ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE LIVING THROUGH COHOUSING
Lessons from Quayside Village (North Vancouver, B.C.)

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ABSTRACT

Historically, humans have often lived in small communities that share resources and live in harmony with nature. The current era of housing has unfortunately prioritized the individual by creating single-family residences that are consuming viable land. (Scotthanson & Scotthanson, 2005). This type of housing creates isolation for its occupants and decreases the social interactions that come with sharing resources and engaging in community activities (Scotthanson et al., 2005). With social, economic and environmental concerns brought forth by today's housing landscape, a new concept of housing has emerged known as cohousing. Cohousing is a relatively new approach to sustainable living that draws upon characteristics of early human settlement to create a socially engaging and economically responsible community. This case study explores Quayside Village, a cohousing development in North Vancouver that has achieved several outcomes in creating a sustainable community.

1.0 / WHAT IS COHOUSING?

Cohousing is a clustering of homes, or units in a building, where residents share common spaces and resources. Units are privately owned, however some cohouses have rental units. Cohousing originated in Denmark in the 1960's when a group of families started living together to share evening meals and childcare (Scotthanson et al., 2005). Cohousing then became very popular and communities started to form in North America during the 1980's.

In many contexts, cohousing often gets confused with condominium or cooperative housing developments. Cohousing bears similarities of condominiums and cooperatives in ownership and operation, as cohousing groups most often register a new development as a condominium legally, as obtaining financing is easier. Sharing resources in cohousing is similar to cooperative developments, however there is no shared income between residents of a cohousing development (Scotthanson et al., 2005).

The Cohousing Model
Cohousing aims to achieve a sustainable community that creates social, economic and environmental outcomes. As these outcomes vary between projects, all groups interested in cohousing come together to plan a vision for a community that they desire. This planning is conducted through a consensus decision-making process that imposes a fair system for resident input. After move in, communities are operated by the residents in a non-hierarchical structure comprised of several committees (Scotthanson et al., 2005).

FIGURE 1 | Quayside Village

2.0 / QUAYSIDE VILLAGE BACKGROUND

Quayside Village was one of the first cohousing developments in Canada, taking 2 years to complete (1996-1998) (Canadian Cohousing Network, 2016). Quayside is located at 510 Chesterfield Avenue, at the corner of Chesterfield Avenue and 5th Street, in the Lower Lonsdale area of North Vancouver, B.C. (Cohousing Development Consulting, 2017). Residents are within walking distance to various local amenities and within a short commute to Downtown Vancouver. Quayside contains 19 residential units total; 1 is a rental unit and 5 are affordable units (CDC, 2017). Units vary in size and type including bachelor, 1 or 2 bedroom and townhouses (CDC, 2017). All units have their own kitchen and fireplace and access to the common courtyard through a covered yard, deck, or balcony (CDC, 2017). The common space is 2,500 square foot which includes a courtyard, reading rooms, and a common dining area, and a 650 square foot commercial space is located on site (CCN, 2016).

FIGURE 2 | Cohousing Concept Drawing

3.0 QUAYSIDE OUTCOMES

Quayside prides itself on being a safe and sustainable community with a mix of ages, ethnicities and family types (Meltzer, 2005). Through the development process, the group was able to create such a community that produced social, economic, and environmental outcomes that benefit all residents.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Quayside's layout was intentionally designed to facilitate social interaction. The building's entrance is a wide walkway connecting residents and visitors directly from the street to the main common area (Meltzer, 2005). Common spaces are shared amongst all residents for various activities, for example ,the common dinning area is where residents cook meals and dine together (Warson, 1999). Quayside also celebrates a multi-generational community comprised of seniors, young families, and singles. A relationship between the senior citizens and children is one that creates a socially diverse environment for seniors, often lacking in conventional senior housing, while offering young parents inexpensive childcare (Meltzer, 2005).

Accessible design has been incorporated into Quayside's layout, including the entrance and main common space which can easily be accessed from the street, either by foot or wheelchair (Meltzer, 2005). All townhouses have ground floor entires and additional universal design features have been incorporated into the affordable rental units (Meltzer, 2005).
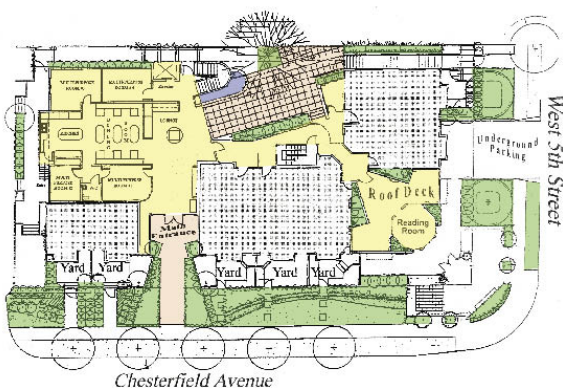

FIGURE 3 | Quayside Village Courtyard

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

As most cohousing developments consist of privately-owned dwellings, Quayside contains affordable units that serve the growing demand for affordable housing in North Vancouver (Warson, 1999). The City wanted more affordable housing so they offered a density bonus and lowered the land cost for those units. The density bonus was 10% to allow for these units, as well as reducing building setbacks and parking spots (Green Building Audio Tours, n.d.). Not only do affordable units offer an increased opportunity for feasible housing, but all units are designed by the residents during initial planning as a way of creating units that work with their individual budget (CDC, 2017). In addition to affordable units, the sharing of resources such as childcare, carpooling and meals, reduces the everyday costs of living that are often difficult to cover when people live on their own.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

The site on which Quayside resides is very compact, occupying only a $1/4$ of an acre (CDC, 2017). Construction of the project maintained a low environmental footprint by reusing on-site materials to create stain-glass windows, wooden doors and oak floors, used for the common areas (CCN, 2016). The building was also designed with BC Hydro's Powersmart Program and BC Gas Energy Efficiency Program (GBAT, n.d.). With financial aid from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Quayside installed a grey water recycling system, which was the first in Canada to be incorporated into a multi-housing project (CDC, 2017). The community maintains environmentally conscious efforts by carpooling, biking and walking and recycling and composting waste (63% of all waste is recycled and all kitchen scraps are composted) (GBAT, n.d.).

FIGURE 4 | Quayside Village Area Plan

4.0 HOW QUAYSIDE ACHIEVED IT'S VISION: THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

While the development process is similar for all cohousing projects, Quayside's process provided valuable lessons for future projects by showing the importance of the consensus decision-making process as well as the role of the cohousing consultant when overcoming project challenges.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

The group that formed Quayside explored their goals, values and commitment to one another in the early planning stages of the project, just as all cohousing groups do. The group was able to *build* housing that suited their needs, as opposed to *find* housing that suited their needs. "Experience shows that only people who seek new residential options for themselves will have the motivation to push through the arduous planning and design process without comprising their initial goals" (McCamant & Durrett, 1994). It was important for residents at Quayside to understand that consensus should not always consist of a 'yes' or 'no' answer to decisions. There is a range of responses that individuals can use to express how they feel about a particular decision, such as 'Really agree', 'not like it' or 'willing to live with it'. This creates a better dialogue between the group and provides a better rationale for decisions than simply a 'yes' or 'no' answer would. As long as the group defines a vision, understands the existing conditions, and identifies the necessary pathways to get there, then a project should achieve it's vision set forth by the residents (Scotthanson et al., 2005).

ROLE OF THE CONSULTANT

The role of the consultant is extremely important for cohousing developments. Cohousing groups act as the developer and often do not have the skills and resources to develop a project on their own. Projects that are done without professional assistance most often never come to fruition. The cohousing consultant for Quayside, Cohousing Development Consulting (CDC), offered several services to guide the group along the development process. Prior to working with the group, the consultant hosted a community building workshop to educate residents on cohousing. They were educated

FIGURE 5 | Gathering of Residents at Quayside

on best cohousing practices, potential risks of cohousing and answered any questions and concerns that residents had. It was suggested to Quayside that the project contain between 20-35 units (Nutt, 2002). Any less would make management and financing difficult, and any more would cause residents to lose out on intimate social connections that comes with fewer neighbours (Nutt, 2002). The next phases of development consisted of searching for land, site acquisition, project feasibility and cost projections. CDC acted as the project manager, coordinating with the group and the other professionals (contractor, lawyers, banks, architect etc.) while acting as an advocate for the group to ensure that their personal investments for the project were safe. CDC also aided in negotiations with the City to obtain the density bonus allowance for the affordable units.

PROJECT CHALLENGES

In any cohousing project there are always challenges and various risks associated those challenges. Cohousing has issues due to the lack of knowledge that professionals have on cohousing, it's ownership structure, acquiring land and the consensus decision-making process. For Quayside, the project ran into issues when construction costs were underestimated as the building has more complexity than was originally budgeted for. This caused the need for cost levies to cover the ongoing maintenance and unanticipated repairs. Because the residents act as the developer, a lot of costs came out of their pockets, causing tensions within the community. They eventually had to hire an outside financial consultant to help them until the debts

were paid off (Meltzer, 2005). Challenges also ensued with resident management structure upon project move in. The group had developed a flexible framework that would allow them to deal with resident issues on an ad hoc basis (Meltzer, 2005). There were issues with too many committees for day-to-day operations, cooking schedules and quiet hours in the open courtyard (Meltzer, 2005). However, after a few years of testing various methods to solve issues, the community now runs very smoothly (Meltzer, 2005).

5.0 / LESSONS LEARNED

Several valuable lessons were learned from Quayside's development as it became a framework for future cohousing developments in Canada. With a well defined vision, education on cohousing, and professional cohousing assistance, the planning process can be quite simple. The majority of developers, planners and other professionals do not have enough experience in cohousing. It is important to educate people who are seeking cohousing, and professionals who can guide them along the development process. Hiring a cohousing consultant, such as the CDC, who has immense knowledge and experience in cohousing, is crucial to the success of any cohousing project. The cohousing consultant aids in communication between the group and the other professionals, and acts as a support system to mitigate conflict amongst group members in order for them to achieve the community of their dreams. Creating sustainability, and affordability, in housing by balancing social, economic and environmental outcomes is achievable through the cohousing model.

FIGURE 6 | Quayside Village

FIGURE 7 | View of Vancouver

6.0 / CONCLUSION

Developing sustainable housing can be challenging. Housing has to meet demands in the market, and unfortunately, the three major components of sustainability, social, economic, environment, are never all met simultaneously. If housing is affordable, it may not foster social interaction or not be constructed with green sourced materials as they usually more expensive. Another situation is when housing is constructed with expensive green technologies and offers a lot of amenities, however the units are not affordable for most individuals. This cycle continues in housing, as one component of sustainability is sacrificed for another. Truly sustainable living, that satisfies social, economic and environmental needs of people, can be achieved through the cohousing model. Quayside Village is a exemplar case of how cohousing can be successful in Canada and achieve goals that often seemed impossible when creating a sustainable community.

RESOURCES

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FIGURES

Figure 1 | Canadian Choosing Network (2016) Quayside Village [Photograph], Retireved from http://cohousing.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/11144_QuaysideMain.jpg

Figure 2 | PDX Commons Cohousing (2013) The Sunriver look [Drawing], Retrieved from https://pdxcommons.com/2013/07/31/the-many-faces-of-cohousing/

Figure 3 | Cohousing Development Consulting (n.d.) Quayside Village Courtyard [Photograph], Retrieved from http://www.cohousingconsulting.ca/proj%20Qv.html

Figure 4 | Elizabeth Mackenzie (Photographed plan drawing) (n.d.) Quayside Village Area Plan [Plan drawing], Retrieved from http://gbat.me/buildings/quayside_village_cohousing

Figure 5 | [Photograph, Group of Residents]. Retrieved from https://sites.google.com/site/quaysidevillage/commonspace

Figure 6 | B.C.'s Best Buildings (2017) 398: Quayside Village [Photograph], Retrieved from http://www.architecturefoundationbc.ca/best-buildings-entries-for-voting/

Figure 7 | Quayside Village (flickr). (n.d.) View of Vancouver (Quayside Village) [Photograph], Retrieved from https://hiveminer.com/User/Quayside%20Village