



## Cohousing

**Cohousing balances the needs of the individual for autonomy, privacy and control of their own space, with the advantages of cooperation, belonging, safety and community. It's the best of both worlds!**

Earthsong is a cohousing neighbourhood, a multi-generational collaborative housing community based on the concept that originated in Denmark in the early 1970s. Cohousing is described in the inspirational book *"Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves"* by architects Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley 1994.

The physical design encourages both social contact and individual space. Cars are kept at the edge of the site to create a pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood designed for casual interaction and safe play for children. Residents live in fully self-contained private homes, and also have access to extensive common facilities such as gardens, play areas, workshop and the common house. The social center of the neighbourhood, the common house at Earthsong has a large kitchen and dining room, smaller sitting rooms, a shared laundry, children's and teens' rooms, and a guest room.



### Characteristics of Cohousing

1. Participatory process: Members organise and participate in the planning and design process for the housing development, and are responsible for all the final decisions either with or without a separate developer.
2. Intentional Neighbourhood design: The physical design encourages a strong sense of community while safeguarding privacy and increases the possibilities for spontaneous social contact.
3. Common facilities: Each household has a complete private residence but has access to common areas and facilities, including a large, common house, which are integrally designed for daily use to supplement private living areas.
4. Resident management: Residents manage the development, making decisions of common concern at community meetings using inclusive, participatory decision making processes.
5. Non-hierarchical structure and decision-making: While there are leadership roles, responsibility for the decisions is shared by the community's adults and no one person dominates the decisions or the community process.
6. Separate Income Sources: Households are responsible for their own income and finances and do not rely on the community for their primary income.

"The value of the cohousing model in respect of social *and* environmental sustainability is its recognition of, and attempt to address, some of the failings of the late twentieth century society...; the breakdown of community, alienation of the individual, and the neglect of disadvantaged groups such as single parents, the elderly and the young. It does so via the hardware of site layout, building design and shared resources as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the software of participatory process, shared decision-making and a rich social agenda."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. Meltzer, 'The Missing Link: A 'Sense of Community' and the ESD Debate', in J Birkeland (ed), *Catalyst '95: Rethinking the Built Environment*, at <http://www.aiid.bee.qut.edu.au/~meltzer/articles.html>

