
COHOUSING

NOT A NEW IDEA, BUT...

A NEW SENIOR HOUSING ALTERNATIVE



RENDERING OF STADSGRAVEN COHOUSING SITE PLAN IN DENMARK BY LEGIL DESIGN

THE PROPOSAL

The idea of cohousing is not a new one, but it does come with a lot of preconceived notions. That is, it's housing shared by a group of young families that eat and live together; it's a commune for hippies; it's temporary housing for digital nomads that travel often, e.g. WeWork, WeLive projects; or it's for young professionals that want to own less and travel more. In the age of the sharing economy, cohousing is becoming increasingly popular and acceptable as housing costs in this country continue to rise and housing stock becomes increasingly scarce. In fact, Ikea in collaboration with Space 10 has launched an on-line platform for researching and developing concepts for future shared living spaces.

In Seattle, we have a few existing cohousing projects with a few more planned. However, none of the forthcoming or existing cohousing projects are intended for senior living communities. One of the most common complaints about senior housing is this: it's too expensive. Senior living costs, depending on the community and level of assistance, can easily cost a senior on average \$6000 per month.¹

Additionally, senior living communities with an emphasis on luxury are rising in popularity around the United States and come with a price tag of up \$1 million for the entry free with an additional monthly fee on average of \$6000.² This trend in senior housing clearly addresses a significantly small percentage of the aging baby boomer population. Additionally, aging in isolation has shown to be an another increasingly difficult issue to resolve. So if you live in the U.S. and are retired, what are your choices when it comes to where and how you will age in place?

There are, however, projects appearing in different communities that are offering the opposite solution, a place to age in place within a community of seniors with shared values and opportunities. Through this generous travel scholarship, I propose to investigate cohousing as a better solution for senior living in United States. As baby boomers age, they will require a variety of housing solutions. The existing solutions are often found too expensive, out of reach, and at times isolating. Cohousing could be the solution that is affordable, sustainable, and with benefits beyond the cohousing community.

I will visit cohousing projects in different locations to better understand the formation of the community, the funding model and how government assistance helps the process, the architectural design of the community, and how the residents feel about living in these communities.

¹ Jess Stonefield, Next Avenue Contributor Avenue, Next. "Ways To Cut The High Cost Of Senior Housing." Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 16 Dec. 2018, www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2018/12/16/ways-to-cut-the-high-cost-of-senior-housing/#2d4e-98e459cd.

² James, Scott. "Boomers Create a Surge in Luxury Care Communities." The New York Times, The New York Times, 4 Dec. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/12/04/business/retirement/continuing-care-retirement-communities-baby-boomers.html.



RENDERING OF A COHOUSING PROJECT IN DENMARK BY AART and FORCE4

RELEVANCE & POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Housing affordability in many cities are becoming a major issue. The typical response to a lack of affordable housing is a call to build more housing. However, in many cities, there are a number of dwellings that lie vacant, while people remain on waiting lists for public housing, are thrown into competition in tight rental markets, or become homeless. If there is already vacant housing stock, simply building more houses will not necessarily address the dynamic that keeps them vacant while people are in need of housing. As senior housing costs continue to rise and become unaffordable, building more and more senior facilities will not solve the problem.

Last June, the housing vacancy rate in downtown Seattle was 25.7% and 11% in Central and South Seattle.¹ Seattle is suffering from this cyclical problem and it's time we refocus how we think about our housing stock and housing solutions.

Seattle has strong Scandinavian roots and cohousing is a Scandinavian concept. Additionally, Seattle is also one of the most innovative and greenest cities in the US. Therefore, Seattle would welcome innovative ideas to solve today's housing problems.

Adults who are more socially connected are healthier and live longer than their more isolated peers. Furthermore, social disconnectedness and perceived isolation seem to be independently associated with lower levels of self-rated physical health.² These issues affect the senior population at a greater rate than the majority of the population and worsen as they continue to age.

Cohousing is the answer to resolving these concerns for social connectedness. It will provide a reduction in isolation and produce a thriving, supporting community for seniors to age in place.

¹ Rosenberg, Mike. "Seattle Renters Score Big as Landlords Dangle Freebies to Fill Empty Apartments." The Seattle Times, The Seattle Times Company, 25 June 2018, www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/free-amazon-echo-2-months-free-rent-2500-gift-cards-seattle-apartment-glut-gives-renters-freebies/.

² Cornwell, Erin York, and Linda J Waite. "Social Disconnectedness, Perceived Isolation, and Health among Older Adults." Journal of Health and Social Behavior, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Mar. 2009, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756979/.



COHOUSING BY MCCAMANT & DURRETT ARCHITECTS



CHAPELTOWN COHOUSING, LEEDS, UK

RESEARCH METHODS

This travel research will be divided into three categories: Research, Site Visits, and Conversations.

1. . Research - Before arriving at each site, I will do extensive research on the community, document the project with site plans and floor plans where possible. Through my initial research, I have learned that each cohousing community starts very differently, develops organically and is financed using different models. By researching these differences prior to site visits as much as possible, the visits will be informed and produce effective information gathering.

2. Site Visits - Each site I will be visiting has been chosen because the cohousing community began with the desire to create a cohousing community for seniors and is the first of its kind in the city. Each visit will consist of documenting the site, architecture, and structure of the community. Photos and possible video will document the community as much as allowed.

3. Conversations - I will conduct interviews and conversations with founding members and community members in order to obtain a better understanding of what was the impetus to seek out such a community and what was the factor that made the decision as opposed to a traditional senior housing facility. This collection of personal experiences will provide insight into the thought processes that one encounters in making the decision to move into a cohousing community with the goal of illustrating similar, relatable circumstances.

I will also be interviewing developers and architects who are currently championing some of the cohousing development in the Pacific Northwest and beyond to obtain their industry insight into the feasibility of cohousing for seniors as a option to existing offerings.



RESEARCH



SITE VISITS



CONVERSATIONS

THESIS STATEMENT

Cohousing is not a new idea, but it is often thought of as a housing solution for young families, digital nomads, hippie communities, or for young frequent travelers. Current senior living offerings are often too expensive and lack the communal aspect that treats aspects of loneliness and isolation. Cohousing projects geared towards seniors and their needs could solve these issues as an alternative solution to the overpriced senior living options that exist today. By visiting some of the first existing senior cohousing projects, I hope to illustrate its inherent benefits and possibilities. I hope to provide insight into how these communities are formed and succeed, making senior cohousing a viable housing alternative.



SITE VISITS - EXISTING SENIOR COHOUSING COMMUNITIES

Babayagas' House, Montreuil, on the east side of Paris.



"To live long is a good thing but to age well is better," says 85 year old Thérèse Clerc who dreamt up the project back in 1999.

"Growing old is not an illness," says the elegant, feisty Clerc. "We want to change the way people see old age," and that means "learning to live differently."¹

A self-managed social housing project run by a community of dynamic female senior citizens who want to keep their independence, but live communally. The building houses 25 self-contained flats. 21 are adapted for the elderly and four are reserved for students.

There are around 21 women aged 66 to 89 living in the six-story house, a third of whom live on the poverty line. Seniors have replicated the Babayagas model in other cities across France and Canada.

Residents pay an average of 420 euros for 35m². This project is one of the impetus of this grant proposal. I was incredibly inspired by the women who made this project possible and made this alternative senior housing option a reality.

1. Hird, Alison. "The Babayagas' House, a Feminist Alternative to Old People's Homes, Opens in Paris." RFI, RFI, 5 Mar. 2013, www.rfi.fr/en/france/20130305-babayagas-house.

STATS:

Community name: **Babayagas' House**

Units: **25**

Year of Completion: **2012**

Location: **Montreuil, France**

Minimum Age: **60 years old**

Contact: **Dominique Voynet, Community Outreach Director**

"The project 'Maison des Babayagas' is a wager on an evolving concept [of society's aged]: one of taking charge and of helping others. It considers individuals as persons, not as potential patients."
- community's website

Vieillir c'est Vivre—"Aging Means Living"



Rendering of the house

SITE VISITS - EXISTING SENIOR COHOUSING COMMUNITIES

Older Women's Co-Housing (OWCH), High Barnett, North London, UK



Completed 18 years after its genesis, the Older Women's Co-Housing (OWCH) is a groundbreaking project designed specifically for, and by, women, and they are managing it themselves. It was also the first cohousing project in the UK built specifically for seniors.

The scheme is two thirds owner-occupied and one third social housing. In addition to private residences, the women share a common house containing a meeting room, kitchen and dining areas. There are also laundry, guest and parking facilities on site.¹

The women of OWCH, were heavily involved in the design and fundraising of the project. This project received funding from many organizations which makes it an interesting case study. One funding support came from Hanover Housing Association, a leading not for profit organization providing affordable homes and related services exclusively for older people.²

¹Mairs, Jessica. "Pollard Thomas Edwards Completes UK's First over 50s Co-Housing Scheme." Dezeen, Dezeen, 16 Jan. 2017, www.dezeen.com/2016/12/09/pollard-thomas-edwards-architecture-first-older-co-housing-scheme-owch-uk/.

²Oxygen Agency. "New Ground Cohousing Development Is an Inspiring Example Not Only of How We Might Live as We Get Older, but of How to Live in Cities at All." UK Cohousing Network, cohousing.org.uk/case-study/new-ground-cohousing-development-inspiring-example-not-might-live-get-older-live-cities/.

STATS:

Community name: **Older Women's Co-Housing**

Units: **25**

Year of Completion: **2016**

Location: **High Barnett, North London, UK**

Minimum Age: **50 years old**

Contact: **Patrick Devlin, Project Architect of Pollard Thomas Edwards**



"The women's brief was very clear: their own sustainable homes, with shared facilities that create a sense of community." - Patrick Devlin, Project Architect

Phoenix Commons, Oakland, CA



Phoenix Commons is the first senior cohousing project in the East Bay. It is located on the Oakland waterfront in the Jingtown Arts District and within walking distance of Alameda's Park Street. It has over 7,000 square feet of common spaces designed for shared living, which contain a media lounge, a library, another seating area, a gym, an office and a courtyard with a hot tub.

The community was developed as urban infill, built on the site of a burned-down restaurant and large parking lot. Reusing the previously developed site, Phoenix Commons turned a parking lot into a residential community, added to the Bay Trail, improved access to the Oakland estuary, and added its unique character to the community. The project was built to LEED Green principles.¹

The two guest rooms on the project are constantly filled with family members, creating a multigenerational environment.

This project is unique from the other projects as it did not stem from community members wanting to build the project for themselves. It started from a developer with a long history in senior nursing home development.

¹"Sustainability." Phoenix Commons, www.phoenixcommons.com/our-community/sustainability/.

STATS:

Community name: **Phoenix Commons**

Units: **41**

Year of Completion: **2016**

Location: **Oakland, CA**

Minimum Age: **55 years old**

Contact: **Jeff Zimmerman, Architect**



While in California I plan to travel to the design office of McCamant & Durrett Architect, the Cohousing Company to speak to the architects about their efforts in the Cohousing movement in the United States.

Charles Durrett is the author of the book, "Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living - the Handbook."

SITE VISITS - EXISTING SENIOR COHOUSING COMMUNITIES

PDX Commons, Portland Oregon



PDX Commons is a senior cohousing community, the first of its kind in Portland Oregon. It is an urban cohousing condominium development and designated senior community, but 20 percent of their housing has no age limit, making this project more intergenerational. It has 5,000 square feet of common spaces for shared living. Ground floor common areas include an office, mailboxes, library and lounge area, media and music room, multipurpose room for gym equipment and crafts, a workshop/tool room, bike room and laundry rooms.

Many of the community members still work in their professions but are close to retirement. They are teachers, nurses, therapists, doctors, lawyers, developers, financial expert, consultants, and environmental specialists.¹

The community was made possible with the help of Urban Development + Partners (UD+P). The company assisted in all aspects of the development process; from finance, design, construction and management, with the goal of making a positive impact on the community while generating strong returns for investors.²

¹"Our Members." PDX Commons, www.pdxcommons.com/our-members.

²"URBAN DEVELOPMENT + PARTNERS." URBAN DEVELOPMENT + PARTNERS, www.udplp.com/.

STATS:

Community name: **PDX Commons**

Units: **27**

Year of Completion: **2017**

Location: **Portland, OR**

Minimum Age: **55 years old**

Contact: **Lew Bowers, Community Member**



Side Visit: While in Oregon, I also plan to visit the UD+P office also located in Portland to interview Joren Bass, Senior Development Manager, who is heading the company's development efforts in cohousing. I hope to gain a better understanding of the financing models, what drives development of projects to fruition and what the market projections are for these types of projects.

Joren Bass is an architect and developer that is passionate about cohousing as an alternative senior housing solution to what is currently offered by other developers, so his insights will prove valuable to the research.

DELIVERABLES & OUTCOMES / BUDGET

RESEARCH / TRAVEL BLOG -

A research and travel blog will be used to document the entire process and as an organizational tool for information gathering and documentation. It will also serve as a real time media library for all documentation.



PHOTOGRAPHY / VIDEO -

Documentation of the site visit, architecture, travel and interviews will take the form of photography and video.



DOCUMENTATION -

A publication of the information curated through notes, recordings and various digital to summarize the research and its findings.



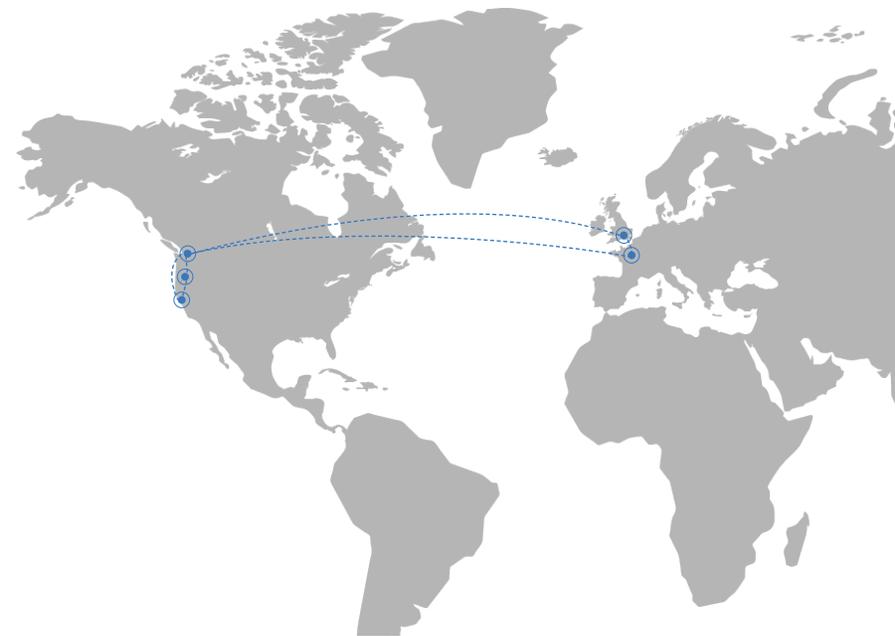
EXHIBITION -

An immersive exhibit to showcase the findings from the travel and research, to use as a catalyst for discourse in the Seattle design community and public at large. A possible conversation with some of the local developers / community members with the design community to discuss the future of cohousing for seniors. (subject to participation confirmation)



It is my sincere hope that through this research, senior cohousing will become a more feasible, affordable and sustainable solution to resolve the many concerns of housing the aging baby boomer population in America.

Having worked on traditional independent senior living projects from traditional developers, I believe that it is necessary we provide other diverse, affordable and community building options.



2 SEPERATE TRIPS - INTERNATIONAL & DOMESTIC

1st Trip	
SEATTLE TO LONDON	
1. Seattle to London flight:	\$ 800
2. London Accomodations:	\$ 500
3. Public Transportation:	± \$ 200
LONDON TO PARIS	
1. London to Paris Eurostar Train*:	\$ 200
2. London Accomodations:	\$ 400
3. Public Transportation:	± \$ 200
PARIS TO SEATTLE	
1. Paris to Seattle Flight:	\$800
2nd Trip	
SEATTLE TO PORTLAND	
1. Seattle to Portland Train*:	\$ 80
2. Portland Accomodations;	\$250
3. Portland Ground Transportation:	\$200
PORTLAND TO OAKLAND	
1. Portland to Oakland Flight:	\$200
2. Oakland Accomodations	\$200
3. Oakland to Seattle Flight:	\$200
SEATTLE EXHIBIT COSTS	
Exhibition materials and documentation printing fees	\$650
Total Costs	\$4,930

*Trains will be taken where possible to reduce the carbon footprint of this travel.