forth the neighbor: he who lives near at hand, within calling distance, sharing the crises of life, watching over the dying, weeping sympathetically for the dead, rejoicing at a marriage feast or a childbirth.6

Apart from the agricultural references, Mumford could be describing the experience of many cohousing groups. Rural contexts do not provide the only antecedents for cohousing. Small city neighbourhoods where residents depended on each other for support existed less than a century ago.7

Every aspect of the cohousing definition and practice has in a sense been borrowed from other sources. In this way, cohousing represents a unique composite of shelter strategies. Legally and financially, condominiums have often provided a model. In terms of group process, communes such as the kibbutz of Israel and sectarian groups such as the Hutterite have offered inspiration. Design for a combination of privacy and neighbourliness was anticipated by urban low-rise group housing which has a history dating back many centuries.8 The

7 Elena Marcheso Moreno, "Cohousing Comes to the U.S.," Architecture (July 1989): 64.
sharing of common facilities also has a long pedigree, being found in apartment hotels and collective houses on both sides of the Atlantic since the turn of the century. Finally, the incentive and pattern for self-help initiatives can be traced to the prolific and varied cooperative movement.

2.3.2 Europe

The precursors to European cohousing can be seen in the utopian ideals of nineteenth-century housing reformers. Norbert Schoenauer has suggested that the age of industrialization produced a different response in the New World as opposed to the Old when it came to housing reform. Americans, he says, focused on mechanization in the drive to produce the "servantless" house, whereas Europeans emphasized centralization, pooling resources into collective household services that removed domestic drudgery.

The earliest experiments date to 1832 in France. There were two English prototypes in the early 1900's, but the full flowering came about under the leadership of a Dane, Otto Fick. His "collective house" was built in 1903. It had no less than 27 common rooms for collective services to 26 apartments, providing everything from a central kitchen

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10 Ibid., p. 47.
11 Ibid., p. 48.
12 Ibid., p. 54.
(delivering food by a dumbwaiter system) to a laundry. Interestingly, Fick had some of the same financing difficulties which can plague cohousers today. In the end, the municipality of Copenhagen had to hold the first mortgage on the property, and construction was financed on a cooperative basis.

In spite of the problems, Fick's model was emulated all over Europe. Early examples can be found in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Sweden.13 As for the sphere of tenant-planned and managed multi-story buildings, there are many examples throughout Europe (in both new developments and restoration of old buildings); both local and state governments have been supportive.14

Scandinavian soil has proven particularly fertile for the development of collective approaches to living, though the large-scale projects that have been developed in modern times (sometimes with over 1300 units) have become too institutional for many people's tastes.15 The smaller Swedish communal apartment houses that were developed in the 1970's as a response begin to approach the cohousing model, though the aspects of a group design process and individual or cooperative homeownership were largely missing from these government-sponsored projects.16 Cohousing "proper" (i.e.

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13 Ibid., pp. 55-59, 63.
14 Mathey, pp. 41-42.
15 Franck and Ahrentzen, p. 69.
16 Ibid., p. 72.
closely following our definition) actually developed in the 1970's in Denmark. By 1988, 67 cohousing communities had been built in Denmark (most since 1982) and 38 more were being planned. The first communities were motivated and made entirely by residents. Soon, nonprofit housing developers and associations became involved, and the national government began to be supportive. Legislation passed in 1981 made it possible for housing cooperatives of at least eight units to apply for a lower-interest government-sponsored loan.

Today, cohousing is a mainstream shelter option in Denmark, and fast becoming the same in other countries. By 1991, Marcus and Dovey were reporting that there were about 200 functioning cohousing developments in Northern Europe.

2.3.3 United States

Collective (and, later, cooperative) apartment houses were common in American cities in the nineteenth century. Consider how modern-sounding the amenities were in Chicago's so-called Jane Club, opened for single female workers in 1898: it boasted a dining room, central kitchen, laundry room and a bicycle and trunk storage room. The many experiments with collective living waned when single-family detached dwellings became affordable to many after World War II. Contrary to the

17 Ibid., p. 96.
18 Ibid., p. 102.
19 Marcus and Dovey, p. 113.
20 Franck and Ahrentzen, p. 4.
impression given by McCamant and Durrett, the Americans have not exactly been waiting around for cohousing to be imported from Europe. In fact, Dorit Fromm lists several examples of cooperative housing (one dating from 1939) which incorporate cohousing elements. One project is described in detail, a limited equity housing cooperative in Santa Rosa, California, that was occupied in 1982 after a five year planning, financing and building process. Further, Karen Franck describes a Portland, Oregon, community which finished construction in the late 1970's and truly manifests all the elements of European cohousing except daily common meals (the residents only meet weekly). Nevertheless, it may be fairly said that with the publishing of McCamant and Durrett's case study of Danish cohousing in their 1988 book, and the beginning of their cohousing consultancy out of Berkeley, California, a new wave of interest has developed. The first new-construction cohousing community emerging out of this wave opened in Davis, California, in 1991. It has 26 units and a common house on a 2.8-acre suburban site.

Whereas the Davis group used a developer, the first (at least according to its own publicity) self-developed cohousing project was completed in April, 1992, on Bainbridge Island,

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21 Ibid., p. 121.
22 Fromm, p. 98.
23 Franck and Ahrentzen, pp. 16-17. Fromm also provides a case study of this group.
24 Marcus and Dovey, p. 113.
near Seattle, Washington. The group there had the benefit of one of its residents being a development consultant.

Marcus and Dovey also identify two other projects being completed in California by 1992: a converted warehouse and a downtown row house scheme. California seems to be particularly inclined towards housing experiments. Dorit Fromm suggests this is because of the "impoverished communal and social life, and the resulting claustrophobic pressures on each isolated nuclear family, offered by the suburban tracts that sprawl across the state."

However, the idea of cohousing has spread to many other areas, from Seattle to New England, from the Southeast to Alaska.

Marcus and Dovey counted over 100 groups debating goals and looking for land by 1991. This is an amazing change in just two years, from the date of the Moreno article in *Architecture* which could not identify one cohousing proposal underway.

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26 Marcus and Dovey, p. 113.
28 Marcus and Dovey, p. 113.
29 Moreno, p. 67.
2.3.4 British Columbia

Cohousing has arrived in British Columbia from across the U.S. border and appears to be gathering momentum. The first "core group" (a cohousing interest group) formed an association in January, 1991. This group, dubbing itself Windsong, bought a five-acre site in Langley in March, 1993.31 At the same time, an education and facilitation group has formed in B.C. called the The CoHousing Network, B.C. Chapter (formerly Cascadia Cohousing Society/International Cohousing Society). Their first newsletter reported that six new core groups have formed in different parts of B.C.31 The local network is communicating with other cohousing animators in Canada, including an active society in Toronto. An umbrella organization called The Cohousing Network puts out a 20-page quarterly called CoHousing. So far, McCamant and Durrett have been heavily involved in these efforts. However, it is interesting to note that an entirely separate stream (having no contact with the foregoing initiatives or players), has emerged from an innovative housing consultancy called Providence Shelter Corporation. Under its guidance, two multi-story projects, one housing a seniors group (The Tillicum) and the other intergenerational (The Vicinia--Latin for neighbourhood), will be finished on the westside of Vancouver in 1994. (As will become clear in chapter 4, there

31 Ibid.
is nothing inherent in the adopted definition for cohousing which precludes a multi-story design.) In both cases, the groups are acting as their own designers and developers. A substantial savings over market rate has been promised.\footnote{32} Whether this is in fact achievable remains open to question, as we will examine in the next section.

2.4 Cohousing and Affordability

The issue of affordability in cohousing is both a critical and a complex one. Affordability of housing is a prevalent and constant social topic today. A task fueling the discussion is deciding exactly what affordability means. One definition might test whether homeownership in a particular area is possible for a certain income level—-but this begs the question of whether downpayments are within reach and what debt levels are appropriate for an individual or family. However, affordability can also be measured in terms of what one's housing dollar is able to buy. As architecture professor Karen Franck notes: "The economic advantage of collective housing is primarily the opportunity to have amenities that might be difficult for single households to afford, such as darkrooms, workshops, one or more guest rooms, or very large living rooms."\footnote{33}

\footnote{32}Providence Shelter Corporation prospectuses.  
\footnote{33}Franck and Ahrentzen, p. 6.
A local cohousing project, the Vicinia has put affordability, defined simply as housing priced below market rate for an area, as a centrepoint in their advertising. On the other hand, the North American gurus of cohousing, McCamant and Durrett, recently stated that there should be no expectations that cohousing can be built for less than market rate in North America. More recently, Marcus and Dovey have concurred: "Indications are that cohousing does not reduce the cost of a new home, since reduced carrying and marketing costs, and a nonprofit approach, are offset by the cost of the common house and the increased costs of professional services engendered by the consensus decision-making process." Apart from the special situation of third party grants or investment (including favourable leasing terms), the experts may have a case, at least based on the experience in Denmark as noted by McCamant and Durrett: "Although earlier cohousing groups attempted to keep prices below market rates, many had difficulty designing within their original budgets." In fact, budget control only came in when the Danish government set limitations on the residential units that would qualify for cooperative financing. Therefore, "previous criticisms of cohousing as a high-priced option out of reach of common people no longer hold true."

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34 Notes from a lecture (Burnaby, Nov. 18, 1992). Karen Franck, writing in New Households, New Housing, p. 6, agrees: "The actual cost of a dwelling unit is not likely to be reduced in collective housing; in many cases it is the same as or higher than the cost of conventional apartments or houses". 35 Marcus and Dovey, p. 113. 36 McCamant and Durrett, p. 161. 37 Ibid., p. 145.
One key variable in the affordability formula revolves around this question: are unit sizes and costs per square metre being limited? Smaller, simpler units of course have a direct benefit of affordability to the resident, but they also affect cost indirectly. The point is that smaller units can usually mean more units (as long as open space and shared facilities are not too lavish), producing an economy of scale when constructing common buildings. The second key affordability variable is: how much work are the cohousers willing to put in? This work is sometimes called "sweat equity."

Clearly there are direct savings if one can eliminate the profit margin charged by a developer or general contractor, or do some construction work as a group.\textsuperscript{38} The Vicinia claims to be coming in at 20 percent below market rate, and that about two-thirds of this saving can be traced to not having a developer involved.\textsuperscript{39} There have also probably been some savings on marketing and real estate fees when compared with normal apartment buildings. However, the Vicinia has not yet been built, and the opening date has recently been delayed by several months.

\textsuperscript{38} Even savings during development planning can be substantial. According to McCamant and Durrett (see p. 56), thousands of dollars were saved by one Danish group when they borrowed an old blueprint machine and reproduced some 50,000 construction drawings for the bidding process.

\textsuperscript{39} Interview with Craig Vance, Providence Shelter Corporation, Vancouver, B.C., 27 February 1992.
It remains to be seen whether the third great variable with affordability will take a toll. This variable is simply the question of time. The longer that interest (or lease) payments are being made on an uncompleted site, the more expensive it becomes. Also, delays can discourage a group, leading to defections and slower recruitment, and thus potentially higher marketing costs. Delays are more likely with larger projects (McCamant and Durrett define this as over 35 units, so the Vicinia would fit such a pattern). Planning approvals, financing arrangements and neighbourhood opposition are all usually more complex with a larger project. The Vicinia has experienced all of this, perhaps causing them to consider the advice given by McCamant and Durrett: "we generally do not recommend that a resident organizing group attempt to build a community of this size without collaborating with an experienced developer."40

Finally, entry affordability can be created by lowering front-end costs, either for all members (e.g. leased land combined with a long-term sinking fund) or for certain members (e.g. those who pay less downpayment into a cooperative mortgage). In spite of all the obstacles to affordability, after almost three years of planning, Windsong is still predicting lower than market costs.41

40 McCamant and Durrett, p. 157.
41 Focus on Cohousing (Newsletter of the Cascadia Cohousing Society), Vol. 1, Issue 3 (Fall 1993).
Whatever the conclusion on affordability, with the kind of early cohousing activity described in 2.3.4, one might ask: What are the prospects for cohousing in British Columbia in the next few years and beyond? The balance of this thesis will attempt to answer this question in terms of exploring the constraints and exploiting the opportunities inherent in our adopted definition of cohousing. The concluding chapter will draw the main factors together in the context of the current British Columbia housing scene.
3 ORGANIZATION IN COHOUSING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will address three sets of opportunities and constraints arising directly from the first two definitional criteria of cohousing adopted at 1.3.3, namely:

a. structuring joint ownership of common property combined with individual equity in private dwellings (largely a legal concern); the issue of membership will be included under this category, though membership also has obvious connections to group process (see subsection 3.7.2).

b. managing development and maintenance financing; consideration of approaches to property acquisition and construction will take place under this category, though these topics naturally have design implications as well (see chapter 4), and they touch on governmental concerns (chapter 5).

c. handling group process, if indeed there is anything unique about the dynamics of a cohousing group.

These three areas of concern are brought together in this chapter because of their obvious interrelationships. The legal is inevitably entangled with the financial side of cohousing, and group process is largely spent on these
matters, at least in the early stages of a cohousing development. Legal and financial arrangements have an impact on how the cohousing group operates in making decisions.

One may ask: why begin this cohousing study with legal agreements and financial matters? One reason is that these concerns do indeed arise very early in the history of cohousing groups. McCamant and Durrett note: "Before a group can proceed very far in the planning process, it must give serious consideration to its legal organization and individual and shared liabilities."1 The confidence level of members, consultants, bankers and realtors alike increases dramatically when a cohousing group becomes a legal entity.

The constraints and opportunities, and suggested solutions, will be drawn from research on European and U.S. models, local interviews (see Appendix 7.1), and some collateral sources on housing and ownership (see Appendix 7.2).

3.2 LEGAL CONCERNS

Simple analysis combined with reviewing the experience of European cohousers suggests that the type of legal glue holding a cohousing group together must satisfy three basic tests:

a. it falls under an umbrella of relevant legislation and regulations.

b. it facilitates the lending required for development.

c. it fulfills the values and goals of the cohousing group.

The only exception to test a. would be if the cohousing group wanted to "break new ground" and attempt to have new legislation passed. This (long and uncertain) process would be beyond the average cohousing group.

Test b., satisfying private lending institutions or public funding sources, will always be a consideration (unless the cohousing group is completely self-financing, a situation that is hard to imagine other than in the case of seniors with lots of equity). In some cases and at certain times, banks and credit unions are prepared to be creative. On the other hand, they can also be very conservative, for example, not being willing to provide individual mortgages at good rates for members of a housing corporation.
The import of test c., maintaining the values of the group, will vary widely depending on the types of values in view. Examples of values that could influence the shape of a legal agreement are:

-- distinguishing serious members from the casual or curious.
-- maintaining a smaller planning group deliberately until development decisions are substantially completed.
-- not trying to solve every part of the final agreement at the start (i.e. only creating legal structures as necessary).
-- breaking down barriers that come with individualism by not having strata titles and therefore sharing liability completely (this becomes a question of choosing the mechanism to define the individual equity attached to private dwellings).
-- limiting the equity that can accrue to individual members (e.g. preserving a "social dividend" of affordability beyond the first generation).
-- managing the transfer of shares or title strictly (including through bequests).
-- having only general principles written down in the final agreement as compared with more detailed by-laws.

Of course, the precise principles and by-laws in the final agreement that encode these values can vary from group to group.
3.3 LEGAL SOLUTIONS

3.3.1 Legislative Frameworks (Test a.)

The natural first question for a cohousing group to consider in defining its legal structure is: What is possible under current legislation in the jurisdiction where the development will occur? For example, in Denmark, the homeland of cohousing, policy has been in place since 1981 that provides loans for new construction to any housing cooperative of at least eight units. The effect of the Cooperative Financing Law was to reduce the initial investment and monthly mortgage payments. To qualify, a cooperative had to cap construction costs as well as limit average unit size (to 95 square meters). Residents received the tax advantages of ownership, but their equity growth is limited by the government, equity increasing only by the published rate of general inflation rather than by speculative land market rates.²

Similar limited-equity cooperatives are legislated now in the United States. For example, California limits equity on the resale of units to an annual appreciation (in 1988, set by law at 10 percent per year) in return for some public subsidies which reduce down payments.³

² Ibid., pp. 141-142.
In British Columbia, the three basic legislative umbrellas for contracts allowing equity appreciation on individual units and joint ownership of common property would be partnerships/companies, cooperatives, and strata corporations (condominiums). Companies could either be for-profit or act as a nonprofit holder of land that is leased back to homeowners at perpetually affordable rates (speculation and absentee ownership being proscribed by charter). The so-called Community Land Trust is an example of the latter model.4 The main difference between cooperatives and companies is that the former always are structured around a one-member-one-vote system rather than around power being geared to the number of shares held by an individual.5 As for strata corporations under the Condominium Act, they replaced the market housing groups once structured under the Cooperative Association Act.6 Condominiums are preferred by most buyers over cooperative arrangements because of the easier and clearer procedures for resale. Such resale is a wholly private and well-understood conveyance not open to scrutiny by the other residents in the complex; furthermore, the buyer can get normal private mortgage financing not available to the purchaser of shares in a cooperative.

5 See Section 27 of B.C.'s Cooperative Association Act.
6 See Part 2, "Housing Cooperatives."
3.3.2 Lender Relationships (Test b.)

Each model for legally linking cohousing group members has its advantages from a financing viewpoint. In British Columbia, the process of securing mortgages on strata units is routinely handled by all major lending institutions. On the other hand, a corporation could attract favourable interest rates on a combined mortgage (i.e. a "volume" deal), as long as a progressive lender was prepared to risk funds on a relatively new housing type. McCamant and Durrett are cautiously hopeful in this regard: "The first American cohousing groups must convince banks that they can handle problems of long-term management; once a number of cohousing developments have proven this, financial institutions may actually prefer lending to them." 7

Furthermore, a corporation or cooperative with attractive social values in its charter (e.g. limited-equity schemes) might garner government involvement (e.g. Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC) that provides the kind of lender-confidence that leads to better mortgage interest rates, or even produces special grants to offset certain consultant and other start-up fees. The Vicinia development on W. Broadway described in chapter 2 has tried to position

7 McCamant and Durrett, p. 201. Progressive lending certainly cannot be assumed; one major credit union in Vancouver is currently not lending to cooperatives.
itself in exactly this way. In fact, the Vicinia project has gone further in its creativity. Formed as a so-called equity cooperative with the members as tenants-in-common, it has convinced CMHC to offer individual mortgage insurance so that a lender can provide a mortgage on each member's leasehold unit on a personal covenant basis; one advantage is that the project is protected against general foreclosure in the case of mortgage default. Thus, this cooperative is effectively emulating some of the features of a strata corporation.

Finally, nonprofit corporations like Community Land Trusts have the capacity to attract funding from socially concerned investors and philanthropists. In the United States, for example, development costs have been lowered by grants from religious organizations, charitable foundations and city governments. Clearly, most of these agencies would only be interested in homeownership projects for individuals and families with limited means.

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8 Interview with Craig Vance, Providence Shelter Corporation, Vancouver, B.C., 27 February 1992.
3.3.3 Legal Agreements and Group Values (Test c.)

Given the variety of values with legal implications that may exist from group to group, it is difficult to suggest generic solutions. Nevertheless, one helpful idea that could be applied to most cases is the idea of establishing legal agreements in a phased style, dealing as much as possible with the immediate task at hand and delaying complexity where possible. McCamant and Durrett list three phases of the development process at which legal agreements need to be drawn up:

a. initial organizing (pre-site acquisition) and development planning.
b. construction.
c. definition of final ownership and management structure.¹⁰

To approach the legal side in stages, with complexity postponed until absolutely necessary, is a strategy for not tiring potential members or scaring them off. The phased approach to encoding legal agreements is an option; the actual content of such agreements as outlined below is a well-established in the European experience as described by McCamant and Durrett.

¹⁰ McCamant and Durrett, p. 162.
--Initial Organization

The first agreement usually will cover the group's purpose, decision-making procedures, recruitment methods, and fees to pay operating expenses and early consulting services. The order in which membership payments are received can be the basis of a priority list for selecting the eventual private units. Non-paying attendees at organizing meetings generally would be excluded from voting. The organizing group might be restricted to a smaller number than the planned final group size, to make planning easier (see subsection 3.7.2 below). An example of an initial agreement used by one of the Danish groups studied by McCamant and Durrett is given in Appendix 7.3 at the end of this study. Attorney advice and assistance is probably not necessary at this point.

--Purchase and Construction

The second agreement normally will be established when the group is prepared to purchase property or hire consultants on an extended basis. Two possibilities are to incorporate as a development partnership (Companies Act) or a building association (Societies Act), which will exist through the construction phase. An attorney will usually be involved with writing up by-laws. This agreement will generally require a minimum, partially-refundable investment towards the down payment on the site and collateral to guarantee the
construction loan. Obviously, this stage represents an increase in risk for individual members. The by-laws would almost certainly need to include membership withdrawals and procedures for settling accounts, e.g. refunds not being made until a new member is secured. This stage of agreement will also reflect the involvement of any third party partner such as a developer, builder or nonprofit sponsors like community development corporations in the U.S. (see below under 3.5.2 to 3.5.4). Finally, it is important for the bylaws to spell out who can legally represent the group.\textsuperscript{11}

--Operation

The third agreement is set up after construction is complete and the construction loan is transferred to individual or cooperative mortgages. The by-laws of this homeowners' company or cooperative supersede all previous agreements. Certainly included here will be details concerning maintenance fees and management structures, degree of control over transfer of shares or titles,\textsuperscript{12} and whether the group agrees to a limited equity (permanent affordability) plan as a social value in its agreement. It may be argued that the final legal structure is something that will need to be discussed long before occupancy. This is no doubt true; the values that will

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 163.

\textsuperscript{12} For example the group could have first right of refusal if a member wants to sell, thereby strictly controlling membership; in a private company, even the transfer of shares by bequest can be restricted.
be encoded in the final managing document will be wrestled with at the earliest stage of the group. However, dealing with the precise formulations should be delayed until later lest the group die in the details before it has even begun.

3.4 FINANCIAL CONCERNS

Apart from the funding implications of the legal structure of a cohousing group (see 3.3.2 above), there are several areas of a cohousing project that have financial implications. The following list of financial constraints and opportunities (in chronological order as the project develops) can be abstracted from the descriptions in McCamant and Durrett and local experience as revealed in interviews:

a. early recruiting, exploration of values and goals: may involve hiring a cohousing consultant or a generic facilitator, advertising, meeting room rentals, and some office overhead.

b. development planning: if self-developing, usually will involve hiring an architect, and perhaps a specialist consultant in cohousing (preferably these will be one in the same).

c. site acquisition: downpayment, plus the usual property purchase costs; legal charges to set up the group agreement; permits.
d. construction: if acting as own general contractor, will involve securing a loan to buy materials, hire sub-
trades, and pay development cost charges.
e. maintenance: both ongoing and capital replacement (e.g. roof).

3.5 FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS

Each of the financial and physical needs listed in the previous subsection can be handled in different ways.

3.5.1 Initial Costs

As was noted in the descriptions of legal agreements, charging fees to interested members is the customary way to recover exploratory and what might be called "group development" and "vision-casting" costs. Fees can either be monthly dues or a one-time nonrefundable deposit (the Vicinia approach). Sometimes government or foundation grants can be secured if the project qualifies as a innovative case study (see section 5.4 below). There is also the remote possibility of a private patron, or the more likely scenario of involving a courageous developer even at this early stage.
3.5.2 Development Planning

The cohousing group can act as its own developer, assuming a lender is willing to provide funds for land acquisition and construction. Banks can require purchase commitments for at least half the units before such lending will be approved. Another option is for the cohousing group to do a joint venture with a developer. The complexities and expense of the process (including, today, managing neighbour reactions) usually will make this an attractive choice. Unless a nonprofit developer can be found which is convinced about the social merits of cohousing, this partnership will add costs. Usually the most that can be hoped for is a limited-profit developer; apparently this breed of developer is multiplying, at least in the U.S. It must be remembered that financial institutions prefer to work with developers having track records and sizeable collateral.

3.5.3 Land Acquisition

If self-developing, funds can be secured from any financial institution willing to offer them. Mortgages can be held jointly or individually, depending upon the legal arrangement.

13 McCamant and Durrett, p. 163.
A cooperative mortgage has the advantage of allowing members with large downpayments (generally older, more established folks) to be partnered with those that do not have much in the way of a downpayment but can handle large monthly payments (young career types). In this way, a socioeconomic and intergenerational mix is promoted in the membership. Cooperatives with the right social values included can attract low-interest loans from government or, in the U.S., agencies like the National Consumer's Cooperative Bank. Dorit Fromm describes a U.S. limited-equity cooperative that secured a government loan by agreeing to include ten units for very low income residents.\(^{15}\) A problem may arise, however, when government funding, and its attendant bureaucracy, threatens the privately-driven creativity of a cohousing initiative. Furthermore, if the cohousing model is too dependent on governments, it will disappear in times of tight public money.

---Individual Mortgage

Creativity is also possible with individual rather than cooperative mortgages. Again, the Vicinia project is paving the way. In addition to gaining CMHC support (see below), this group also intends to lobby a single lender for optimum rates, with the argument that a "volume deal" for so many

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individual mortgages should be in order. The CoHousing Network is promoting another innovative strategy, the formation of a fund to attract private investors in cohousing real estate.\textsuperscript{16}

One way to reduce land costs is to lease land from a sympathetic landlord such as CMHC or a Land Trust. For example, in Israel, housing associations known as amuta form to secure land at favourable lease rates from the national government (which owns virtually all of the land in the country). In fact, the Vicinia project is leasing its land for sixty years from CMHC. In that case, contributing to a "sinking fund" becomes another monthly charge to offset the decreasing resale value of the building and permit moving into new premises at the end of the lease. Another possibility for getting help with financing, especially where the cohousing group decides to include people who cannot afford to become homeowners, is to involve a nonprofit social housing organization in the development of rental units in the project. McCamant and Durrett describe one Danish cohousing development that successfully followed this model.\textsuperscript{17}

However, some difficulties are noted in Dorit Fromm's analysis of Dutch experience with mixing renters and owners; in particular, there is the fact that renters do not show up much to meetings about finances.\textsuperscript{18} One group that actually charged

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Focus on Cohousing} (Newsletter of the Cascadia Cohousing Society), Vol. 1, Issue 3 (Fall 1993).
\textsuperscript{17} McCamant and Durrett, pp. 109.
\textsuperscript{18} Fromm, p. 62.
rent differentially according to ability to pay is reconsidering its generous spirit, largely because of renters abusing the system. Finally, in places where mixed use is possible or required (as in the Vicinia with its mandatory W. Broadway storefronts), additional savings are possible through leasing commercial space (assuming vacancies and rents are favourable and a "profit" can be made), though this takes time and trouble to manage.

3.5.4 Construction

In rare cases a self-developing cohousing group could act as its own general contractor. There is growing literature on self-help (meaning self-build) housing strategies. More often, given the complexity of a building project (including dealing with local government) the higher costs of hiring a builder must be borne. As with developers, low-profit builders with some social vision should be located, if possible. If they will guarantee costs, so much the better. The Vicinia managed to locate a competent builder who was also willing to help with financing. Within the typical project, there are three key ways to reduce construction costs:

a. limit idiosyncrasies in private unit design.

b. avoid changes during construction.

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c. have the cohousing group do some of the building or landscaping. McCamant and Durrett describe several Danish cases where the cohousers did much of the finishing work. However, a caution should be taken from Dorit Fromm, who describes a Dutch cohousing group who ended up paying more to have professionals fix up their poor workmanship.20

Another major way to drastically reduce construction costs is the (probably rare) situation where an existing structure can be renovated. McCamant and Durrett encountered at least one of these projects in Denmark, and happen to live in one themselves.21

3.5.5 Maintenance

Operating costs obviously can be handled through monthly fees. Such costs can be offset in two ways:

a. having the cohousing group do some or all of the work; to avoid incompetent performance, freeloading or guilt, the Vicinia has decided to charge everyone fees, then professionally define all cleaning, repair and even management jobs and allow members to "bid" on the contracts (so that they effectively reduce their fees

20 Fromm, p. 63.
21 McCamant and Durrett, p. 96.
according to the amount of time and skill they have to put in).

b. where possible, running one or more cooperative businesses on the property, or renting out common facilities to neighbourhood groups. Sometimes tax breaks may be available for such operations, but an expert should review any claim to be sure it cannot be challenged later. Dorit Fromm again provides a warning out of one Dutch project which consistently found their cooperative ventures to be hard to staff, money-losers or both. Eventually, the residents were forced to sell their common house to pay off taxes and business loans.22

Finally, implementing a policy similar to sharing a cooperative mortgage creatively (with different downpayment amounts from member to member), a progressive cohousing group may decide to assign operating costs equitably according to dwelling size, number of occupants and household income.

3.6 GROUP PROCESS CONCERNS

To understand the opportunities and constraints of group process in a cohousing project, there is no substitute for consulting with groups themselves. Members of the most

22 Fromm, pp. 62-63.
accessible local projects were interviewed (see Appendix 7.1). The key concerns they faced in their group processes were abstracted. Beyond this local anecdotal information, there is further help on group process in the cohousing literature. Of all sources, McCamant and Durrett especially provide rich case studies of the planning and execution process experienced by cohousing groups. Here is their summary:

Resident participation in the development process is cohousing's greatest asset and its most limiting factor. It is a huge task for a group of people, inexperienced in both collective decision making and the building industry, to take on a project of this complexity. Most residents have little knowledge of financing, design, and construction issues for housing development. They encounter problems in maintaining an efficient timeline, avoiding the domination of a few strong personalities, and integrating new members without backtracking.23

What emerges from a comparison of local and European cases, however, is that there mostly is nothing unique to cohousing about how the group needs to operate. In trying to abstract the possible essential group issues faced by cohousers, the following emerged in the interviews and the literature:

a. the function of group size: in a larger group it is more difficult to maintain community (including ownership of the process) and effective and efficient decision-making.

b. the function of inclusiveness in planning: how far down the planning road can you travel without the full, final membership being established?

23 Quoted in Elena Marcheso Moreno, "Cohousing Comes to the U.S.,” Architecture (July 1989): 64.
c. the function of freedom: how many group norms can be applied before individual expression will be offended?

d. the function of agenda: the content of the group process is not open-ended.

e. the function of the outside facilitator: a group does not usually contain all the resources needed to run an effective process; beyond a process facilitator and project manager, there is a role for technicians with specialized skills in financing, design and construction.

3.7 GROUP PROCESS SOLUTIONS

3.7.1 Group Size

We should recall that one of the main motives to experiment with cohousing in Europe in the first place was dissatisfaction with the impersonal institution that large collective apartment buildings have become. McCamant and Durrett note that most Danish cohousing communities they studied had an average of 15 to 33 households (40 to 100 people). They suggest that there are three categories of cohousing size: small (6 to 12 households), medium (15 to 30)

24 McCamant and Durrett, p. 42.
and large (over 35). However, it seems to the present author that a smaller scale is more feasible both in terms of satisfying community life (the minimal requirement defined as knowing every member well) and effective and efficient decision-making. It is interesting to note that larger projects have tended to solve both the community and efficiency issues in two ways. The first approach involves subdividing the housing physically, clustering a more reasonable number of units around a series of modest common houses. The whole group rarely, if ever, meets. The second size "solution" is actually part of the approach to the next group process issue. Before turning to that approach, one might ask: Is there a lower limit to group size? In fact, it appears that one would not want to have much less than six units as "small housing groups often have difficulty maintaining the energy to organize common activities over a period of many years."  

3.7.2 Membership and Planning

As McCamant and Durrett describe, some groups opt to have only a subset of the final group form in the beginning and make charter and sometimes even design and site decisions. This, of course, is designed to make group process easier, and the temptation to use this model is especially great when the

25 Ibid., pp. 156-7.
26 Ibid., p. 42.
27 Ibid., pp. 37, 77.
final number of community members is going to be large (see previous section). However, it is almost impossible to make late joiners, who have to "buy into" someone else's plan, not feel second class or less responsible for subsequent processes and decisions (especially, in a mixed-tenure situation, if the late joiners are the renters). In fact, an overly small founding core can itself be detrimental: too much work for too few can weary a group before it even gets going.

Whatever the pain of a long process, it is better to include as many of the final members as possible from the start. Naturally, this becomes an argument to keep the final size of the project relatively small so that a long process does not risk burning out members and even killing the whole effort. Whenever someone joins, the key thing is to make sure that group members are aware of the commitment to group process from the start, so that people like those involved with Vicinia will be attracted. As Marcus and Dovey warn: "The development process of finding like-minded people, setting goals, negotiating funding, hiring an architect, and developing a design program requires a high level of commitment and participation." 28

3.7.3 Voluntary Commitments

Another area for the group to address is how to make sure that a distinction is drawn between cohousing and communes. The charter and subsequent "contracts" or group agreements should have a minimal number of non-negotiable behaviours so that maximum freedom is extended to each member to participate in common life as they wish. Of course, a group can opt to be more stringent in the communal requirements, but the necessity of policing and penalties and the complexity of evaluating potential new members can become daunting and discouraging.

3.7.4 Substance of Group Process

What do cohousing groups actually meet and decide about? In fact, the content of the discussion is precisely and primarily the set of issues identified in this study (see the end of each chapter for a summary). Following this primary list of concerns and solutions may help to order and speed up the process. The sorts of secondary, optional questions on the agenda can be found in the guidelines offered by McCamant and Durrett (e.g. type of common facilities desired\(^\text{29}\)) and Fromm (e.g. type of site plan to encourage neighbourhood interaction but protect privacy\(^\text{30}\)).

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\(^{29}\) McCamant and Durrett, p. 38.
\(^{30}\) Fromm, chap. 9.
3.7.5 Professional Assistance

On both substance and process matters, it would be wise to add one more decision to the list: whether or not to follow McCamant and Durrett's advice and budget for a cohousing consultant from time to time during the planning and execution of the project.\(^{31}\) This would especially help to avoid burning out professionals in the group who are volunteering their services too much. However, taking a warning from some projects (see the interviews in Appendix 7.1), one needs to make sure that the consultant has all the requisite skills in group facilitation and administration.

3.8 SUMMARY

3.8.1 Legal Concerns

a. Overarching question: what is possible under the statutes governing associations and property?

Options: i. partnerships
   -for profit
   -not for profit (e.g. Community Land Trusts)

ii. cooperatives

\(^{31}\) Franck and Ahrentzen, p. 124.
iii. strata corporations/condominiums

b. Overarching question: are lending requirements fulfilled?

NB Each legal structure has different implications for financing.

c. Overarching questions: are the values of the group protected? Will a phased approach to setting agreements in writing be adopted?

Phase options: i. initial organizing agreement
  ii. construction agreement
  iii. final ownership and management agreement

3.8.2 Financial Concerns

Stages and funding options

i. early recruiting: monthly or one-time fees; institutional or private patron
ii. development planning: group act as own developer or do joint venture with non- or low-profit developer
iii. site acquisition: cooperative or individual mortgages; purchase or lease (NB sinking fund required)

iv. construction: act as own general contractor or hire one and at least be involved with finishing touches; consider renovating existing building

v. maintenance: contract or do own work; run a business on-site

3.8.3 Group Process Concerns

a. Size: optimal between 6-20 units (up to about 50 people, because it is difficult to maintain an acquaintance with many more people)

b. Membership Timing: people need to be involved with key decisions from the start; need a critical mass to avoid burn-out in planning

c. Commitments: minimize rules to avoid being a commune.

d. Agenda: follow guidelines like those in this study to prevent unnecessary delays.

e. Consultant: one option to prevent volunteer burn-out.
4 DESIGN OF COHOUSING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The key resource by McCamant and Durrett, and the subsequent work by Fromm, provide a good starting point for the critical work of abstracting the design elements applicable to cohousing. There are other useful avenues of insight on the obstacles and opportunities of cohousing design, e.g. sources arising from related housing types. These reviews will be consulted rather than depending on local interviews, as there has been little experience to date of finalized projects in the British Columbia. The foundation has just been poured for the Vicinia building on W. Broadway.

The focus task of this chapter is to clearly identify the essential design principles that apply to cohousing, separating these from the optional; the former represent constraints that cannot be avoided (at least by the definition adopted in this study), the latter solutions which provide additional choices and motivations in a cohousing development plan. Tackling these two topics will result in some broad conclusions for policy and practice as a cohousing facilitator in B.C. working specifically with design issues.

The starting point involves returning to the discussion begun in chapter 1, namely the definition of cohousing, now explored more fully from a design perspective. The approach that will
be followed is to agree on the constraints inherent in the definition of cohousing, to analyze the design challenges that naturally arise in any cohousing project, and then to look at options exercised by projects that follow typical models (notably the cluster housing model). The point of this exercise is to enable facilitators to be absolutely certain about the decisions that must be made and the obstacles to overcome in the physical sphere in order to design a cohousing project.

4.2 DESIGN CONCERNS

When consulting written sources and actual experience regarding the type of housing of interest in this study, there is an immediate problem of the definitions of terms based on physical attributes. The example of local cohousers suggests that there is no single design automatically imposed on cohousing. The Vicinia is a four-storey apartment building; Winslow Cohousing in Washington State features on-the-ground townhouses situated along a "village street." This prompts the question: Is the physical design of cohousing in any way limited by definition from the start? If so, what other, earlier classifications of housing might provide appropriate insights? We will attempt to understand further what cohousing design is by comparing the component of the
definition dealing with design (see 1.3.3 c.) against design definitions of related housing types in the literature.

4.2.1 Cluster Housing

Over fifteen years ago, Untermann and Small wrote on cluster housing, which they describe as multiple housing units that share:

a. common walls, floors and ceilings.

b. common open spaces and facilities.¹

Taken at face value, it is not clear whether the authors would include any condominium development with a party room, an edge of landscaping around the building, and a small inner court as having sufficient common amenities to meet their definition. They do specify that their emphasis is further restricted to the development of low-rise, medium-density cluster environments. They also describe this form as open space/garden apartment-type housing developments. Thus, for them, high-rises set in a park and having a common parking garage would not qualify for attention. In fact, they clearly indicate that the kind of housing they have in mind is meant to be an antidote to the "human pathology in high-

density/high-rise urban housing environments." On the other hand, though their definition is becoming more refined, it also risks eliminating some kinds of housing that might naturally be described as cluster development but not share any common walls, floors or ceilings. For example, the housing units may be detached but very close together and placed around a common garden or square, or they may only share walls with a common room. As one instance of this, a report prepared for the Alberta Department of Housing in 1986 labeled groups of single-family detached housing precisely as cluster housing.

Comparing an even earlier source, in William Whyte's book on cluster development one finds a spectrum rather than a definition. Whyte places conventional subdivisions with no common open space at one end, and at the other end cluster development of high density, with towers or townhouses sited around small common greens. Thus his focus seems to be on density rather than on design, which is betrayed by a synonym he offers for cluster development: "density zoning." Furthermore, common open space is emphasized but not common facilities.

2 Ibid., p. v.
How much can the lessons of these older American treatments of innovative housing and site design be applied to the more recent housing movements? Are the same types of housing under consideration?

4.2.2 Medium-Density Housing

An important text by Marcus and Sarkissian, *Housing as if People Mattered* (1986), in fact continues the problem with definitions. Their apparent interest, as described in the sub-title of their book, is medium-density family housing. Then, in the introduction, one meets this affirmation: "We firmly believe that [low-rise, high-density or clustered] housing, when done well can serve the needs of many segments of the population better than the other two density extremes--low-density, detached housing or high-density, high-rise housing." Finally, the authors admit that low-rise, medium- and high-density housing in both the private and public sectors will be given attention, thus resolving the density confusion. They also name three other characteristics of the housing under consideration in their book: it is attached, it is smaller and it involves more shared facilities; of course, the latter two comparative features require some reference

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point to be really useful as a limitation of focus: "smaller" than what, "more shared facilities" than what?

4.2.3 European Cohousing

Turning again to McCamant and Durrett, one finds the following physical categories outlined: private, self-sufficient residences, extensive common facilities, and intentional neighbourhood design. There is a hint that facilities for common dinners is almost a requirement, and the fact is noted that most cohousing development consists of attached, low-rise dwellings clustered around pedestrian streets or courtyards. Two other features listed, design planning by residents and complete resident management, are really organizational categories that have been dealt with earlier. Therefore, as with the earlier sources cited, the physical design boundaries are not that limiting, though they certainly do not embrace every built form. Definitely not included are "shared housing" (several unrelated people in a traditional house) or "congregate housing" (private rooms arranged around shared living spaces). Beyond this, however, a great variety in size, location, design, and even density, is admitted under the cohousing umbrella. Furthermore, when the authors do

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7 Ibid., p. 43.
8 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
suggest other limitations on the cohousing model, the concern is much more with social than physical considerations: the residents represent a cross-section rather than any specific age or family type (such as the elderly or single parents), intentional communities or communes organized around strong ideological beliefs are excluded, and there is individual choice in the degree of participation in community activities.\textsuperscript{9}

Dorit Fromm, as already noted in chapter 1, maintains that the essential design characteristics of cohousing include common areas and facilities (rooms for shared cooking and dining being usual but still optional) combined with private, self-contained units (including private bathrooms and kitchens).\textsuperscript{10} The fine print is given in the introduction to the book. Here, we discover that, as with McCamant and Durrett, no specific building type or density is required. For example, cohousing is applied as a term to a high rise in Sweden and a hundred-plus-unit apartment building in Germany.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., pp. 15-16.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 2.
4.2.4 Analysis

What can we abstract from these housing movements, specifically answering: what is their relationship physically to cohousing? Cluster housing is, as Fromm rightly notes, a purely physical category.\(^\text{12}\) It describes self-sufficient dwellings which are grouped together--detached or attached (on one or more surfaces, but not a high-rise)--so as to create less private and more common and contiguous open space, and to create room for common facilities. McCamant and Durrett, on the other hand, maintain that cohousing "refers to an idea about how people can live together"\(^\text{13}\) rather than primarily to physical or other characteristics. Nonetheless, three essential physical features seen in the earlier housing types can be seen to form the design boundary of what most would consider to be cohousing:

\(^\text{12}\) The one exception to this usage of terminology is Christopher Alexander et al in *A Pattern Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), where a social (specifically legal) note is introduced: "People will not feel comfortable in their houses unless a group of houses forms a cluster, with the public land between them jointly owned by all the householders" (p. 198). Whyte also anticipates this legal aspect of cluster development with common areas in his *Cluster Development*.

\(^\text{13}\) McCamant and Durrett, p. 43.
A.1 private, self-sufficient dwelling units
A.2 extensive common areas and facilities (relative to the private space)
A.3 relationships between structures and between built form and land that promote neighbourhood or community.

Three other features seem to be almost on the essential list for cohousing (in terms of "contributing to community or neighbourliness," see 1.3.3 above), but do not quite make it there:

B.1 low-rise
B.2 medium to high density (i.e. smaller and/or attached units)
B.3 common dining facilities.

It may be arguable that these three follow necessarily from condition A.3, but it then would not be a matter of "givens" by definition but solutions that follow from first principles. For those that win the argument for including B.1 and B.2 in a list of essential design constraints, then the link with cluster housing is obvious. In other words, if one's cohousing model is low-rise with higher densities, either by choice or necessity, then the essential lessons of cluster housing are critical to learn, and the optional lessons would be at least salutary. However, all cohousers must begin with
the "A" list, and ask what design solution apply within the three boundaries indicated. The cluster model, for example, then becomes a secondary exercise. Finally, the unique characteristics of a particular cohousing community (e.g. children, disabled residents, ecological ideals, artistic or craft pursuits) dictate a tertiary design exercise. In the next section, we will focus mainly on the primary exercise of solving the essential cohousing constraints (the "A" list), but also indicate implications for the cluster approach (as this appears to be a popular option for cohousers).

4.3 DESIGN SOLUTIONS (THE "A" LIST)

While identifying design solutions in this section, the focus will be on sources available outside of the specific cohousing literature. The object is to augment and perhaps critique the design options in key sources like Fromm in light of the essential constraint categories. Whereas some cohousers or their reviewers move beyond design solutions that are essential, we do not want to be overly distracted by optional approaches, i.e. those that can vary from one cohousing project to the next.
4.3.1 Private, Self-Sufficient Units (A.1)

a. Personal and Flexible Units

The literature on the architecture and interior design of private houses is of course vast, and any of it could be consulted. That is to say, there is nothing particularly unique about the private spaces dictated by the "A" list cohousing constraints given above. One exception to this rule might be the link between design and community life (A.3), specifically how proximity and close interaction impacts the need for uniqueness and personal identity in internal space.

The question is debatable: either one decides that the opportunity for contact with others in communal space is so great that little visiting in private spaces will take place, so the need for personalization in such spaces as some kind of identity protection is reduced (that is, there is little opportunity to compare and discover that your space is not very unique); or one decides just the opposite, namely that the close contact between people, wherever it takes place, mandates care in the interior design of personal refuges on both large and small scales. If one follows the second line, then there will be a motivation to uniquely shape and decorate each private unit.
A good place to find inspiration for small-scale personalization, if it is deemed necessary, is Alexander et al's *A Pattern Language*, notably pattern 253, "Things From Your Life". On creating identity in semi-private spaces, see Marcus and Sarkissian, especially design feature 180, "Personalized landscape."

Large-scale personalization (e.g. specifying different arrangement of rooms in each unit) is simple in unattached cohousing units, or in attached complexes where space and cost are not an issue; standard architectural sources are all that is needed. On the other hand, the challenge posed by cluster housing models when it comes to creating variation in units is greater (see below).

The notion of large-scale personalization raises the question of flexibility in internal spaces. Research seems to indicate that residents are less inclined to move interior walls than some architects might imagine: "The general symbolic and emotional ties with the house, the need to territorialize and personalize, the need for expression, may be more important than physical flexibility, although they are related." However, one might imagine that the encouragers of community life in cohousing would want to promote permanence of tenancy, and therefore would be more open to some innovative ways to

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15 Marcus and Sarkissian, p. 234.
16 Quoted in Marcus and Sarkissian, p. 64.
make interior spaces adaptable to accommodate changes in lifestyles and desires within a household. Specialized architectural literature would need to be consulted, e.g. on modular design.

b. Abbreviated Units

Beyond the general category of personalization, it seems that private spaces are affected mostly when certain options are exercised regarding a particular cohousing project. For example, a secondary design issue for private space arises depending upon what decision is made about common facilities (A.2). Kitchens in individual homes could be abbreviated if a common kitchen (B.3) is constructed, just as a common room makes entertainment space in each home less necessary; the argument here is that one can always book common spaces to facilitate hosting a large number of guests.

There is little experience with this sort of design feature outside of cohousing itself, apart from suites designed for seniors in so-called congregate housing (which has limited application to any situation involving children); in such housing, cooking and eating together is a regular reality, unlike the way party rooms are used in typical condominium "communities." More help might be available from the latter model regarding the impact of providing a common unit for
guests, as some condominium complexes have experimented with this amenity.

The general principle is clear: anything provided communally, e.g. laundry facilities, is less necessary or even unnecessary in private spaces, with a consequent impact on design. Finding material on the specific impact probably would require careful research.

c. Clustered Units

As has been suggested above, choosing a clustered approach (i.e. B.1-2) to cohousing means that literature on the clustered form could and should be consulted. Here one need search no further than the classic source on site planning by Untermann and Small and the more recent excellent guidebook by Marcus and Sarkissian. The latter resource is especially useful as it has adopted Christopher Alexander's famous pattern paradigm, providing a synopsis of some 254 design features for cluster housing, with main principles abstracted, applications suggested and extensive cross-references given for each feature (though sometimes features seem to be distinguished unnecessarily).

Which of these design features are critical in a clustered cohousing project, that is, as compared with any other clustered project? The surprising thing is not many of the
features listed by Marcus and Sarkissian are essential to cohousing private units, though this becomes less surprising when one considers the limitations imposed by the authors on their work:

Dwelling interiors are not included. Analysis of a hundred case studies of residents' responses to their housing environments clarified that their chief complaints focus not so much on dwelling interiors as on overall image, milieu, and site planning. Most designers know by now how to design an adequate kitchen and a functioning bathroom, but apparently their skills have not been so highly developed in site planning, landscaping, play design, and creating acceptable images. Hence this book focuses on the arrangement of dwellings on the site, the treatment of facades and entries, and the crucial spaces between buildings.17

In other words, it would seem that there is little in the way of private space issues for cluster housing in general, let alone clustered cohousing. Thus, for example, there is no help here on providing architectural variety on a large-scale in the interior space of attached dwellings where space and cost are relatively limited. For this issue we must turn elsewhere, though precisely where is not clear. What follows, then, are the clustered housing features covered in Marcus and Sarkissian that may have some special applicability to cohousing private space.

17 Ibid., p. 11.
i. Privacy Protection (1.d,h)18

It is an open question whether privacy needs to be more or less protected in clustered cohousing as opposed to any other clustered project. Does community life, with its closer relationships, engender more or less respect for privacy? Most would agree to err on the side of caution, and opt for design that enhances privacy in and around individual units. Surprisingly, Marcus and Sarkissian offer only a few guidelines beyond the basic principle (p. 34). This may be because careful approaches to sightlines, overlooks, use of fences, and so on, are such well-established architectural practices. As for noise, it may be overly optimistic that the kind of people who choose cohousing do not want the same level of insulation from the sound of neighbours and passersby (e.g. children) as does the average person. When it comes to providing sound barriers, it may be better to err on the side of caution, especially if there is a desire to protect resale potential.

ii. External Personalization (29-34, 180)

The same debate that applied to internal personalization above also applies to external personalization, though with different arguments. Whereas less visiting in private spaces may lessen the need for personalization on the interior, more

18 The references are to the design guideline numbers as given in Marcus and Sarkissian.
visiting in common spaces also may make personalization on the exterior less critical. The reason is that the very drive for personalization, namely as a way to reduce a sense of anonymity, is not as great within a cohousing project. As Marcus and Sarkissian state:

Most people need, if not to design their dwellings, at least to give them some touch of uniqueness that says: "This is mine; it is a reflection of me/my family; and I/we are worthy and unique beings." 19

However, the theory is that such ego-valuation is happening more through the relationships between people in a cohousing situation, making personal architecture less vital. Moreover, as most cohousing is resident-designed, the need to resist the alienation from professional architects through "the completion or continuing modification of dwellings by residents" 20 seems to be eliminated. Finally, it is unlikely that the veiled hostility or fear attached to the idea of territoriality, i.e. the "deep need to know where their domain ends and another begins" 21 would have any place in a true cohousing environment (see also comments on "the part and the whole" under 4.3.3 below). The only counterargument offered at this point is the possibility that community life itself may liberate some creativity in residents, where an audience of close neighbours and friends actually inspires external personalization, not so much out of individual desperation or even competition, but out of a sense of communal enjoyment. If the latter becomes true, then the avenues suggested by

19 Ibid., p. 63.
20 Ibid., p. 64.
21 Ibid., p. 66.
Marcus and Sarkissian could be helpful, e.g. the suggestions on entry personalization.22

iii. Private Open Space (l.k)

The challenge of creating semiprivate patios or yards in higher density developments, if this is deemed to be a necessary part of self-sufficiency in cohousing private units, could be approached through Marcus and Sarkissian's chapter 7, "Private Open Space." Also, see again design feature 180, "Personalized landscape." Another good source is general material on the architecture of townhouse complexes, though the higher sensitivity about community in cohousing contexts requires special treatment. For instance, residents would probably not want their privacy barrier to be too abrupt, presenting an unfriendly facade to their neighbours and colleagues. In this case, Marcus and Sarkissian provide a helpful concept: transitional filters. "Most people find it preferable that visitors or strangers pass through a series of zones or filters that make them more and more aware that they are entering a private domain as they approach the dwelling."23 See also design feature 77, "Common space boundary" and 228, "buffer zone".24

22 Ibid., pp. 72-3.
23 Ibid., pp. 78-9.
24 Ibid., pp. 127, 276.
d. Small, Dense Units

All that remains is to deal with the impact on private space when densities are chosen which move beyond the possibility of cluster housing to either row housing or apartments. The reasons for choosing medium density over low may have nothing to do with economics. The residents may simply have decided to maximize the land available for common facilities and open space, or they may be part of that subset of cohousers who are keen on ecology and energy conservation. In any case, there is no better place to begin on happy design of such attached units than the comments by Alexander et al on "Row Houses" and "Housing Hills", and by Kevin Lynch on courtyard or patio houses. For example, note the strategy of placing row housing on paths off roadways, permitting units to have greater frontage and therefore more light penetration.

As for creatively dealing with the limitations of small units, it is useful to turn to history. Witold Rybczynski describes well the societal differences which permitted the move to smaller homes in seventeenth-century Holland. The main factor was the embracing of a nuclear family model of housing, leaving behind the large communal dwellings--with their extended families, tenants and servants--of other European

countries. Whatever might have been lost in this shift, there clearly is a parallel with the private space of cohousing projects, where communalism definitely happens outside rather than inside the home. Furthermore, Dutch homes of this period were smaller than what had been known elsewhere in Europe, and they have much to teach the cohouser living with high density and hence more modest units:

The French interior was crowded and frenetic, the many pieces of furniture jostling each other in rooms whose papered walls were illustrated with scenic landscapes and where all surfaces were embroidered, gilded, or decorated. Dutch decor, by comparison, was sparse. Furniture was to be admired, but it was also meant to be used, and it was never so crowded as to detract from the sense of space that was produced by the room and by the light within it.28

Beyond the general literature on apartment complexes and efficient use of space, one could even turn to special design applications such as mobile homes, trailers and yachts to get insight on high density private space.

4.3.2 Extensive Common Areas and Facilities (A.2)

Similar to the issue of providing private space, there is surprisingly little that is special or unique to cohousing when it comes to providing common space, that is, features that would distinguish cohousing from, say, any townhouse or condominium complex. For example, Marcus and Sarkissian's

28 Ibid., p. 63.
comments on "Comfortable space dimensions" (pp. 121f) and "Facility size" (p. 203) are certainly applicable beyond the cohousing world.\textsuperscript{29} The only difference in the latter case is that the "user needs research" advocated by Marcus and Sarkissian to prevent underused or overused facilities should be easier to do among a cohousing group. Beyond this, there are a few general issues that can be drawn out:

a. Maximization

As was noted under 4.3.1.d, there may be a tendency among cohousers to maximize common areas and facilities. This has obvious implications for the size and density of private units (see above) if the solution involves physical spread of the common space. If the solution also includes efficient use of space, then possible useful sources are the architecture of community centres and the design of multi-use parks.

b. Overall Size

The overall size of a cohousing project becomes a question of balance in regards to communal facilities. Clearly, certain facilities, e.g. indoor pools, cannot be financed if the resident group is too small. On the other hand, some amenities become difficult to operate when user groups are

\textsuperscript{29} Marcus and Sarkissian, pp. 121f, 203.
large. For example, Marcus and Sarkissian refer to a Swedish study which notes that a maximum of ten households should share communal laundries, so they "can easily organize scheduling and responsibility for keeping the space clean".\(^{30}\) The issue of size will be revisited below (see also 3.7.1 above).

c. Boundaries

The issue of boundaries between private and public space was already touched on in the discussion of private dwellings above. Here it will suffice to recall the ambiguity inherent among cohousers, that is, where such residents are perhaps less concerned with "space hierarchy," "common space boundaries" and "buffer zones" than typical people living in close quarters with one another and with common areas. Marcus and Sarkissian state unequivocally: "Ensure that the boundaries between private and communal space are clearly defined."\(^{31}\) It remains open to debate whether the average cohouser may be more interested in privacy (because of the communal factor) or less interested (because of the communal factor). In sum, it may be better to lean toward sharp definition of private space in the design so that the individual British Columbian cohouser can exercise maximum choice in the balance between private and public existence.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 194.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 127.
d. Flexibility

Again, the issue of flexibility is a moot one, and for similar reasons as in the case of private interior space (4.3.1.a). On the one hand, to create the longevity of tenancy which is essential to community life, it would be good to anticipate different needs over the course of a household's maturation as common facilities were being designed (e.g. turning part of a day-care into a teen centre). On the other hand, physical substantiality and permanence is also important to community identity, thus making an argument for a rootedness of buildings in the ground, a fixedness to their walls, and a luxury of time for landscaping like trees to evolve and for landmarks to take on meaning. In short, a flexibility of space should not sacrifice a sense of place.

4.3.3 Overall Design Promoting Community (A.3)

We now turn to the last of the defined constraints on cohousing design, namely the existence of relationships between buildings and the space between buildings that encourage a sense of neighbourhood or community life. What is clear is that this constraint overlaps with the previous two, but additional insights may be gleaned that are not strictly part of providing private or common spaces. What is unclear is exactly what is meant by "neighbourhood" or "community
life." Unfortunately, it lies outside the scope of this study to tackle such a slippery question.\footnote{32}

To continue using the concept, however, it must suffice to say that cohousing design should promote neighbourliness and friendship. It is easy to see how the interplay of the previous two constraints aid this cause: the option of retreat into private space makes intimacy voluntary and therefore more intentional and appreciated, whereas the natural, spontaneous and regular opportunity for friendly communal contact allows for the interpersonal knowledge base which breaks down isolation and builds up true friendship. What more then can be said about encouraging these values at an overall design level? It turns out that, once again, the guidelines which are specific to cohousing are modest, though a little more can be said about the specific option of clustering.

\subsection*{a. Between Units}

Where the cluster model is followed and shared entrances are chosen, density amelioration can be achieved by making sure only a few units are accessed by each entry and by varying facade design from unit to unit.\footnote{33} Both of these strategies create a lower perceived density. Making another point,

\footnote{32 For an introduction to the issue see Lynch, pp. 239ff, 400-402.}
\footnote{33 Marcus and Sarkissian, p. 34.}
Marcus and Sarkissian assert that "a degree of social homogeneity is necessary before residents will develop a feeling of community". This may be a tautology, "a degree of social homogeneity" being so vague as to be identical with "a feeling of community." The fact is that the precise homogeneity or feeling desired is a choice made by residents, with the relationship between private units arising accordingly.

For example, if the cohousing project is to be geared to families, the private units will tend to be similar and larger. Or if the desire is for a mixed social situation, then units will be of different types, say one for families, one for couples, one for singles, one for the disabled and so on. In this case, another decision would be whether or not to link similar units (i.e. similar life-styles) to the same sub-cluster within the overall project. What is emerging here is that there is nothing essential for cohousing in the area of homogeneity. In fact, especially in the case of a cohousing project designed by young couples, it might be good to build in heterogeneity that is unnecessary at the start (i.e. some larger units) but becomes important in allowing growing families to move within the project. Again, happy, long-term residents promote community life.

34 Ibid., p. 42.
35 See Alexander et al, pp. 376ff.
36 See Marcus and Sarkissian, p. 44.
A final note about the relationships between units involves security. Allowing some degree of surveillance between neighbouring units is still wise, even though it is arguable that a stranger will always be very noticeable in common areas (assuming that surveillance of common areas is not restricted and the overall number of residents is not large). Generally, however, it would be foolish to depend too much on detecting and intercepting a potential burglar before they get close to an individual unit.

b. Between Units and Facilities

Well-sited community facilities is a principle put forward by Marcus and Sarkissian with regard to cluster housing.37 This may seem like a feature desired equally by all projects with shared facilities, but perhaps the higher degree of community life, with the fairness implied in that concept within cohousing, makes it even more important to create equitable access (e.g. similar walking distance, ramps for the disabled) to common facilities. There is no place within cohousing for a situation that can arise in townhouse developments, where "phase" three units can be much further from the common clubhouse than "phase one" units. The same principle could be applied to parking, which should be adequate enough and at a similar distance from each unit to prevent one of the worst

37 Ibid., p. 34.
obstacles to community spirit: jockeying for premium parking spaces.

c. Between Units and Land

In the specific case of the cluster model of cohousing and the need for density amelioration, visual and functional access to open space from each dwelling is key. As Marcus and Sarkissian note: "...a feeling of spaciousness within the home--an important component of resident satisfaction in medium-density housing--can be achieved when well-landscaped grounds provide green views from windows".38

Moving to the question of overall size of the project, it is true that non-physical limitations are probably more important, e.g. how small can the number of households be before the community demands become too great.39 A similar non-physical criteria is the perception as to what forms a household group where there can be face-to-face contact and true neighbourliness; or, more objectively, how large a group can be and still work effectively and easily on a consensual basis. On this score, Alexander et al are very definite: houses should be arranged in clusters of 8 to 12 units.40 The relationship to the land now becomes clear, for they further

38 Ibid.
39 McCamant and Durrett, p. 42, suggest more than 6 households, and note that most European cohousing developments have had 15 to 33 households.
maintain that each cluster must be organized around common land and paths which the residents control and gradually develop.

The common land is an essential ingredient, a focus which physically knits the cluster together. This pattern of dwelling and community life can be traced back for millennia. As Untermann and Small state: "The cluster housing environment is the most fundamental and enduring form of human settlement." The only thing that might be debated is the optimum number of households per cluster. Many have made the connection between cohousing and the village (plus commons) which has been ubiquitous in human history and geography. Lewis Mumford suggests that neolithic villages were comprised of between 6 and 60 families. On the other hand, Marcus and Sarkissian would allow their identifiable clusters to range from 30 to 100 units (1986, p. 35); elsewhere, they put the lower limit at 20 (p. 189). Clearly, the Alexander camp would be itching to subdivide much further.

To be fair, it is possible that Marcus and Sarkissian have in mind smaller subunits linked to communal, semiprivate spaces like courtyards and play areas, distinguishing the latter from larger public spaces shared by up to a hundred homes.

41 Untermann and Small, p. 1.  
43 Marcus and Sarkissian, pp. 35, 189.  
44 Ibid., p. 264.  
What is missing from their scheme, though, is an essential sense of clustering, so that the communal space is semienclosed or totally enclosed by and visible to all the dwellings it serves. However, on the basic principles there is agreement:

--larger developments should have clustered subunits (p. 34). 46

--each subunit should have some elements of uniqueness to create a sense of place and identity (p. 57).

--the most important basis for a sense of place and identity is common open space (pp. 119-120). 47

--all spaces should be treated as territories or zones of influence of a subunit of residents to encourage their proprietary attitude (pp. 264-5), with the boundaries marked explicitly (e.g. hedges), subtly (e.g. distinctive paving stones on a court) or even symbolically (e.g. naming the space).

--ambiguous space should be minimized, that is, space of unclear use or control (p. 274).

46 The references are to Marcus and Sarkissian.
47 See also Sim Van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe, Sustainable Communities (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), pp. xiv-xvii.
d. Between Units and the Whole

The balance between designing the parts and designing the whole is perhaps weighted slightly towards the latter for cohousers. This again is a reflection of the community ideal, and especially the participational design process enjoyed by the typical cohousing project. The implication of this is that, as suggested earlier, relatively less sympathy will be afforded to personalized design and flexibility in the cohousing context. That is to say, where idiosyncrasy and flux go too far, the community responds with integrity and stasis. So, cohousing projects will look unified, and remain quite stable in design, though it remains an open question how much they could be distinguished from any townhouse complex which has a monotone design due to economics and a static design due to unempowered residents.

e. Between Built Form and Land

Once more, Marcus and Sarkissian are very helpful when they point out that community life depends on more than community facilities but also includes opportunities for casual social contact. It turns out that most of the principles involved with fulfilling such needs centre on the relationship between buildings in general and open space. For example, Marcus and Sarkissian suggest that:
--windows, porches and fences should allow easy views of passersby (p. 186).

--areas for outdoor chores should be within speaking distance of public circulation space (p. 187).

--no dwellings should be located in isolated positions (p. 187).

--major pedestrian routes between buildings should pass through communal open space that is attractive to spend time in; one obvious idea is to provide seating (p. 188).

--courtyards should be no more than 30 feet wide to reduce isolation between facing units (p. 190).

f. Between Site and the World

Marcus and Sarkissian maintain that a sense of community (and security) is enhanced when access to the site by outsiders is discouraged. Most of their suggestions relate to careful treatment at site entries (see guideline 78, "Street linkage" and 201, "Site entry barriers"). On this point, Alexander et al seem to disagree, as they are happy to arrange clusters so that pedestrians can cross through them without feeling like trespassers. However, the contradiction between these authorities disappears if the clusters of Alexander et al are in fact equivalent to the smaller subunits of a development which Marcus and Sarkissian envision as sharing a semiprivate

48 Marcus and Sarkissian, pp. 127, 255.
space. The very notion of "semiprivate" suggests that appropriate use by outsiders is allowed.

4.3.4 Secondary and Tertiary Solutions

Beyond the general design solutions, then, all other decisions related to cohousing communal areas depends on the type of facility chosen (e.g. B.3, common dining facilities) and the type of community being served (e.g. children). Before one turns to specialty literature, Marcus and Sarkissian is still a good place to begin. Under "communal facilities" (pp. 191ff) they cover small meeting rooms, kitchens and dining rooms, day-care centers, laundries, workshops, community gardens, adult sports centres and swimming pools.\(^{50}\) Further, there is an excellent chapter on common open space and the needs of children. A micro-scale amenity suggested by Marcus and Sarkissian is a connecting door between units to permit shared child care.\(^{51}\)

Other design decisions mainly arise out of the values a particular cohousing group might hold. For example, on a social level, it seems that cohousing initiatives tend to attract an ecologically sensitive clientele. It is interesting to ask what environmental opportunities arise in particular in the case of cohousing, and what design

\(^{50}\) Ibid., pp. 191ff.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 192.
strategies may be appropriate. The literature in this area that is directly related to cohousing is sparse, but there is much to be mined from sources indirectly, e.g. Van der Ryn and Calthorpe's *Sustainable Communities* (1986). Such collateral decisions about a project become potentially endless, as inspired by the idiosyncrasies of a specific cohousing group.

Having dealt with the internal forces at work on design, the external forces involved, namely governmental ones, will be the subject of the next chapter.

4.4 SUMMARY

A.1 Private Space Design

a. Internal Personalization (debatable importance)
   i. Small-scale
      -Indoors (decoration and furnishing)
      -Outdoors (landscaping)
   ii. Large-scale Flexibility (moving walls)
b. Reduced Self-Sufficiency

Secondary Design Exercise: depending on economics, unit size and the specific common amenities provided that reduce or eliminate the need for the same amenities in private units

c. Dense Dwellings (Option)

Secondary Design Exercise:

i. Privacy Protection

ii. External Personalization (limited importance)

iii. Private Open Space Provided

d. Small Dwellings (Option)

Secondary Design Exercise:

i. Access to Light and Land

ii. Efficient Use of Space

A.2 Common Space Design

a. Maximization (Option)

i. Spread of Facilities and Open Space

ii. Efficiency of Facilities and Open Space

b. Size of Group Matched with Facility Desired
c. Boundaries Between Private and Public Space Can Be Moderate

d. Flexibility of Buildings Not To Oppose Sense of Place

e. Secondary Design Exercise:
   i. Depending on Type of Communal Facility
      -Kitchen and Dining Room
      -Other
   ii. Depending on Type of Community
      -Children and Open Space
      -Elderly or Disabled

A.3 Overall Space Design

a. Between Dwellings
   i. Density Mitigation (where necessary)
      -Facade variation
      -Minimize number of units per external entry
   ii. Secondary Design Exercise: depending on definition of community homogeneity
      -Housing type(s)
      -Clustering of similar type
      -Housing heterogeneity anticipating future social mix
   iii. Neighbourly Surveillance
b. Between Dwellings and Facilities
   i. Facilities Well Sited

c. Between Dwellings and Land
   i. Density Mitigation (where necessary) Through Visual and Functional Access to Open Space
   ii. Subunits of 8-12 Households around a Common Space
   iii. Unattached Space of Unclear Use To Be Avoided

d. Between Parts and the Whole
   ...the Whole is Somewhat Favoured

e. Between Buildings and Land
   ...Design for Casual Social Contact
      -Pedestrian Friendly
      -Conversation Friendly
      -Observation Friendly

f. Between the Site and the Wider Community
   ...Discourage Access to Overall Site by Strangers

Tertiary Design Exercise: depending on community values
   -Ecology
   -Cottage Industry
5 GOVERNMENT FACILITATION OF COHOUSING

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Interestingly, financial concerns are of least importance as cohousers relate to government, since by our definition cohousing is to be largely privately financed (1.3.3). However, financial concerns do not cover all the social implications of cohousing, as the following list demonstrates. Chapter 2 already dealt with the advantages and impediments of cohousing from a governmental perspective. To recapitulate, all levels of government should be interested in cohousing for at least five reasons:

a. the interest in a certain segment of society in home ownership remains undiminished (see chapter 6); this aspect of the affordable housing question should not be ignored.

b. a significant affordability factor may be generated by private cooperation alone, with no public funding (see section 2.4 above).

c. affordability can be passed on to future generations through limited equity covenants between cohousing members.

d. other indirect social benefits can accrue; European experience shows good neighbourhood enhancement through aspects of cohousing (e.g. more continuous open space,
rentable meeting spaces, proactive involvement of stable, sensitized members with community issues).

e. the "green" trend in society will reinforce a cohousing movement because the members of cohousing projects frequently have ecological concerns which motivates them towards, for example, higher densities.

Not only should governments be motivated, but cohousers have a stake in influencing, where possible, government constraints on their projects. (See Appendix 7.5 for a general lobbying strategy regarding local government.) Even if their project does not directly benefit, they may end up aiding future cohousers.

The range of potential involvement of governments in cohousing will be outlined below, starting with and concentrating on local government as a sign of the growing role this sector has in community development. The insights here will be mainly derived from interviews with cohousers and municipal planners from the Lower Mainland region. Later, current federal and provincial opportunities of interest to cohousers will be briefly described (with information largely based on government publications).
5.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONCERNS

The results of the interviews of cohousers and planners from this regions are useful in three ways:

a. alerting cohousing groups to the areas of government relations requiring special attention in development planning.

b. pointing out possible places for cohousers to lobby for flexibility and creativity on the part of local planners and politicians.

c. encouraging local governments to consider high-leverage policy changes to facilitate more cohousing.

5.2.1 Context: Self-Help Housing and Local Government

Hulchanski et al provide a helpful summary of the categories of local government involvement in affordable housing (see Appendix 7.4), a good starting point for identifying constraints and opportunities related to cohousing.1 The three types of initiatives from their list most applicable to self-help housing (in particular, cohousing) are: (a) house conversion loans and regulation reform; (b) zoning reform to

allow clustering; and (c) land provided to non-profit societies and cooperatives.

That being said, the degree of local government support for specifically private, self-help approaches to affordable housing is very limited according to the record. A King County Plan was actually the policy statement reviewed that was most advanced in this regard. Although there, as in all the policy literature, the relatively new term and concept of cohousing does not appear. However, the King County Affordable Housing Policy Plan provides three strategies under its "Objective 2B: Homeownership Programs" that might be applicable to the cohousing model:

a. develop an urban homesteading program.
b. assist non-profit self-help housing agencies to operate in urban areas
c. assist nonprofit housing agencies to acquire land to develop a community land trust, enabling homeowners to lease rather than purchase their lot.

Follow-up research still needs to be carried out to see how this plan is progressing, in particular the ownership initiatives which were identified as "long-range." Contact with the King County policy office suggests that much of the

\[2\] Affordable Housing Policy Plan (King County Housing and Economic Development, 1987).
work on housing is now being subsumed under the Growth Management Act provisions.

5.2.2 Cohousers' Perspective

--Local Government Concerns

Details from the interviews can be found in Appendix 7.1. The key interconnected principles behind the cases discussed were:

a. inflexibility and lack of imagination
b. the tradition of separated uses.
c. unwillingness to exercise discretion.
d. unwillingness to set a precedent.

Three further obstacles identified were:

a. getting encouragement from one municipal department but experiencing roadblocks with others (e.g. Vancouver's Housing and Properties Department, which is entrepreneurial when compared with Planning or Engineering).
b. planning departments tending to be academic and not well-versed in the land market.
c. resistance from neighbours to rezoning, e.g. against clustering in single-family zones.
The latter obstacle is certainly local in nature, though not specifically a governmental problem.

—-Local Government Solutions

First, it should be recognized that all the cohousing proponents reported great sympathy in the response of municipalities to their proposals. Grassroots initiatives by citizens are always attractive in some sense to officials. However, all also agreed that the climate for cohousing could be improved. Aside from direct attacks on the bureaucratic resistance and negative organizational culture listed above, several possible proactive approaches by local government to encourage cohousing were identified:

a. give an entrepreneurial director outside of planning or engineering the authority to define "equity co-ops" or cohousing projects with a guaranteed social benefit as qualifying for co-op status under the Cooperative Housing Act, and thus permit them to benefit from:
   --more lenient parking regulations which avoid application for rezoning or variance
   --(at least in Vancouver) a fast-track approval process.

b. facilitate a public education campaign which would disassociate cohousing projects from communes (with their
negative overtones) and instead associate them with stable, long-term, private tenure combined with tangible neighbourhood benefits.

c. help cohousing groups find suitable land (e.g. that would be easily rezoned), either actively or by providing readable maps.

d. lease land to cohousing groups.

e. define cohousing as a housing use that can be introduced into official community plans, area plans and zoning by-laws.

f. allow housing in all zones (i.e. including commercial/industrial)—zoning was meant to protect housing property from industry but not vice versa (in other words, mixed use would permit more opportunities for housing, especially of the affordable variety; for example, adaptations and conversions could take place).

g. allow clustered cohousing in single-family zones as an outright use (subject to certain design and siting restrictions).

5.2.3 Local Government Planners' Perspective

--General Concerns

Insights were also gained from two planners based in a particular municipality (Delta), though it will be clear that
their comments can be generalized. Again, details from the interviews are found in Appendix 7.1. The main constraints identified were:

a. shrinking land base for housing
b. little planning experience with cohousing
c. little social motivation for innovation
d. fear of neighbourhood resistance to change.

5.3 PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The Housing Division of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Housing administers rent subsidies and oversees the work of the British Columbia Housing Management Commission. This agency, too, is mainly concerned with rent supplements, as well as encouraging private sector investment by reducing interest costs for projects that meet certain objectives (B.C. Rental Supply Program). Recently, the ministry set up a Provincial Commission on Housing Options (for the results, including incentives for cohousing or equity coops, see chapter 6).

Interestingly, the current program that might be of most use to cohousing groups is run by a different ministry, Finance and Corporate Relations. This is the Home Mortgage Assistance

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Program (M.A.P.), designed to help people who do not have a down payment big enough to meet usual mortgage requirements. With M.A.P., an individual may borrow as much as 95 per cent of the purchase price and still qualify for mortgage insurance. This program has planning implications for cohousers, as it would not be available to a group with a cooperative mortgage.

5.4 FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Most programs at the federal level relevant to cohousing groups would be administered through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). There are not many general constraints and opportunities (since the funding for social housing has been eliminated), apart from the structural support provided to the general mortgage market. Accessing the following programs might be of interest in special cases:

a. Guidelines, standards, design and performance criteria relating to building components, housing units and physical environments, including requirements for people with disabilities.

b. Rural and Native Housing Program, providing housing assistance, including a homeownership approach, in communities of 2500 people or less.
c. Housing Awards Competition, aimed at recognizing innovation in housing for particular groups in society.

In addition, CMHC is acting as a catalyst with other government levels and the private sector to foster affordable housing, including examining the prospects for developing government land. Two examples are:

a. the Canadian Centre for Public/Private Partnerships.

b. Affordability and Choice Today (with the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association), encouraging regulatory reform at the local level to improve housing affordability and choice.4

Again, the program of greatest usefulness to cohousing groups is actually run by a different department, namely the ability to remove funds from RRSP's (on a payback schedule) to apply towards down payments. This program was recently renewed for one year. However, this good incentive, like the British Columbia M.A.P., is directed at the individual mortgage holder. There is nothing like the special recognition and support given to limited-equity cooperative mortgages in Denmark and in many American states.

5.5 SUMMARY

a. At the local level, be prepared for:

i. resistance on being flexible with fire and building codes, mixed use and parking requirements

ii. different messages from different departments at municipal hall

iii. resistance from neighbours to any rezoning

iv. hesitation about supporting market-style housing, even when a group with a social conscience is involved

v. hard work to change to a more creative and favourable climate (but spend more time accommodating your plan to "what is")

b. At the provincial level, look for:

i. help for low-down-payment buyers through M.A.P.

ii. the new program to help equity co-operatives become established
c. At the federal level, examine:

i. the Housing Awards Competition

ii. the RRSP withdrawal-for-down-payment program

iii. CMHC support for specialized projects meeting specific social needs.
6 CONCLUSION

6.1 PROVISIONS FOR COHOUSING IN B.C.

The preceding three chapters, which form the bulk of our study, indicate that the key constraints facing cohousing practitioners can be addressed by opportunities in B.C.

6.1.1 Organization

First, as in most of the developed world, legislative contexts exist to allow private equity combined with common property. In fact, as Vicinia has demonstrated, legal frameworks are flexible enough to permit a combination of the advantages enjoyed by cooperatives (community control over resales, e.g. limited equity) and the features of condominiums attractive to some people (e.g. individual mortgages and a sense of homeownership). Other creative options such as Community Land Trusts remain to be more fully explored in B.C.

Second, though it is not clear how extensive the help will be from private developers and lending institutions, it has been shown that financing can be facilitated in B.C. through the involvement of CMHC as either provider of leased land or backer of individual mortgages (even in a cooperative legal framework). However, there is nothing yet like the subsidy available through the Danish government for limited equity.
projects. If Windsong completes its project, it will be the first in B.C. to demonstrate that cohousing is possible with no government input. Finally, it seems (at least based on the experience of Vicinia) that competent, creative builders willing to carry costs and guarantee prices can be found in B.C.

Third, as for resident group process, there is nothing particularly unique about the solutions available in B.C. as opposed to anywhere else a group may operate. One can at least be sure, viewing the experience to date in Vicinia and Windsong, that the requisite energy, creativity and determination exists among some British Columbians to endure and enjoy the typical cohousing development process.

6.1.2 Design

A happy result of the analysis in chapter 4 is that the essentials of cohousing design do not represent a long list, and many of them have been put forward only tentatively, with much mootness acknowledged. What this means is the critical design task is not exhausting, well within the capabilities of B.C. professionals and even resident groups working on their own. Furthermore, there is plenty of freedom for unique features in a project. However, if the critical issues, however minimal, are ignored or unemphasized, then it is doubtful that a true cohousing project will result.
This point is salutary if one turns from a deductive approach to cohousing design to an inductive approach, that is, abstracting issues from contemporary cohousing experience. It is remarkable on the one hand to see how much of the design logic in chapter 4 matches the investigation of McCamant and Durrett of European models,¹ and, on the other hand, to see how much Dorit Fromm’s design program for cohousing loses the key issues in a forest of non-essentials.² Nevertheless, as one does move beyond the strict essentials, specifically towards the popular options of low-rise (Vicinia) or cluster housing (Winslow and Windsong), there is plenty of evidence visible in the Lower Mainland of B.C. that talent exists for such design. Much experience has been gained during the long history of socially-funded and shaped housing projects in the province.

A final warning would be wise: it is one thing to say that careless or unfocussed design may preempt a cohousing experience, it is quite another to say that design can guarantee a cohousing approach to living. For instance, common eating facilities are a feature of Scandinavian cohousing. However, it is also normal in these settings to make common meals optional rather than mandatory (in the

spirit of making communalism voluntary rather than following the tighter expectations of communes such as kibbutzes). These two realities are somewhat at odds, severing any neat link between design and experience when it comes to shared meals. This qualification on design imposed by social contracts and cultural symbols can be generalized. As Marcus and Sarkissian state: "Design cannot cause behaviour, but it can offer the possibility of certain activities taking place".³ Thus, what can be said is that the physical design principles offered in chapter 4 encourage residential behaviour in the direction of cohousing values, but other forces must also be brought to bear to make cohousing a reality.

6.1.3 Government

Both literature reviews and discussions with experts are convincing in regard to the question of affordable and otherwise creative housing: private, self-help approaches are a trend for the future. The overwhelming reason for this claim is the diminishing public funds available for social and cooperative housing. Although federal and provincial governments can still be involved with innovative housing, the programs are not extensive, making community-based action all the more essential in today's policy climate.

³ Marcus and Sarkissian, p. 10.
That municipalities should also be key actors in affordability and other shelter issues is mandated by the current tendency for senior governments to down-load social concerns. Indeed, the Municipal Act of B.C. was recently amended to require consideration of affordability in official community plans. However, there is still a long way to go before local governments will be seen as proponents or at least allies of the cohousing approach to developing shelter. On the other hand, different cohousers made the strong point that cohousing projects do not have to be in an adversarial relationship with local government. Solutions to obstacles can frequently be available to the patient cohouser, even if the solutions are not very innovative.

One might wonder about the source of local government reluctance to be actively and creatively involved with cohousing in B.C. The main impediment mentioned was a philosophical one: why should a private group be treated any more preferentially than a private individual? A cohousing group's members should not expect any more advantages than those which they derive from their cooperativity itself. In other words, the social benefit of cohousing and other forms of innovative homeownership, and the consequent priority that local government should provide to them, remain to be demonstrated.
6.2 PROSPECTS FOR COHOUSING IN B.C.

Should the title of this section end with a question mark?
Returning once more to the definition of cohousing, it is clear that there are obstacles to cohousing in British Columbia. In terms of "consumers," there is to some degree the same sort of rugged individualism and love affair with the single-family detached house as McCamant and Durrett observe in the United States.\(^4\) Furthermore, we are a highly mobile culture, making the establishment of community commitments difficult. In fact, many people might move to a new city (e.g. for a new job) before a cohousing process was even completed. For example, the 1991 census reported that almost one-third of British Columbians over age 5 had moved in the previous five years, with over 40% of these moves being out-of-province.\(^5\) Windsong, however, which began in 1991, had not yet begun construction 3 years later, with the planned occupation not being until February 1995.\(^6\)

As we have seen, at the senior government level on this side of the Atlantic there is no special financial help available for equity cooperatives like that found in Denmark. Further,  

\(^6\) *Focus on Cohousing* (Newsletter of Cascadia Cohousing Society), Vol. 1, Issue 3 (Fall 1993).
as Dorit Fromm points out in her comparison between Europe and the United States, North American local government does not yet provide help of any kind—financial, technical or organizational.\(^7\)

However, in spite of the conservative biases of institutions and individuals and the usual skepticism about a new idea, there are at least seven reasons to be optimistic about cohousing in British Columbia.

a. There has been a strong tradition of non-profit cooperative housing in British Columbia producing a lot of experience with group process and management.

b. The programs of funding for cooperative and social housing at the federal level have been eliminated.

c. Deficits will make it unlikely that the provincial government, and traditional roles reinforced by restrictive charters unlikely that local governments, will step into the gap left by Ottawa, ensuring that self-help approaches to shelter provision will be all the more critical.

d. Both affordability and homeownership continue to be high priority items for citizens of British Columbia. The

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\(^7\)Fromm, p. 95.
results of a housing affordability survey (of 606 persons) taken for the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver were recently released. Four results are of interest:

--two-thirds of the respondents believed that affordable housing is a Canadian right.

--most respondents believe affordable housing should be "defined as shelter in a price range that people see as reasonable and it should be for everyone, not just those with low income, and include all types of both owned and rental housing."8

--nearly half the respondents believe that home ownership is now beyond the means of the average family in metro-Vancouver.

--the majority of the respondents did not believe they should have to move from their own municipalities to find affordable housing.

If cohousing can be demonstrated to be affordable (see 2.4), even on the westside of Vancouver, then it will be well-positioned to fill the widening housing gap.

e. The provincial government itself seems interested in this solution to affordability. In its recent report,

the Provincial Commission on Housing Options made the following recommendation:

An Equity Co-operative Housing Program should be introduced for low and moderate families who want to purchase their first home.

The key elements of this proposal indicate that, though the name is not used, limited-equity cohousing is the shelter model in mind. In fact, Providence Shelter Corporation was instrumental in this recommendation being brought forward, with suggested funding of 3 million dollars in the first year.\(^9\)

f. British Columbia society is changing along the lines of most industrial societies: families are smaller, often with single parents, and therefore can theoretically be accommodated in the more modestly sized private units that are possible in cohousing projects (see chapter 4).

g. Finally, the already high interest in ecological issues and the growing interest in better community life (to bridge multicultural and adolescent gaps and reduce the crime rate) bodes well for a kind of shelter which can serve both interests so well. The environmental-friendliness of higher densities and relational-

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\(^9\) Provincial Commission on Housing Options Executive Summary (Victoria: Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Housing, 1993), p. 8.
friendliness of closer neighbours can both be engendered by cohousing. This may be a wave of the future.

6.3 COHOUSING AND THE NEXT CENTURY

Marcus and Dovey suggest that "cohousing may well become the most significant new form of housing in the 1990s....while the ideology of the detached single-family house will persist, cohousing is a high quality and highly sustainable alternative." It is an open question as to which must come first to see cohousing flourish in British Columbia and elsewhere in North America: a revolution in our individualistic, anonymous culture or radical government support. Dorit Fromm definitely emphasizes the former in her description of the new American dream:

In tackling suburbia's problems, people will indeed need to learn how to create better communities. This requires not only rubbing shoulders with others, but investing time and interest in your neighbours and being available to help one another. Not only are new designs needed but new priorities within residents that go beyond the materialistic.

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Mathey, writing in *Beyond Self-Help Housing*, echoes this philosophy: "Whether 'building community' or 'community building' is generally adopted or not, it labels the essentials: the emphasis being on the activity that builds relationships rather than focussing only on the things produced."12 As suggested in chapter 2, such community spirit, an attitude based on sharing, is central to any society attempting to develop along sustainable lines. Sustainability begins with the local level, and cohousing stands as a powerful model and expression of healthy grassroots initiatives.

On the other hand, self-help housing expert J.F.C. Turner believes that ultimately there must be a partnership between the local collective and larger institutions for holistic success relationally and economically: "As the capacity to make the most economic and creative use of resources is in local hands, the overall task is to discover ways and means by which state powers and market forces can enable and support personal creativity and local initiative—a search for symbiosis not a competition for hegemony."13 This is a worthy challenge for private action and public policy in housing and other social concerns on into the next century.

13 Ibid., p. xiv.
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7 APPENDICES

7.1 INTERVIEWS

7.1.1 With Local Cohousers

On Organization of Cohousing

Interviews were completed with Vicinia members (and one ex-member) in order to get a realistic sense of the obstacles faced in terms of group process in particular and organization in general. These interviews were held just before the ground-breaking for the project which took place in the fall of 1993. The interviewees were Jennifer and Tim Greenway; Julien and Sheila Fagnan; and Gordon Dobson-Mack.

The following questions were asked in each case:

a. What were the best things about the group process in your cohousing project to date?

b. What were the worst things?

c. What first attracted you to this kind of housing?

d. What are you looking forward to in the next phases (construction; early operation)?

e. What are you dubious or anxious about?
The letter attached to each question forms the key to the following interview summaries.

A married couple with no children. They worked on the Building Committee.

a. Best: getting to design together, at least for certain aspects of the building (though sometimes it was also good to have restricted options, in the interest of time and group harmony).

b. Worst: having to design within specifications set by architect, planning department; some losses from the original design dream (though there also were gains); process was too long, partly because of skills missing in the consultant; another trade-off was group size: smaller would be more efficient but also more work per person.

c. Attracted: price; area of Vancouver; freedom to have pets; multigenerational aspect.

d. Anticipating: community life; cooperating on committees (specifically maintenance); and contact with the neighbourhood (e.g. an open house is planned).

e. Anxious: delays in the building program.
A single professional. She worked on the Building Committee.

a. Best: input on design (e.g. bicycle storage); mix of units; learning about how a project works; feeling a sense of ownership.
b. Worst: process was too long, creating extra expense; having to cut corners on the design; people not showing up for meetings.
c. Attracted: priced below market; opportunity for creativity; community atmosphere.
d. Anticipating: more input on finishing touches; ownership; relating to "her floor" (psychologically reducing the large group size to something more manageable).
e. Anxious: market risks associated with being on leased land; little control over who joins now.

A young student couple with two children. She was on the Board.

a. Best: problem-solving with a group; creativity aspect; process is helped when not everything is fluid, i.e. some nonnegotiables set by planning department, budget, architect and even the market.
b. Worst: dealing with unrealistic expectations (creating some tensions); no member with expertise in finance;
inefficiency and missed deadlines; inexperienced consultant.

c. Attracted: affordability; openness to family.

d. Anticipating: seeing the building go up; ownership; contact with wider neighbourhood; program for common spaces; community.

e. Anxious: cost overruns (e.g. lumber prices); a short honeymoon in terms of some member relationships.

A young professional with a student wife and no children. He was on the Finance Committee before leaving the project.

a. Best: good to plan in a group: ten heads are better than one.

b. Worst: long time (with expense attached); lack of commitment and unifying vision; lack of a good project manager.

c. Attracted: community at a higher level than a normal apartment building; satisfaction of a cooperative achievement.

d. Why Left: process too frustrating; did not like financial features (lease; commercial space) or the large size; burn-out (was spending up to 30 hours per week).
Several local, practicing cohousers provided insights on government and cohousing, as well as on the rationale for cohousing. The interviewees were:

Howard Staples, Director, Windsong Cohousing Association. Windsong is the oldest cohousing core group in B.C. Their office is in Delta, but they have purchased land in Langley.

Chris Hanson, founder and developer of Winslow Cohousing, Bainbridge Island, WA. This project, thirty minutes by ferry from downtown Seattle, is the first cohousing community in the U.S. to be completely developed by its residents.

Craig Vance, Director, Providence Shelter Corp., Vancouver, B.C. This cohousing consulting company will shepherd the first cohousing project in B.C. (called Vicinia) to completion in 1994. It is located on W. Broadway. They are also working with a project in Kerrisdale.

Alan Carpenter, Cascadia Cohousing Society of B.C. The mission of this society is to promote and facilitate the creation of cohousing communities in the Pacific Northwest by assisting in the formation of cohousing core groups and helping them through the development process.
--The Negative View

These cohousers identified local government obstacles to cohousing. The information emerged from two basic questions put to cohousers operating in this region. One question, in fact, was negative (what obstacles do local government pose for cohousing?) but the other was positive (what would a "dream local government" that encourages cohousing look like?). Of course, considering removal of obstacles would be a positive translation of the points which follow. The actual obstacles identified in the interviews were:

a. fire equipment access requirements compromising pedestrian-oriented streets between houses, and interfering with community gardens near clustered houses.

b. parking regulations exceeding actual needs of a community.

c. unwillingness of planning staff to permit a functioning elevator penthouse beyond the building height restriction (the penthouse is allowed by regulation as long as the elevator cannot be accessed from the roof); to allow elevator access to the roof-top garden (a major amenity in the project) would have opened it up to disabled members; here, as so often, a regulation strictly interpreted is limiting a social good.
d. inability of codes to allow shared use in the same space, e.g. commercial parking by day in otherwise residential parking spaces, or storefronts doubling as common space for residents at night.

--The Positive View

Chris Hanson of Winslow Cohousing provided a refreshing "minority report." He feels that cohousing groups are unrealistic, expecting to change or, worse, ignore current regulations rather than work creatively within them. For example, rather than trying to force multifamily housing on a single-family zone, the Winslow group decided to build on land zoned commercial: no zoning change was required and parking flexibility was much higher (in fact, planning officials were automatically eliminated from the parking design process).

In the same spirit, Mr. Staples of Windsong suggested this approach to an unnecessary overflow parking lot: simply plan on making it a ball-hockey court. Similarly, making pedestrian streets wide enough should satisfy fire-equipment access regulations: it does not mean that one has to allow any other vehicles access.

Mr. Hanson's final point was also telling. He does not believe that local government, and specifically planning departments, should be involved with land development;
planners should simply advise council and provide good maps to the private sector.

Turning to the local scene, it was noted in chapter 2 that the W. Broadway project has ensured that its affordability factor will be passed on to future purchasers through a limited equity agreement between members: a second generation member will buy at the same market discount enjoyed by the original group. This social benefit is what attracted the involvement of CMHC and has engendered some sympathetic treatment by departments of the City of Vancouver.

7.1.2 With Local Planners

The interviewees were:

Brian Perry, Area Planner, Delta Municipality.

David Shih, Planner, Delta Municipality, author of an affordable housing study in progress for Delta Council.

On General Constraints

Four features of the Municipality of Delta as revealed in the interviews with local planners bear on the growth of self-help
approaches to affordable housing in general, and cohousing in particular:

a. few new parcels are left given the constraints of the Agricultural Land Reserve, so most future development will be through infill, conversion or adaptation, and upzoning.

b. there is relatively little experience in Delta with social and cooperative housing.

c. there are few tangible reminders of housing unaffordability through the presence of the homeless.

d. the NIMBY attitude is as strong in Delta as anywhere.

On Self-Help Constraints

The Delta planners interviewed see only two types of housing: social and market, and they are firmly unconvinced that a third way really exists. Given the NIMBY syndrome, Mr. Perry was dubious about the window of opportunity being open to any cohousing which requires rezoning. Mr. Shih was equally adamant that an official cohousing zone or designation was unlikely, but in his case the resistance was expected from the top. Mr. Shih further maintained that the Vancouver Charter afforded that city more entrepreneurial opportunity than that available to municipalities operating under the Municipal Act.
On a social level, Mr. Shih was uncertain that Canadians could match the cooperative spirit exhibited by the northern Europeans who originated cohousing. On the other hand, the social trend towards "green" consciousness could introduce a "small and efficient is beautiful" mentality, all of which would be conducive to cohousing.

Finally, Mr. Shih notes that the Municipal Act reference to affordable housing was only so much "window-dressing" as it made nothing mandatory. In fact, it is clear from the policy statement in the 1992 Tsawwassen Area Plan that affordability does not include home-ownership issues anyway.

7.2 COLLATERAL SOURCES ON COHOUSING ORGANIZATION

Several sources outside the cohousing world might help shape legal frameworks and financial plans. For instance, homeowners associations formed to manage open space in neighbourhoods date back over thirty years in the U.S. The articles of incorporation of such groups could provide insight into the final agreement of a cohousing group.¹ Even more applicable would be the extensive literature on the bylaws of cooperatives and condominiums. Finally, cohousing groups would be wise to consult reports from any regional workshop in

¹ See, for example, William H. Whyte, Cluster Development (New York: American Conservation Association, 1964).
their area which brought together municipalities, developers and financial institutions with the purpose of brainstorming affordable housing options.

Similar to the discussion of legal and financial matters, some sources from relevant types of housing can be helpful primers for the planning process involved with cohousing. Three such sources are:

a. Managing a Successful Community Association.2 This resource, aimed at a variety of associations where property owners join together to share some property in common enjoyment and responsibility, is particularly useful on the terms of reference for standing committees (i.e. division of labour in the whole group and contracting in subgroups).

b. Condominium Management.3 This book includes some good chapters on running meetings and establishing and enforcing rules.

c. The Condo/Co-op Owner's Survival Manual.4 This source has an excellent list of key documents for a group to have in place.

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There are an enormous number of useful books in print on group roles, communication, purpose and vision-setting, stages of group life, group diseases and so on that could be usefully consulted.\(^5\)

### 7.3 SAMPLE ORGANIZING AGREEMENT FOR A COHOUSING GROUP

**Purpose:** The undersigned hereby form the Sun and Wind Cohousing Organizing Group, which is a partnership for the purpose of developing a cohousing community. The group's functions include but are not necessarily limited to exploring the scope of the proposed project as determined in future meetings; recruiting and orienting new members to the group; preparing a development program; seeking and examining potential sites.

**Membership:** Interested persons become active members of the group by attending three meetings, paying membership fees, and signing the organizing agreement.

**To Leave the Group:** Stop attending meetings and paying membership fees.

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Meetings: Minutes of discussions and decisions made will be distributed to attending and absent members before the next scheduled meeting.

Decision Making: To protect minority rights, a consensus-seeking process will be used. A formalized decision-making process [i.e. voting, with the degree of majority specified] will be used only to avoid an impasse. All decisions are to be discussed thoroughly before a decision is made. Decisions can be brought up by members who were absent in the next meeting only.

Financial Obligations: The finances of the group shall be the respective obligation of all individual members. At this time the undersigned agree to pay a _____ organizing fee each month for incidental costs which are limited to paper, mailing, photocopying, and rental of meeting rooms. For another purchases, or to incur any cost above _____, authorization must be given at a regularly scheduled general meeting. No deficit may be incurred. If the group dissolves, any surplus will be returned to the members in proportion to the length of their participation.

The Next Step: When property is bought or other activities are undertaken that demand greater economic responsibility to the group or to a third party, the organizing group will incorporate itself accordingly.
Once incorporated, members reserve a house in the community by investing in the corporation (or partnership). Persons not able or ready to invest in the corporation may follow the project as members of the organizing group with the potential of buying later if units are still available.\(^6\)

7.4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

An inventory of local government involvement in initiatives to provide affordable housing in categories proposed by Hulchanski et al:\(^7\)

- **Advocacy**—lobbying for improved provincial/state and federal housing programs.

- **Planning and policy**—mainly involving studies and recommendation-making, though comprehensive planning and policies are increasing; an example of the latter is the Habiter Montreal plan; Hulchanski notes the absence of regional planning for housing;\(^8\) Varady and Birdsall suggest the following trends in policy-making: local task forces

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8 Ibid., p. 21.
involving all three sectors, linkage with economic development, comprehensive needs-analysis.9

_standards and zoning—seen as the chief enemy of affordable housing, but little comprehensive is being done about it; some specific initiatives: density bonuses, demolition controls, house conversion programs, housing above shops, income mix zoning and new communities in industrial areas, relaxed regulations to allow commercial space to be used for working/living by artists, lower standards for site improvements, revisions to allow clustering, zero-lot-line development, updates of codes to allow more cost-effective materials and construction; also, zoning for manufactured housing.

_regulatory process—very limited reforms taking place in the administrative delays and costs associated with development; a couple of examples of fast-tracking are cited.

_organization—many initiatives in this category, notably public/private partnerships, intergovernmental partnerships, and expanded housing departments.

_land and buildings—using municipal land for social housing, land banking (control of land prices through control of

residential land stock), building rehabilitation assistance and initiatives involving "granny flats."

Financing--apart from standard subsidies to low-income people, mostly the initiatives fall under public/private partnerships, but conversion loan programs and reserve funds also exist.

Taxation and fees--taxation powers little used to promote affordable housing; waivers more common (e.g. taxes for first time home buyers, fees related to social housing development).

Information--municipalities excel here, especially regarding housing registries (e.g. a home-sharing service in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto).

7.5 A LOBBYING STRATEGY: RECOMMENDATIONS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The following represents a possible brief to a local or regional council, assuming that a cohousing group chooses to lobby for a more favourable climate for their own project or some future one.
a. Preamble

By these four stages:

--acknowledging the current socioeconomic climate with regard to housing;
--recognizing the value of self-help, cooperative approaches to affordable housing, especially the model known as cohousing, within that climate;
--synthesizing the literature and interview results regarding the bureaucratic obstacles, organizational culture and leadership opportunities within local government;
--being realistic about what kind of changes cohousers and other shelter innovators can expect;

the following policy is devised for adoption by relevant agencies in local governments.

b. Philosophical Shift

This is perhaps the most difficult and certainly the most important component of the policy. The balance of the policy rests on this foundation:
Councils, commissions and staff must recognize:

i. the unique quality of group-developed equity housing, placing it somewhere between social and market housing.

ii. the affordability factor of this sort of housing, especially when developer profit is eliminated.

iii. the other social benefits of cohousing in particular, even when equity is not limited.

iv. the appropriateness of offering some sympathetic response to and even proactive enhancement of cohousing initiatives.

c. Planning Change

Councils should direct the Planning Department to:

i. devise a description of cohousing that would permit it to be included as an allowed use in zones.

ii. recommend amendments to the Official Community Plan and existing Area Plans to introduce cohousing as an outright use in appropriate zones.
iii. provide the information in ii. in a clear fashion to cohousing groups.

iv. designate at least one staff-person to act in a limited way as a cohousing consultant to interested groups.

d. Regulatory Change

Councils should amend codes to permit:

i. mixed use in the same space (to encourage creative use of space by commercial enterprises and residents in the case of urban cohousing).

ii. shared parking by commercial concerns and residents at different times of the day (again, in the case of urban, mixed use projects).

iii. discretion on the part of fire marshalls in the provision of fire-control access (e.g. not worrying whether pumper trucks will have to run over a community garden).

iv. discretion on the part of the Directors of Planning and Engineering to interpret codes liberally and thus allow cohousing members to fully enjoy common amenities.
e. Communication Plan

Apart from the internal communication needs engendered by b. above and the zoning information suggested under c.iii., the following communication strategy would be in order:

i. a combination of news releases, public meetings and cable-TV shows to announce the changes listed under c. and d. above.

ii. a primer on cohousing and other self-help housing prepared by the planner identified under c.iv. above (in conjunction with the Cascadia Cohousing Society), including a directory of low-profit builders and relevant consultants, to be distributed to libraries and developers, and advertised in local papers for public purchase.

iii. an annual community workshop on this form of shelter and the general issue of residential intensification, hosted by the Planning Department and involving key proponents from the private sector.

iv. periodic news releases to the local paper (at least semiannually), especially as early projects are developed.
f. External Affairs

Several inter-agency initiatives would be in order:

i. invite a local member from the Cascadia Cohousing Society to sit on any Advisory Planning Commission.

ii. make sure reports circulate from municipalities as to their involvement with cohousing and other forms of self-help, equity housing.

iii. initiate a quarterly information exchange on affordable housing and especially self-development models with planning counterparts in Washington State and B.C.

iv. investigate and lobby for CMHC and equivalent B.C. support for cohousing.

g. Future Municipal Action

Several initiatives remain too controversial and unstudied to be part of a first step, but do bear consideration for the future:
i. acquire and provide leased land to cohousing groups, perhaps with restrictive covenants to preserve certain social benefits.

ii. allow clustered housing in single-family zones as long as density allowances are maintained on average and other design guidelines are met; also, allow housing in all zones.

iii. give discretion to the Director of Planning or some new official to designate cohousing projects with sufficient social benefits (e.g. limited-equity models, including community day-care) as equivalent to subsidized co-operatives and thus subject to some relaxed standards.

iv. set aside funds for low-interest loans to help finance home-ownership developments and adaptive re-use of buildings by cohousing groups with otherwise limited means and credit.