

# EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON COHOUSING COMMUNITIES IN CANADA: A SOCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

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## REASONS FOR RESEARCH

Shared housing is a well-established concept, particularly on college campuses where groups of people live together, typically in a house or an apartment, and share common areas such as the kitchen, living room, and bathroom.

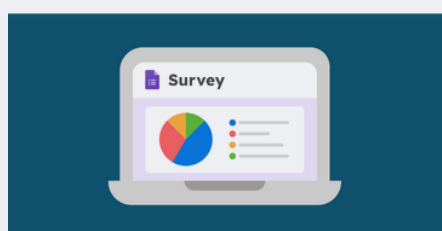
### WHAT IS COHOUSING?

- Cohousing is a deliberate form of living that places strong emphasis on building social connections and developing deep community bonds.
- Common spaces such as shared kitchen, dining area, living room, garden, workshop, etc. are important characteristic of cohousing since they encourage residents to interact with each other and build strong relationships.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Designing cities with community in mind has become increasingly relevant in the wake of Covid-19 as it has severely impacted socialization and restricted opportunities for human interaction.

## METHODS



### SURVEYS

- An anonymous survey link was sent to 19 cohousing communities in BC, AB, SK and ON
- 15 cohousing residents participated in the survey



### INTERVIEWS

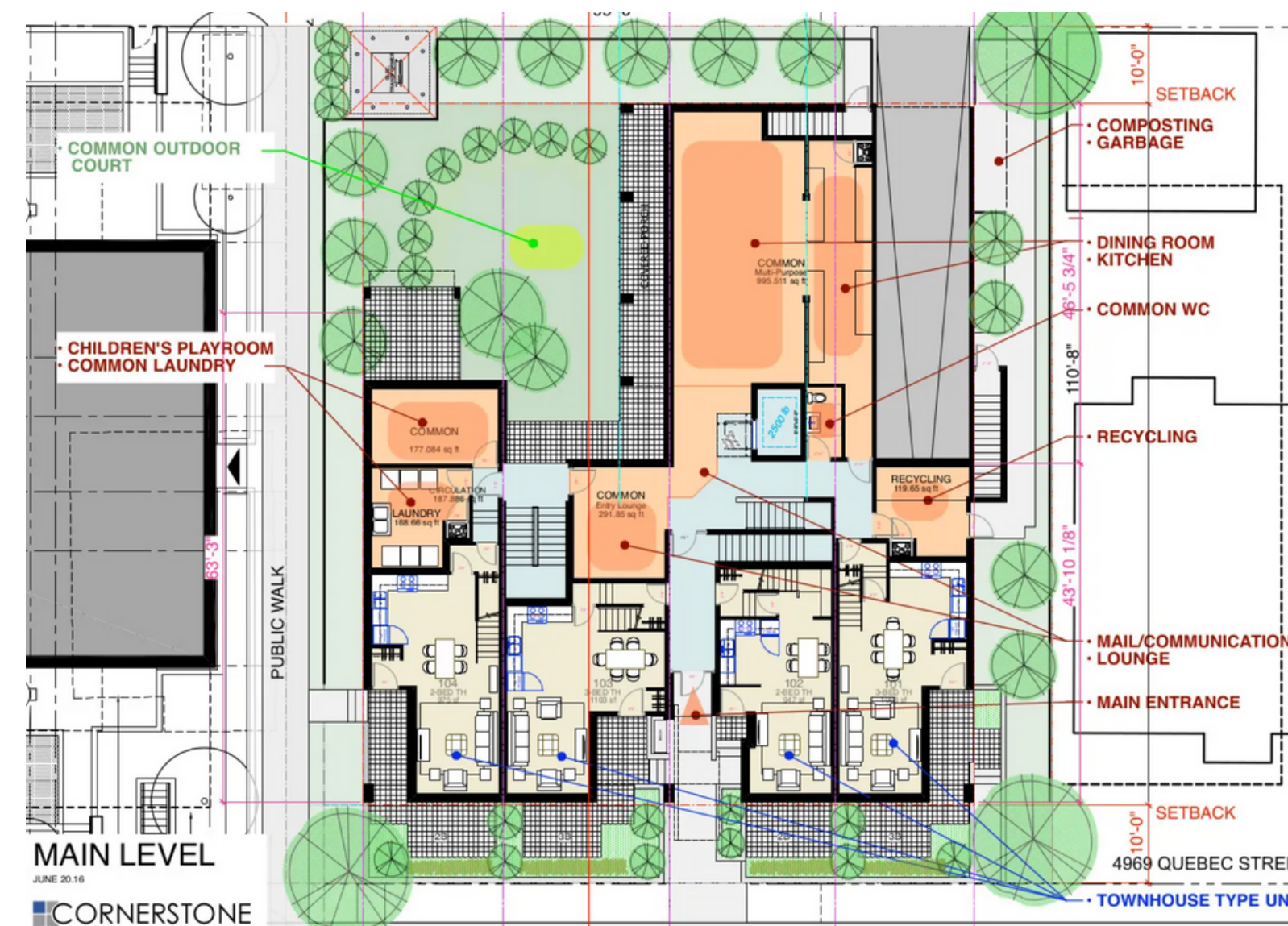
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 cohousing residents from BC, AB, and ON

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the importance of common spaces for community building in cohousing?
2. How was community building amongst cohousing residents affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What strategies have been used to build/maintain community during the pandemic?



RAVEN'S CROSSING COHOUSING, SIDNEY, BRITISH COLUMBIA



COHOUSING CONCEPT PLAN

## FINDINGS

### 1. BENEFIT OF COHOUSING: COMMUNITY

- Interviews: sense of community was one of the major reasons interviewees chose to live in cohousing.
- This sentiment was reflected in the survey responses in which 14 out of 15 respondents listed sense of community and more opportunity for social interaction as one of the reasons that attracted them to cohousing.

### 2. AVAILABLE AMENITIES AND COMMON SPACES

- Interviews: The common house serves as a vital social and functional centre for residents, offering common facilities such as a kitchen, dining room, living room, and recreational room.
- All of the survey respondents indicated having access to a dining room, living room, and outdoor garden space. 93% also reported having access to a communal kitchen.

### 3. COMMON SPACE USAGE PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC

- Prior to the pandemic, survey results showed that 20% of respondents *always* used the common spaces, 73% used them *often*, and 7% used them *rarely*.
- Interviews with cohousing residents confirmed that all common spaces were extensively used before the pandemic outbreak.

### 4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMON SPACES AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

- 73% of survey respondents *agreed* that the common spaces helped with building a sense of community.
- interviewees elaborated on this point by expressing that working together to maintain common spaces creates a sense of ownership and connection to their living environment.

### 5. COMMON SPACE USAGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

- 13% of survey respondents *never* made use of the common spaces, 27% *rarely* used them, and 40% used them *sometimes*.
- Interviewees indicated decrease use of indoor common spaces and increased use of outdoor common spaces such as patios, gardens, and courtyards, etc.

### 6. SENSE OF BELONGING DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Mixed responses
- Interviews and surveys found a division between vaccinated and unvaccinated members.
- Two interviewees noted that the COVID-19 pandemic heightened their sense of community due to shared experiences, a sense of purpose, a culture of mutual aid, problem-solving skills, and constant communication.

### 7. STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN SENSE OF COMMUNITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Pivoting to online methods of communication such as Zoom, Slack and Microsoft teams
- Creating activities through Zoom (dance parties, movie night, dinner parties, etc.)
- Increase use of outdoor common spaces
- Social bubbles
- Addressing community feelings with the help of a moderator



SOCIAL DISTANCING OUTSIDE IN THE COURTYARD (PRAIRIE SKY COHOUSING)

## CONCLUSION

This research project found that outdoor common spaces played a crucial role in community building during the pandemic. However, their effectiveness was significantly undermined by anti-vaccine rhetoric, which created divisions among community members.