



Co-Housing and Eco-Village Development in Aotearoa/New Zealand



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Introduction

Firstly, a definition of the terms Eco-Village and Co-Housing is necessary in order to understand what is being studied here.

Robert Gilman, in his book, *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities*¹ offers this definition:

"An ecovillage is a human-scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future."

The Global Eco-Village Network² offers an insight into the different dimensions of focus in developing such communities:

"An ecovillage is an urban or rural community whose members try to provide a high quality lifestyle without taking more from the Earth than they give back. Ecovillages attempt to integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life. To achieve these aims, ecovillages typically build on various combinations of three dimensions: Community, ecology and spirituality."

In their definitive work "Co-Housing: A contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves" Macammant & Durrett³ coined the term Co-Housing to describe a phenomenon in Denmark (North American examples were appended in the second edition), where families and individuals with a strong concern for both community and environment formed co-operative housing groups, mostly in urban/suburban settings.

"In addition to a clear common denominator of people joining together intent on cooperation as a means of improving their lives, Katie [McCamant] and Chuck [Durrett] offer six defining characteristics of a cohousing community:

- Participatory process. Members organise and participate in the planning and design process for the housing development, and are responsible as a group for all the final decisions either with or without a separate developer.
- Intentional neighbourhood design. The physical design encourages a strong sense of community and increases the possibilities for spontaneous social contact.
- Private homes supplemented by extensive common facilities. Each household has a complete private residence but has access to common areas and facilities, which are integrally designed for daily use to supplement private living areas, including a large common house.
- Complete resident management. Residents manage the development, making decisions of common concern at community meetings using inclusive, participatory decision making processes.
- Nonhierarchical structure. While there are leadership roles, the responsibility for the decisions is shared by the community's adults and no one person dominates the decisions or the community process.
- Separate income sources. Households are responsible for their own income and finances and do not rely on the community for their primary income.

In Denmark these communities are known as *bofaelleskaber*—which translates variously as living communities; communal living; or living together. It is estimated that over 300 such cohousing communities have been built in Denmark since 1970.^{4,5}

Chris Hanson adds: "...from my experience with co-housing in North America, I would add the following:

- Optimum community size. ...between 12 and 36 dwellings...
- Purposeful separation of the car...
- Shared evening meals... level of participation varies from group to group...
- Varied level of responsibility for development process"¹⁰

The development of Ecovillages and Co-housing in Aotearoa / New Zealand (hereafter "Aotearoa" or "NZ" for simplicity) is a positive step for the rebuilding of strong community examples, which others may use as a model in generations to come. The realisation that many of our current societal ills are due to a lack of community is now becoming commonplace, but at the forefront are those who are doing something about it.

This Study has made a survey of current Eco-village and Co-housing developments, noting their size, location, and age.

From this survey, a case study was chosen (the most locally accessible example: Earth Song Community in Ranui, Waitakere City), and investigated in some detail, to see just how this 'new' model is paving the way to a positive future for the people of Aotearoa, and what lessons it has to offer to those projects yet to form, or that are still in their infancy.



meals, co-housing style: the common house dining room at Trudeslund, Denmark³



what? no cars? a typical street scene in the trudeslund co-housing community³

Part 1: Survey

Aim of the survey

The main purpose of the survey was to establish a list of possible candidates for the second part of the study, as well as to provide an overview of the extent of such developments in Aotearoa.

While every attempt has been made to record the existence of all such projects, I admit that the survey is by no means exhaustive, and no-doubt some more obscure examples may have slipped through the net (recently received e.mail indicates the existence of at least 6 groups forming in the Christchurch area, which are not included in the study survey). Due to the present small scale of developments in Aotearoa I have confidence however that the key developments have been found and recorded.

Methodology

A short e.mail survey was conducted after initially establishing that all but two of the communities had frequent access to e.mail facilities. Those without e.mail (Tui and Rainbow Valley) were surveyed indirectly, via contacts who had e.mail and knowledge of the two communities. The initial mail-out was posted out to those communities with whom I had previously had some contact, as well as other associates whom I thought may be able to help. It called for notification of any further communities that I didn't know of, and their contact details (preferably e.mail). A good response was felt, if somewhat tardy in a few cases, and this provided a reliable basis to conduct the survey-proper.

This involved a simple questionnaire to establish basic demographic details, from which I intended to make a map with an accompanying list containing the other details.

- name of community:
- location (region, address):
- age (year group first formed, year land purchased):
- population ('normal' & 'maximum capacity'):

Results & Conclusions

Below are the tabulated results of the survey, and an accompanying location map of Aotearoa/NZ.

The map helps to see the grouping of developments, notably around the Golden Bay, Coromandel and Auckland regions. The reasons for such groupings are thought to be due to a general pattern of 'alternative-minded people' living in the former two areas, and the generally high population base in the latter, both making for increased probability of attaining a community 'critical mass'.

Community Name	Group Formed	Land Purchased	Development Started	Population ^a	Location ^b
Otamatea EcoVillage	1996	1996	1997	5 (15)F+W	Kaiwaka, Northland
Anahata Community	1999	1999 ^c	1999 ^d	50-100(18)	Albany, Nth Auckland
Earthsong EcoNeighbourhood	1992	1999	2000	(32)F	Ranui, West Auck.
Awaawaroa EcoVillage	1994-99	1994	1995	4-14(15)F	Waiheke Island
Karuna Falls Community	1975/82	1975	1982	8(14)F+W	Coromandel
Te Hue Valley Farm EV	1998 ^f	1998	- ^f	2(12)F+W	Sth. Coromandel
Tui Community	1984	1984	1985	22(60)+W	Golden Bay
Beachcomber CoHousing	1999	1999	1999 ^e	8F	Christchurch

^a Numbers indicate current population, with anticipated/designed maximum numbers in brackets.

F indicates that the number stated is the community population in 'family/household units' (a common response).

+W indicates that there is provision for a small population of WWOOFers (willing workers on organic farms)

^b Refer also to the map.

^c Rented / leased from NZ Communities Growth Trust (Public Trust).

^d Existing structures from the "Centrepont" community.

^e Existing structure: old motel, retrofitted.

^f Development of both land and group are still in the early formative stages.

Part 2: Case Study

Introduction: The History of Earth Song Eco-Neighbourhood

Beginning in the winter of 1992, a small group – called the Ecovillage Group – began meeting to explore the idea of developing an eco-village, based on permaculture* principles. “Over the next 2 years this and other groupings within the Ecovillage group formed, flourished and waned as we explored environmental issues, ethics, consensus models, and group dynamics, and struggled with how to progress towards the reality of an ecovillage while still allowing sufficient time for the building of community.”⁸

The group developed a comprehensive vision statement, researched financial and legal structures, and began a group newsletter. They then split into five task groups (see “Task Groups” in the next section) which met every six weeks at Handrickson’s farm, Mangawhai for the sharing of ideas, food and songs.

In these early days, the turnover of new people, interpersonal issues and varying levels of commitment meant that inherent problems of stability and vision-holding were core issues challenging the cohesion of the group.

“In response to these challenges a small vision group formed within the larger group at the end of 1993 to build deeper personal relationships and a shared vision from which the ecovillage could grow.”⁸

Despite their best efforts, the ‘task vs process dynamic’ proved very tiring, and the group had effectively ceased by the end of 1994. Founding Ecovillage Group member and current Earth Song member, Robyn Allison admits that despite the lack of any physical outcome in the form of an ecovillage, it was an excellent ‘trial run’ for future endeavours – while bruised, the idea wasn’t beaten!

Inspired by a visit by Dr. Robert Gilman¹ in March 1995, Robyn and others renewed discussions and began drafting a proposal for an “eco-neighbourhood” based on co-housing principles, to be submitted to Waitakere City (who by then had made public their intention to become an “Eco-City”)⁹ for the Harbour View Estate on Te Atatu Peninsula.

In June 1995, a public meeting was held and the Waitakere Eco Neighbourhood Project (WENCP) was begun.

“The invitation put out at that meeting was clearly that if people were excited by the vision as presented, they were very welcome to be part of developing the project from the time they joined, but that in order to progress and avoid the frustrations experienced in the Ecovillage group, major revisiting of the concept would not be appropriate.”⁸

Early meeting topics included basic meeting procedure and adoption of the ‘coloured card system’ introduced by Dr. Gilman (see “Coloured Card System” in the next section), and were convened with the inclusion of a pot-luck lunch, which not only provided a facility for strengthening social bonds between existing members, but also gave an informal entry-point for new members.

A working fund was begun, asking a \$100 contribution from each working group member in order to cover various running costs. Legal structures were discussed to various degrees, and a Project Facilitator – Chris Patterson – was employed to help make a critical path programme and timeline, to identify key tasks, timing waypoints and the relationships between them.

Near the end of 1995, after many meetings, the tensions between task and process began to be felt again, requiring intense discussion, and an outside facilitator. The result was a comprehensive meeting procedure agreement, which was necessary to pay respect to the two ‘ends’ of the task-process dynamic. However, some still couldn’t stay and several members left around this time.

Those remaining met weekly for most of 1996, assembling a solid framework before attempting to attract new members. Detailed submissions on Waitakere City’s Proposed District Plan were made, in particular with reference to their proposed Medium Density Housing criteria. A Trust deed was completed in April (although never formally legalised) and a Handbook, including vision statement, meeting procedures, proposed environmental and social design aspects, working structure and meeting/consensus agreements was completed in June.

A subsequent enrollment meeting and walk over the Harbour View site met with much interest, but very little commitment.

In November 1996, a newly-formed Design Task Group sought to explore the physical realities of a co-housing design, in order to satisfy their own and other’s interest in how the development might actually manifest physically. A \$100 fee was set – to confirm commitment, and cover costs – and the group began exploring the prickly issues of community housing design, such as private & public space, pets, and food in the common house.

Some good publicity was achieved over the year, and by October 1997, after some key members had taken a step back from the process, the group began again with new life, and split into three task groups: Legal & Financial, Membership & Promotion, and Site & Feasibility. The Design Group took on new members and explored a site in Henderson. A workshop was also run, calling on the skills of McCamant & Durrett³ who were

flown over in association with another co-housing group initiation: Green Village Developments. The workshop proved very inspiring, and the group went on to set other goals, including securing a site by spring 1998.

In summer 1999 an old organic orchard in Ranui was found and site purchase was completed by November 1999.

Since then they have continued growing, and have recently completed the final pre-construction development process (at the time of writing, the first sod is being turned on the site, in celebration of the beginning of foundation excavations).

*"Permaculture (PERMANent CULTURE) is about designing sustainable human settlements.

It is a philosophy and an approach to land use which weaves together microclimate, annual and perennial plants, animals, soils, water management, and human needs into intricately connected, productive communities."⁷

Key Aspects of the Earth Song Development Process

Group Formation

Chris Hanson devotes an entire chapter to this subject¹⁰, and I direct the reader to this text for a full appreciation of the many and varied aspects of establishing and maintaining a group, handling group dynamics and establishing a sustainable identity.

The core element of co-housing is a co-operative social group. Without this, the reality of co-housing is impossible to manifest. Like a building, good foundations are imperative, and no amount of glue and nails will hold it together if the structure isn't designed to handle the wind, rain and the occasional earthquake!

The Earth Song formation experience has already been detailed in the 'history' section, and this should give an idea of the kind of common experiences that can make or break a group.

Membership Structure & Strategy

Hanson notes that while membership structures may well be necessary in the formative stages, many groups have had to modify or eliminate more rigid structures in order to maintain group cohesion. The debate over formal membership structure should be addressed early to avoid feelings of resentment, and sudden withdrawals of commitment from more fickle participants.

Earth Song EN has a simple membership strategy, based on a correspondingly increasing level of both financial commitment and responsibility. The structure is as follows:

1. First contact: go on mailing list.
2. Orientation: read literature.
3. Attend two meetings: observe, and ask questions of appointed 'buddy'.
4. Associate member: \$100 payment, task group assignment, resource file received.
5. Full membership: \$2000 payment, full voting rights, unit purchase seniority.

Vision Statement

Another early requirement is the need to move beyond the unstated assumptions of individuals and agree on common goals. This is summed up in what is known as a Vision Statement, and can be used later in the writing of a Trust Deed, Company Constitution or other legal formalities.

It also helps in the formation of a consistent, cohesive identity to communicate positively to prospective members and official/professional bodies. The statement should be comprehensive but succinct, encompassing the broad desires of all who agree upon it, and allow for future growth and modification in accordance with the key principles of sustainability and community.

Earth Song's vision statement is thus:

"Our vision is to establish a cohousing neighbourhood based on the principles of permaculture, that will serve as a model of a socially and environmentally sustainable community.

Within this vision, our aims are :

- To design and construct a cohesive neighbourhood whose layout, buildings, and services demonstrate the highest practical standards of sustainable human settlement
- To develop and foster a living environment which uses clear communication, decision-making and conflict resolution guide-lines that promote tolerance, safety, respect and co-operation
- To assist in education and public awareness of sustainability by demonstrating and promoting innovative community design and environmentally responsible construction."⁶



Task Groups

Since the process of co-housing development is both lengthy and complex, a functional way of dealing with the many tasks requiring research and action is necessary.

Research has proven that smaller groups inherently work better^{11,12,13} especially when it comes to getting things done rather than just talking about the problem. "The best structure for coordinating necessary activities is the task group. They allow people to pool their collective wisdom, knowledge, and skills in creative tasks."¹⁰

Therefore, while the whole group may meet to discuss general issues and hear reports from task groups, the various aspects of the development should be worked through by assigned task groups.

Earth Song EcoNeighbourhood developed the following task group structure:⁶

1. FULL MEETING (all members belong to this group)

Facilitate the development of a cohousing project

- Refine and build on our vision and maintain overview
- Coordinate and cross pollinate task groups
- Major decision making based on taskgroup proposals
- Maintenance of existing membership
- Resource file and library maintenance
- Sustaining ourselves!

2. PROCESS

Oversee the maintenance and building of good group process

- Establish meeting rituals and protocols
- Recommend conflict resolution procedures
- Advance facilitation

3. PROMOTION

Attract new members and build public awareness

- Organise advertisements, articles, and public speakers
- Maintain posters and brochures around the city
- Hold stalls at appropriate events
- Create promotion visuals
- Maintain web site
- Network, Coho Assoc etc

4. MEMBERSHIP

Process new people up to the stage of becoming assoc members

- Run monthly orientations
- Look after information booklets
- Run buddy system and buddy coordinator
- Manage observers

5. SITE

Find a really neat site!

- Site searching
- Liaise land owners + oversea offer
- Maps and models
- Site histories
- Feasibility analyses
- Land purchase

6. DESIGN

Liaise with architectural design team

- Find / recommend architectural firm
- facilitate pre-design programming
- surveying and site analysis
- Oversee design development and construction dwgs
- Cost reviews

7. COUNCIL

Liaise with council at all stages

- Educating council
- Resource consent application
- Building consent application
- Any hearings
- Development impact fees

8. CONSTRUCTION

Bring about and oversee building

- Find/ recomend developer and/or contractor
- Costs estimating
- Review plans with contractor
- Sign building contract

9. LEGAL

Dot the i's and cross the t's

- Initial organising agreement
- Find /recomend lawyer
- Evaluate ownership structures
- Recomend development ownership structure
- Recomend final ownership structure for project
- Review all contracts with vendor and professionals
- seek taxation advice

10. FINANCE 1

Manage groups basic administrative funds

- Early soft costs, cash calls etc
- Members accounts
- Monitor task group spending and petty cash
- Book keeping, tax etc

11. FINANCE 2

Raise several million dollars to develop project either via lenders or developer

- Recomend finace consultant
- Oversee project budget and cash flow plan (liase design)
- Assemble construction financing package
- Seek financing
- Recomend lender
- Valuations
- Transfer to individual mortgages

Due to the size requirements of a working group, and necessary skills common to many of the tasks, the groups were combined as follows:

2, 3-5 and 6-11.

Group Processes – Decision Making

"Consensus is the most inclusive form of decision-making. However it is sometimes mis-understood, and can become tyranny by the dissenter!"⁶

Group discussion and acheiving decision consensus on issues affecting a community group are challenging processes to manage, and can get bogged down by a variety of process-related issues. Most common in discussions are interpersonal issues, questions, comments on the process, and generally voiced opinions. In a decision-making round or 'call for votes' the 'traditional structure' requires either a 'yay' or 'nay'. Abstetions never seem to count for much, except to make a point that those who do so are doing it for good reasons (often unstated, unless asked). This with-us-or-not, black-or-white system doesn't inherently allow for questions, and if it does, the questions can sometime confuse or complicate the issue being decided upon unless properly dealt with.

Frustration can build in those who do not feel they are being heard, affecting attitudes to decision-making and further reasonable discussion during the meeting (not to mention in subsequent meetings, if feelings become entrenched and grudges are held).

Dealing with all of these common facets of meetings requires that each be given its appropriate place in the overall process, rather than dealing with each one as it pops up. "Going through hands in the order raised leads to a disconnected and relatively un-focussed discussion. The result is that the non-linear communication dynamics of the group are constrained by the linear nature of the facilitation process"¹⁰

The Earth Song meeting procedure uses the 'coloured cards system' of empowerment in both discussion and decision-making. The system is adapted from Gilman¹ and Hanson¹⁰ with the addition of a black card in the discussion set.

"The Coloured Cards Method

Discussion:

Each person taking part in the discussion has six coloured cards which are raised at any time during the discussion to indicate a wish to speak.

Black I have an interpersonal difficulty that is preventing my full participation
Red I have a process observation, eg. the discussion is off the subject
Orange I wish to acknowledge someone or something
Yellow I have a question, or need clarification
Green I can provide clarification
Blue I have a comment or opinion.

Cards are accorded differing priority and are heard in the order listed above.

Black cards have first priority. The facilitator first calls on the person with the black card to state their difficulty and to say how they would like the matter dealt with. The group can then decide whether this should be processed within the group or between the individuals concerned.

The red card, the "stop the process" card, has the next priority. It is used to point out a breach in the agreed-upon procedure, such as an item has exceeded time limits.

Next, people holding up orange cards are called upon to deliver their acknowledgment/s.

People raising yellow cards to indicate questions have the next priority. After a question has been asked, people holding green cards are called on to provide clarification to that question. After all questions have been answered, the facilitator calls on participants holding blue cards. At this time, comments regarding the topic of discussion can be put forth.

Decision Making:

Each person, including the facilitator, taking part in the decision making has five coloured cards.

When deciding on an issue, each person must raise one of the coloured cards, which now have the following meanings :

Green I agree with the proposal at hand
Blue I am neutral or basically for it, with some slight reservation.
Yellow I have a question to be answered before I can make a decision.
Orange I have a serious reservation, but I am not willing to block consensus.
Red I am entirely against the proposal and will block consensus.

If any orange or red cards are raised, those people with reds or oranges get to voice their concerns, if they have not already done so. At this point, an amendment to the current motion could be made which may address concerns raised. Another show of cards can then follow. It should be noted that at this point a motion can be passed unless there are still red cards being shown.

If consensus is still not reached after a further meeting on the topic, the decision can be made by a three quarters majority of people eligible to take part in the decision making.

This process requires every person in the room to participate in decision making. Dominant personalities will find it harder to push their ideas through at the expense of less vocal members, and softer-spoken members find it easier to voice their concerns."⁶

Development Strategy

Having a well-planned development strategy is the key to getting a co-housing project built, as it facilitates the movement from ideas to working realities. Hanson details several kinds of broad strategies, before getting down to the details of each: "1. Be your own developer; 2. Find a developer to be your partner; 3. Work with a government housing agency*; 4. Buy a completed project from a developer; 5. Arrange a 'turn-key project' to be built by a developer; 6. One member acts as a developer"¹⁰

Of all the strategies, the first offers most control by the community that will subsequently own and occupy it. However, it also requires the community to act prudently in assessing its own resources, and in employing the required professionals. This is the option taken by Earth Song EcoNeighbourhood, and while they have successfully developed the project thus far – to the point of beginning excavating the foundations – there is much yet to do:

"It is important to stress that despite many of us having skills in the building industry and in business, we recognise that development is a very complex business. We are therefore employing all the appropriate professionals such as architect, lawyer, project manager, financial and specialist consultants, and taking all prudent steps to ensure this project is successfully completed."⁶

*Such as the Housing Corporation of New Zealand, or Te Puni Kokiri (Ministry of Maori Development) Kapa Hanga Kainga programme¹⁴

Land Selection & Purchase

Selection and purchase of a suitable site for an eco-village or co-housing development is a phase that occurs at differing times, depending on the group formation processes – if any – that have gone before. In the survey in Part 1, many developments had occurred after a founding member had already purchased land. Hanson rates it number four in his list of "eight major thresholds of a successful co-housing development"¹⁰ and in the case of Earth Song, this has been the case also, as well as being about half-way along the overall timeline, from formation of WENCP to projected completion of the project site works.

Whenever it occurs, the site will obviously affect any subsequent spatial design that is required, be it for a bare site, an existing structure or anything in between. For this reason, it is important that care is taken in choosing the 'right site' and for this reason, it is important to be clear about what is being sought. At a design meeting in June 1997, the WENCP decided on the following list of search criteria:⁶

- available now or soon
- affordable price
- large enough for 15-30 households
- unobstructed exposure to north
- sheltered from strong winds
- sense of openness and space
- near bush, water or open space
- enough land for growing food
- at least one third of the land available as open space
- ability to manage stormwater and greywater on site
- large tree
- minimal toxic spraying or extraordinary pollution
- good earth energies
- cleared with local iwi
- quiet neighbourhood
- walkable to regular public transport
- near community facilities
- supportive and encouraging council and neighbourhood
- benevolent and patient vendor

This eventually resulted in the selection of the current development site at 457 Swanson Rd, Ranui, which satisfied almost all of the above criteria. The site has provided enough area (4 acres / 1.6 ha) for 32 units, with room for expansion; land for growing food, with a history as an organic orchard; nearby and on-site native bush; many many mature orchard and specimen trees; and walkable to regular public transport, including Swanson railway station.

There has been some contention over on-site water treatment, but otherwise the local authorities have been generally supportive, especially Waitakere City Council.



Design

The design process in co-housing can vary depending on the desires of the group for participation in the design of their new living environment. Most people, given the opportunity, will want to have at least some say in this, and it is then a matter of facilitating a process by which both community (as developer-client) and architect/designer are empowered to make informed and creative decisions.

The Earth Song group essentially continued with their established meeting protocols, in combination with a 2-day weekend workshop format to establish the initial brief and design programming. The architect selected found this process generally workable on the whole, if somewhat slow/inefficient at times.

Schedule of events and timing

- Selection of Architect: July 1999, after an initial presentation to invited architects. Those present were asked to provide details of their previous work, fees etc. in writing for subsequent selection and notification.
- Programming: July – Dec 1999. This involved a series of weekend workshops with the architect.
- Scheme Design: Completed by Dec 1999. At this point, sufficient sketch plans had been established to enable a Resource Consent application to be made.
- Detail Design: The detail design was divided into 3 stages
 1. Site & Civil Works, Terrace Houses: May – Sept. 2000. Building Consent applied for in September.
 2. 4-Plex (2-storey, 4-house units sharing a common central stairwell): In process, 50% complete as of October.
 3. Common House: 90% complete as of October 2000.

Design Principles

Earth Song is based on the three principles areas of sustainable design, as established in the Rio Summit 'Agenda 21':

Environmental, Social and Economic.

- Environmental

Overall design of buildings, and landscape into a coherent whole; Orientation of all buildings to allow use of passive solar design principles in natural climate control; Choice of building materials with consideration for embodied energy, durability, toxicity, recyclability and environmental impact; Collection and re-use of rainwater and waste water; Solar hot water heating; Clustering of buildings to allow for productive open space.

- Social

Balancing the needs of individual and community in a diverse 'village' arrangement; Physical design of spaces to encourage diverse ranges of social interaction; Confinement of cars to the edge of the site; Disabled and elderly design considerations; Mix of dwelling sizes to encourage a wide range of ages and household types; Provision of a centrally located common house to act as a focus for community activities, on a daily basis if necessary; On-going resident management by way of a Body-Corporate or similar legal structure; Openness to the wider community

- Economic

'Urban Village' type of design to allow creation of on-site work and wealth, as well as housing and recreation; Workshop and shared office facilities; Leasable multi-purpose workspaces (stage 2); Economies generated by sharing ownership of items such as washing machines, garden tools, lawnmowers etc.; Reduced domestic energy costs due to energy efficient and passive solar design; Possible reduction in commuting costs; A range of dwelling sizes to accommodate various living options and levels of income.

Legal Structures

The group is presently not a legal entity, being simply a 'residents association' of sorts (who have yet to take up residence). They have formed a Company however – CoHousing New Zealand Ltd. – which is effectively the developer and 'legal person' in any development matters. The members of ESEN are shareholders in the company, and are individually providing finance as investors in the development. Upon completion of the project works, the company will sell the dwellings to the shareholders – along with their respective Unit Titles– and credit any interest on finance to their accounts. The company will probably then be dissolved.

A Body Corporate structure is the group's currently favoured means of maintaining the daily administration of the community's financial and legal affairs (with residents of course being responsible for their own personal financial and legal affairs), such as rates, subsequent building consents and leasing of workspaces to individual enterprises.



Financial Structures

Membership Fees, Accounting & GST, Profits

As previously discussed, membership fees are charged on a two-tier (financial) membership structure: \$100 associate membership, then \$2000 for full membership.

The group currently has a single bank account for holding membership fees and other donations, and uses these as working funds to finance a range of community activities from photocopying meeting minutes, to paying for Building Consents and Consultants' fees. This bank account is essentially the accounts of the group, as it records all incoming and outgoing transactions. However, as a developer there are certain requirements for accounting: quarterly filing of accounts, 8-weekly GST returns and annual accounting audits.

It doesn't officially make any profits or engage in enterprise for profit, so any interest or other gains are put back into the group bank account for the present time. This has proved to be a sticking point as far as bank finance goes, since there is technically no paper profit to show.

Sale / Re-sale of Unit Titles

"The whole idea with UTs is to give a recognised method of owning separate units while also co-owning shared or common space. The title is highly recognised by lenders as security, and despite problems and slow early take-up, are now the dominant form used for apartments and office complexes."¹⁵

This legal structure essentially gives the members of the community 'legal ownership' of their dwelling, and a share in all of the designated community space, being the community house, gardens and utility buildings. It can be viewed as a share in a kind of 'eco-condominium' or 'green apartments' but with the added bonus of resident management.

The estimated unit sale prices for Earth Song are given on page 12 of the handbook⁶ and are comparable with a good quality suburban house in the Auckland region. "Houses may be financed, bought and sold on the open market. The only screening mechanisms will be some covenants and/or bylaws that ensure new buyers are aware that they are buying more than a house...Homes for sale in cohousing communities overseas are highly prized, and often have waiting lists to purchase. This results in good resale value."⁶

Conclusion

After initially completing the survey of existing eco-village and co-housing developments in Aotearoa, I felt that the number of such ventures was still quite small, considering that there are over 300 co-housing communities in Denmark, whose population is only 5.3 million. However, given the social history of our population (quite different from that of Scandinavia) and the relative newness of the idea – still only two generations old at best – it is encouraging to see at least the beginnings of what seems like a revolution in social organisation.

To see an example such as Earth Song at such an advanced stage of organisation in its development strategy gives a hopeful outlook for any future initiatives of a similar nature. It will be interesting to see how it is faring as a living community when it is, say as old as Tui community, and to also see what other examples of co-operative housing have sprung up in the time being.

For those willing to commit some serious time money and effort to building community groups and subsequently building a physical dwelling place in which to foster future community values and lessons, it will be a road both windy and fruitful.

"To stand on the shoulders of giants...communicating with openness and honesty...let's build a nourishing environment on all levels"¹⁶

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<http://www.tpk.govt.nz>
15. EcoVillage and CoHousing New Zealand:
<http://www.converge.org/evcnz/resource/legal.html>
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Quotes from a compilation of ideas during the initial forming of a community group, held during the course of 1999. The group explored the dynamics of group process and focussed on intentions to acquire land on which to build an eco-village.

All images used are from the Earth Song website, unless otherwise noted.



Internet Resources

EcoVillage and CoHousing New Zealand:

<http://www.converge.org/evcnz/index.html>

Earth Song Community:

<http://www.cohousing.pl.net/>

Te Hue (the Gourd) Valley Farm EcoVillage:

<http://www.ecovillage.co.nz>

The CoHousing Network (US-based)

<http://www.cohousing.org>

Global Ecovillage Network (GEN):

<http://www.gaia.org>

Intentional Communities:

<http://www.ic.org>

Catalyst '95 - Designing Eco-Solutions (Centre for Environmental Philosophy, Planning & Design, University of Canberra)

<http://www.aiid.bee.qut.edu.au/~meltzer/>

The Housing Corporation of New Zealand

<http://www.hcnz.co.nz>

Te Puni Kokiri - Ministry of Maori Development

<http://www.tpk.govt.nz>

National Community Housing Forum (Australia)

<http://www.nchf.org.au/stats.htm>

Planning Co-housing: Creative Communities and the Collaborative Housing Society. Toronto, Canada

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Further Reading

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