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Welcome...

You're receiving this newsletter because we thought you might enjoy hearing about our evolving cohousing community in Belfast, Maine. In each issue, we'll share what we've been working on, where we're headed, and how you can get involved if you like.

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Belfast Area Cohousing & Ecovillage eNewsletter - April 18, 2009

Please join us on Sunday, May 10, from 2-4 pm, for what promises to be a jam-packed, fun-filled Open House at the Farm on Edgecomb Road in Belfast. At 2:00 pm there will be bird watching and a nature walk with Mike Shannon, followed at 3:00 pm by a May Pole dance with live music, ribbons, and fabulous frivolity galore!

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Sustainability, affordability, farmland preservation

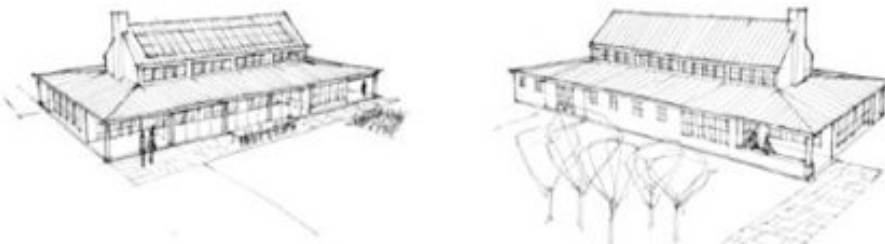
Project Update - Sanna McKim

Embarking on Common House Design

A Common House is the very heart of a cohousing community. It's the living, breathing, circulatory hub connecting a wide variety of activities and people every day-for fun, eating, laundry, eating, education, eating, collecting mail, eating and

just hanging out. Its guestrooms, dining room, meeting spaces and kid nooks (and in our case root cellar, pantry, cozy hearth and multi-season outdoor "rooms") make small, simple homes a truly attractive possibility, while giving compelling reasons to gather together outside the home for work or play, easily and often.

So, needless to say, we were excited to embark on our Common House design process recently with local architects [Elliott, Elliott, Norelius](#). Thanks to lessons learned from the other 120 other Common Houses around the country, lots of firsthand experience contributed by Exploring Member Dyan Wiley ([Pioneer Valley Cohousing](#)) and our new neighbor Michelle Henrion (former resident at [Cobb Hill Cohousing](#)), we started with our mission and values and soon translated our community dreams of creating food, playing music, sharing hobbies and more-into the sizes, qualities, relationships, scale, and location of spaces. With budget constraints being a top concern, we prioritized multi-use spaces that would, by design, flex to meet our needs while strengthening the fabric of our community, strand by strand, activity by activity.



Last year's sudden spike in the cost of food and transportation brought home the importance of our prior commitment to creating enticing opportunities to socialize, and grow, preserve, prepare and eat food together. So that root cellar, central kitchen, generous kitchen table, and kitchen garden became part of the design program. A room initially designated for TV viewing shrunk into mere closet space to store viewing equipment on wheels to be rolled out for Friday night movies or the "big game" (which would be soccer, of course!...just kidding. We're flexible.). The yoga space, craft studio, office machines and music lesson area merged into a soundproof, visually adaptable living room adjacent to the spacious but intimate dining room, home for future weddings, parties, dances, educational workshops (and of course, dinners!). And it grew in coziness, functionality and interest as nooks and built-in storage spaces dotted the edges under dropped ceiling heights and a central two-sided hearth.

The Common House is now in the design development phase, and we'll keep you posted. So what's our biggest unresolved issue? STORAGE! What to do with our (prized) 'stuff.' How much space, really, should we build (and pay for) to stash things we don't use and can hardly keep track of? That's the million dollar question. And what are we most excited about? Anticipation of actually living there... with sunrise bird walks, toddlers learning to walk to their neighbors, teens coming in from riding horses, a few folks brewing beer in the kitchen, and others sipping tea on the Common House porch overlooking the distant hills to the south...

Maybe you should join us...!

On The Land - Mike Shannon

Quack, quack, quack... Could it be? Yes, I was sure I heard it. But, what is it? It sounds like ducks quacking in the woods. You're kidding me... No...Listen...It's wood frogs!





Each spring in low-lying areas, small, temporary wetland communities appear, stand for a month or two, and then by summer, disappear. These ponds, called vernal pools, are now recognized as critical habitats for a variety of life forms.

My friend and fellow naturalist, Lucy Gertz has described these pools as "seasonal habitat for amphibian and invertebrate species with life cycles that have adapted to these rich temporary wetlands. Wood frogs and four species of mole salamanders breed only in these vernal pools, and fairy shrimp live their entire lives here. In just a few months, vernal pool inhabitants grow rapidly in a race to develop before the pool dries up. If they finish in time, adult insects fly away, and frogs and salamanders transform from aquatic larvae into terrestrial juveniles and migrate to surrounding uplands. Others wait out the dry season."

On the land adjacent to our cohousing community, there is a pond in which I observed clusters of wood frog eggs last spring. A depression below the outlet also contained unidentified egg masses. I hope to return this spring to follow up on these discoveries.



Member Profile - Alan Gibson

I grew up in Michigan in a small neighborhood on a dirt road where I knew almost all of my neighbors. Next door to us was a family with kids our age. Their house was like an extension of ours, and we traveled freely between it and other houses in the neighborhood all the time. I'm hoping cohousing will be a similar experience for my kids and their friends in the community, but even better because they'll be in a wider rural landscape with more to see and explore outdoors.

I left Michigan toward the end of high school, went to a Quaker school in Philadelphia for a year, then to Brown University. I earned a degree in History there, studied in South America and in between worked on organic farms in Maine. After a year-long post-college apprenticeship I bought property where I currently live in Waldo and tried to make a living off the land (and off the grid). That didn't last long, as unruly draft horses and an ancient woodstove from Sears nearly killed me (literally in the case of the horses) but in the process I built a house and unwittingly started a career as a building contractor. It turns out that first house was more "green" than most new houses today, and in the 20 years since then I've refined my green building practices to a science. I'm currently designing and building with partner Matt O'Malia in a business called G O Logic, LLC.

When I'm not building or enjoying time with my family (wife Sanna McKim and children Finn, 8 and Pia, 5) I write songs and perform with my rock band "rural electric," play soccer, ride my bike, and go to cohousing meetings. What more could I want?

Notable Quotes

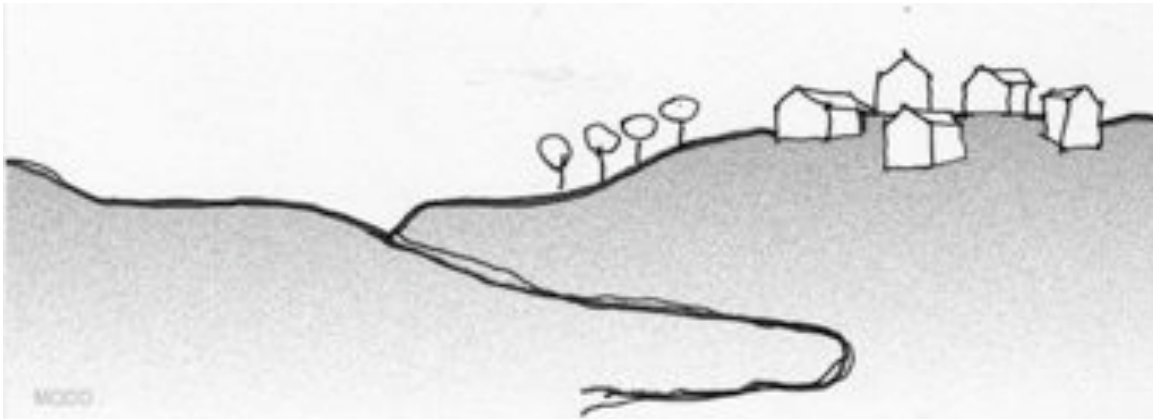
"While some of us watch old movies with a wistful eye to the idealized small town charm, cohousing residents are living its reality. They can wisely state, "It takes a village to raise a child," and mean it." - Susan Finch, Mothering Magazine (to read the full article, click [here](#))

Membership Information

Equity Members are those households who have already committed to purchasing a home in the community. There are currently fourteen of a projected thirty Equity members. Exploring Members are those households who have an interest in becoming Equity Members, but are not yet ready to fully commit. There are currently sixteen Exploring members. Friends are those who are interested in our project, but are not members. See the [Membership](#) section of our website for further details.

Our Mission

To be a model environmentally sustainable, affordable, multi-generational cohousing community that is easily accessible to Belfast, includes land for agricultural use and open space, and is an innovative housing development option for rural Maine.



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