

# West Wind Harbour Cohousing

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### 1) ***What is cohousing?***

Cohousing neighbourhoods are designed to combine the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of shared resources and community living. Cohousing strives to create the sense of a village where neighbours know and support each other, encouraging a sense of community while maintaining options for privacy. It is an alternative development model in which future residents participate in the planning, design, and development of the community so that it directly meets their needs. In the process of working together, residents form foundational bonds in the ongoing community.

### 2) ***How did cohousing get started?***

The concept emerged in Denmark about 50 years ago. It was introduced to North America by the architect team of Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant with the publication in 1988 of their book *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*. Since then, well over 100 cohousing communities have been completed in North America. There are now 13 in Canada, and there are many more in various stages of development. The concept is quickly spreading throughout the world. Durrett's *The Senior Cohousing Handbook: A Community Approach to Independent Living* has inspired projects focusing on the needs of an ageing population.

### 3) ***What is the purpose of the West Wind Harbour Cohousing group?***

We have secured a 1.5-acre site at 6603 Sooke Road for the purpose of developing housing that is community initiated, affordable, environmentally friendly, and socially/culturally supportive. Our goal is to flourish through mutual support in community.

### 4) ***What will the community be like?***

With the guidance of experienced professionals from Cohousing Development Consulting, we are working together to design a community that meets our needs and stated priorities. Cohousing design can take a variety of forms—depending on site conditions, local zoning, and desires of members. All completed communities have included leading-edge environmental features. Some examples include: grey water recycling, solar energy harvesting, efficient heating systems, compact design, sustainably harvested wood, recycled materials, water conservation, organic gardening, and preservation of natural habitat. The optimum size of a cohousing community is between 15 and 30 households. Anything smaller puts too much pressure on the individual to participate in community activities. Anything larger does not support a close-knit community. West Wind Harbour Cohousing will have 25-30 homes.

### 5) ***Will I own my own home?***

Once the development is complete, individual member households will purchase the units that have been created through the development process, and the construction loan will be paid off. The legal status will change to 'strata title', and each household will own their own home together with a share of the common facilities. Most communities in North America have chosen this ownership structure for financing convenience.

**6) *What is it going to cost?***

At this point, cohousing is not subsidized in Canada. Participants are people who can afford to buy their own homes, and the costs are approximately current market rate. With the help of the professional team, the members of the group establish size, quality, and cost guidelines for the project.

**7) *How long will it take?***

We estimate that we will be able to move into our new homes in 2019. We have brought together a group of committed individuals who are financially capable of developing the project, and we continue to build membership as the development proceeds. We anticipate that all the homes will be spoken for by the time construction begins—hopefully, in early 2018.

**8) *What kinds of people live in cohousing?***

Those drawn to cohousing tend to be people who have thought about creating community long before they heard the term cohousing. People who live in cohousing come from diverse backgrounds and income levels, family types and beliefs. What they have in common is a desire to take an active part in their community and a belief that connecting with their neighbours will enhance their quality of life.

**9) *Would I have privacy?***

Yes! Our members value privacy as well as social contact. It is essential to us that we have our own homes and private spaces. Some people believe that the cohousing arrangement allows for less privacy than conventional housing, but this is not, in fact, the case. A unique aspect of cohousing is that residents participate in a conscious process of creating a community that will reflect their values. Our members highly value privacy, so the design will reflect our desire to provide a balance of privacy and community.

The following statement was taken from a CMHC study in 1997 called, "Planning Cohousing":

*"While the shared amenities are integral to cohousing, some believe privacy is more respected in cohousing communities than elsewhere."*

There can actually be increased privacy in cohousing because the common areas provide meeting places, guest spaces, rooms for socializing, etc., allowing individual dwellings to be places of privacy and retreat.

**10) *Will children be welcome at West Wind Harbour?***

Yes! Many of our future residents have grandchildren or other young people in their lives. While those of us involved in this project are mostly in our 60s and our neighbourhood is designed with attention for ageing well in community, children are welcome and we have not set age restrictions.

**11) *Will pets be welcome at West Wind Harbour?***

We have not yet established guidelines regarding pets, but pets are important to many of us.

**12) *What is a common house?***

All the residences will be completely self-contained. Each, for example, will have a full kitchen. However, we will also share extensive common facilities that are designed for daily use. Cohousing common houses typically include such amenities as: kitchen and dining areas, lounge, guestrooms, workshop, and office space. Our members will decide what else is to be included. The common house is the heart of the community; it is a place for residents to share food and have meetings, celebrations, musical events, movies, yoga practice, classes, and other activities that support the interests of community members.

**13) *Do members share meals together?***

Common activities—and particularly shared meals—can be important aspects of community life both for social and for practical reasons. Such activities, however, are always optional. In cohousing communities, residents typically share meals anywhere from a few nights a month to as many as 7 nights per week. It depends entirely on the wishes of the residents, and participation is up to each individual. Each home has its own kitchen, so participating in common meals is optional. Over time, about 60% of cohousing residents tend to participate in shared activities on a regular basis.

**14) *What is the legal structure during development?***

The “developer” is the cohousing group. The simplest method of facilitating this is for the group to incorporate as a standard company, and that is what we have done. This structure limits member liability, allows flexibility, and is most easily recognized by lending institutions. There is no profit to the corporation; homes are sold to members at cost; and the group funds equity for development and construction. The money to make the development happen comes from the cohousing members.

**15) *How do I become a member?***

Please refer to the attached Member Structure document.

**16) *How are members selected?***

All members must be able to afford to purchase a home in the cohousing community. You must be willing and able to take on the responsibilities and obligations of equity membership and are required to complete Margaret Critchlow’s workshop *Is Cohousing for You?*. The three-month associate membership provides the opportunity for you to get to know the other members and decide whether this lifestyle appeals to you. Finally, a meeting with at least one of our equity members and a representative from Cohousing Development Consulting will clarify both your household’s and the community’s expectations and ensure that you have a comprehensive understanding of the processes, policies that have been set, and legal and financial responsibilities. Honest attention to these important issues results in a remarkably effective self-selection process.

**17) *Do I have to like everyone?***

In a healthy and diverse community, people are expected to be tolerant and respectful toward others. Since cohousing communities usually attract members through various social networks, it is likely that a high degree of friendship will naturally exist among members. Some people, of course, are very private individuals and may feel most comfortable with fewer close friendships; whereas, others will form friendships with most everyone in the community. As in other areas of life, individuals create their own experiences.

**18) *Can I expect free elder care or help if I get sick?***

As among any group of friends and neighbours, people help each other in informal ways; cohousing is envisioned as a community in which people are friendly and supportive to each other—especially in times of need. However, this support is always voluntary. Ongoing group care arrangements will be decided by the membership, and any particular ongoing care for individuals would be arranged privately.

**19) *What is meant by the term “co-care”?***

Co-care is a grassroots model of neighbourly mutual support that can help reduce social isolation and promote positive, active ageing. It encourages independence through awareness that we are all interdependent. In a cohousing community, giving and receiving co-care is entirely voluntary. We may choose to support each other through such activities as doing errands, driving, cooking, or going for a walk with a neighbour. We believe that being good neighbours helps us age well in community and have fun doing it.

**20) *How much meeting time is involved?***

Regular meetings are scheduled as needed for member input and decision-making. During the planning stages, we expect to have a minimum of two-day, monthly meetings. If you want to participate in the decisions this can involve a good deal of time during the development phase; however, attendance at these meetings is not required. After move-in, meetings of the whole community tend to be less frequent.

**21) *Is meeting attendance mandatory?***

The best way for prospective members to meet the community is to attend the regularly held meetings. Relationships are strengthened through discussion at meetings, by working together on committees, by socializing at community functions, and through other informal contacts that people naturally initiate. An effective and cohesive community is best forged by working and making decisions together. Attendance at meetings is not mandatory; however, you are expected to abide by the decisions made by the community, even in your absence.

**22) *What will be expected of me after the development is complete?***

When the homes are built and the community is complete, members will work together to organize maintenance and ongoing upkeep duties. There will be a monthly maintenance (strata) fee that each owner will be expected to pay, and there will continue to be regular meetings concerning the running of the community and further decision-making.

**23) *What if I change my mind and want to leave the group during the development phase?***

Associate members have made no major commitment and can easily leave the group at or before the end of the three-month period; however, the \$150 fee is non-refundable. Equity members, however, have made a commitment to be a part of the community, and the group depends on this commitment for the success of the development. We encourage associate members to take some time to reflect on their decision before making the commitment to become an equity member because the required minimum investment from equity members is non-refundable.

**24) *What if I want to sell my home after completion?***

Just like any other home, members who want to sell their unit need to find a buyer for it. Because of the collaborative nature of cohousing, opportunities exist for marketing cohousing units in ways other than conventional real estate marketing methods. Each cohousing community typically has a long list of households interested in units that come up for rent or sale, and there are cohousing websites that also list rentals and sales.

**25) *How will the choice of units within West Wind Harbour be prioritized?***

When the final design of West Wind Harbour is complete and the homes are ready for construction, the unit pricing structure will be determined based on unit size and desirability. At that time, the members will be given an opportunity to choose their units. The order of priority will be based on the date upon which the member became an equity member. Naturally, early membership enables future residents to have greater input and influence over both the overall site and unit design.

**26) *Are the best spots already taken?***

Absolutely not! Our goal is for every residence to have a superb view of sea and mountains. We do not foresee that any units at West Wind Harbour will suffer from compromised situations. Each member household will choose the unit size and design that fits their needs.

**27) *Can I visit an existing cohousing community?***

Thirteen completed cohousing communities currently exist in Canada. Check the website at the [Canadian Cohousing Network](#) to contact individual communities and arrange for a tour. Our neighbour and cohousing big sister, Harbourside Cohousing, offers monthly tours.

**28) *What reference materials are available to learn about cohousing?***

Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett's book *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities* is an excellent resource and will give you an overall view of what cohousing is about. *The Senior Cohousing Handbook: A Community Approach to Independent Living* by Charles Durrett gives a more detailed description of how cohousing can support ageing in place. You can arrange to purchase or borrow this book from us. There are more and more online resources available, including the [Canadian Cohousing Network](#), [Canadian Senior Cohousing](#), [Cohousing Development Consulting](#), and [The Cohousing Company](#)—to name just a few.

**29) *Where can I find out about the municipality of Sooke?***

Sooke village is the compact centre of a wider, coastal community that stretches north to Port Renfrew and beyond. The township itself borders Sooke Harbour and enjoys panoramic south-westerly views across the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Olympic Mountains of Washington State.

First Nations have lived off the natural abundance of the land and the sea in this area for millennia. When migrant peoples arrived from Europe, other parts of North America, and elsewhere in the 19th century, they established important commercial logging, mining, and fishing industries. To these have been added communities of artisans, artists, and creative industry practitioners.

Sooke's climate enjoys the temperate effects from prevailing south-westerly winds, the Japanese Current, and the rain shadow created by the Olympic Mountains. Because of these benevolent factors the southernmost part of Vancouver Island, where we live, is something of a geographical aberration, bringing us warm, dry summers and cool, damp winters. We rarely see snow.

The Sooke Basin, where West Wind Harbour will be situated, is a beautifully sheltered natural harbour. It is one of the most scenic, peaceful, and relatively untouched rural/urban places in North America. At our doorstep lies a region where wild creatures and the wilderness live in relative harmony with people—where we can watch hummingbirds, bald eagles, kingfishers, herons, and loons, and occasionally see bear, cougar, orca, and whales. Deer graze throughout the region—necessitating gardening as an act of cooperation with nature. Sooke Basin is an area of enormous beauty—by any standards.

The website for Sooke's municipal government can be found at: [www.sooke.ca](http://www.sooke.ca).

You can find more information about Sooke, its amenities and its social, cultural, and recreational assets at visitor-oriented websites like: [www.hellobc.com/sooke](http://www.hellobc.com/sooke) or [www.discoversooke.com](http://www.discoversooke.com).

**30) *How do I get my questions answered?***

Please do not hesitate to contact Kitty Elton if you have any further questions.

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