

CATHIE ANDERSON

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Public forum will offer insiders' view of cohousing communities

Residential concept still not widely known but growing quickly
Subdivision offers more chances to interact with neighbors

Speakers Saturday, site tour Sunday offer insight



Architectural rendering of the Fair Oaks Ecohousing subdivision. To foster community, none of the units will have attached garages. Instead, residents will park on the perimeter and walk under the pergola into a shared courtyard. © McCamant and Durrett, 2014

BY CATHIE ANDERSON
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Marty Maskall stumbled upon the concept of cohousing one day back in November 2003 while stopping by a carpool buddy's home in Sacramento's Southside Park neighborhood.

Peeking out his kitchen window, Maskall expected to see his backyard, but what she discovered completely up-ended all her notions about what a housing subdivision could be.

“Instead of a backyard, I saw all these lovely homes with porches facing each other, and I saw one home that was a little bigger than the others,” Maskall said. “I was like, ‘What is this?’ So when I got in the car, I just peppered him with questions.”

When her friend told her that his family lived in cohousing community, Maskall said, “Co-what?”

Maskall discovered that the people who literally wrote the book on cohousing, architects Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant, lived in a cohousing community right over in Nevada City. Maskall met with Durrett and learned that living in cohousing is like living in an old-fashioned village where people know each other, care about each other, take care of each other and watch out for each other.

Maskall fell in love with the combination of privacy and community that cohousing provided. Over the last decade, she said, she has worked to identify the right site and get zoning approvals for a cohousing community in the Fair Oaks area. Construction will begin next year on the 30 residences in the project, she said.

She also has become part of the movement to enlighten people about cohousing. She, McCamant and others will be speaking on the topic Saturday at [a public forum](#) from 2-5 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, 2425 Sierra Blvd., in Sacramento. Admission is \$10.

Then on Sunday, future residents of Fair Oaks EcoHousing will lead a tour of the site of their future homes. To go along, meet them at 10:30 a.m. on the patio of the Fair Oaks Coffeehouse, 10223 Fair Oaks Blvd., in Fair Oaks Village.

In “Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities,” Durrett and McCamant write: “Many people feel alone, isolated and disconnected ... Cohousing helps individuals and families to find and maintain the elements of traditional neighborhoods – family, community, a sense of belonging – that are sorely missing in society.”

In a cohousing community, residents own their homes, but they share ownership of common grounds and a larger common house. That building has a commercial-size kitchen where residents share meals several times a week, a laundry room and spaces for other shared activities. When the communities are built, Maskall said, future residents discuss and decide what they’d like to see in the common house.

Each individual residence also has its own kitchen and laundry facilities. What homes don’t have is an attached garage. Typically, residents park on the perimeter of the community and walk through the courtyard to their homes. People who live this way relish the idea of connecting with neighbors.

Chris Haviland said he and his partner, Melody Jonak, are among the roughly 15 families who already have bought homes in [Fair Oaks EcoHousing project](#): “Today, in single family homes, you pretty much don’t know your neighbors and the level of community is near zero. Maybe you wave if you see someone before you close your garage door with your button. With cohousing, you get to know your neighbors on a more personal level because you see them and dine with them regularly.”

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ABOUT THIS BLOG

Cathie Anderson connects you to local businesses, entrepreneurs and nonprofits by gathering insights and strategies from business leaders of large companies as well as small startups. She's been preparing for this assignment for years, with positions that include assistant business editor at The Detroit News and The Dallas Morning News, and business editor and features editor at The Sacramento Bee. Contact her at canderson@sacbee.com or 916-321-1193.

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