

COMMON GROUND Goals and Purpose

The purpose of the Common Ground Cohousing Association is to create an affordable housing community on the Community Center site that fulfills more of the resident's needs than are met by standard housing programs. This is accomplished by the cooperative efforts of the future residents group identifying community/family needs and incorporating solutions in the housing project's unique overall design.

Co-Housing differs from standard housing developments in that it specifically requires resident participation in the formation, direction and management of the housing complex from the design phase through construction completion, and in an ongoing manner after occupancy.

The design objective of Common Ground is to plan a housing development which acknowledges that resident and neighborhood interaction, interdependence and self-management is the essence of community. Our group feels that a vital neighborhood is comprised of the following key elements:

- 1) Shared pedestrian areas with outdoor amenities such as play areas, gardens, sitting areas and adult recreation areas, as well as pedestrian access to individual domiciles and the complex common house.
- 2) A multi-purpose, multi-family common house which provides space for crafts, hobbies and activities to foster the mutual interest and interaction of the residents and which facilitates lifestyle needs such as childcare, play room, laundry, meeting/dining hall/kitchen space.
- 3) Unity of purpose among residents which creates the strength in numbers to make viable such programs as shared resident transportation by van and wholesale purchasing of common household goods.
- 4) An incorporation of mutual group values and premises into the design and structure of the housing complex, resulting in a functioning program which reflects such premises as honesty, responsibility, personal interdependence, trust, civility, and the search for quality, convenience and fellowship.

The members of Common Ground feel the Community Center site is ideally suited for the co-housing type of development because it is possible to utilize a portion of the existing building. The property is serviced by RFTA, close to essential shopping as well as the post office, the Aspen Art Museum, the Art Park, the library, the Rio Grand playing field and the Rio Grand trail system. The development of an affordable housing complex is compatible with the surrounding residential character and is consistent with surrounding density. Very importantly, the site will be available in a timely manner and represents an opportunity to create physical stability for as many as twenty-five households within the immediate metropolitan area.

COMMON GROUND History and Development

Common Ground CoHousing Association, Inc. came into existence in the fall of 1990. Under the auspices of the Aspen/Pitkin County Housing Authority, the co-housing concept was introduced to Aspen by the founding parents of co-housing in the United States, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett whose book Co-Housing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves, is utilized as a guideline for Common Ground. 42 people attended the lecture on August 2, 1990, which was videotaped and aired on Grassroots television. VCR copies were made available to the Board of County Commissioners, the P&Z and general public.

A great deal of excitement and interest followed this initial presentation, which resulted in some advertising and two additional public meetings on August 30 and September 5, both of which were attended by 40-45 people. Subsequently, fliers were distributed throughout the county and Common Ground held its first official meeting on September 18, 1990.

Meetings have since been held once a week, usually at the Community Center. Three committees have been established: Membership and Organization, Program Development and Finance and Design and Construction. Each committee is chaired by one of the members, and each chairperson serves on the Steering Committee in addition to two members at large.

Until recently, Common Ground has been in a "development phase" and meetings have emphasized planning and design considerations. Great headway, as detailed below, has been made in the various processes required by the relevant government agencies. Common Ground meetings are currently emphasizing group cohesion and social activities. Many potluck dinners and outings have been held and are being planned throughout the coming year.

In September of 1990, a group meeting was held to entertain site plan design suggestions. The group divided into two factions to study the feasibility of either (a) demolishing the existing building on site or (b) remodeling the existing building to accommodate individual units and the common house. It was determined that the most economical recommendation was to utilize a portion of the existing building for the common house and demolish the remainder of the site. This conclusion was reiterated in a county funded study conducted by the firm of Sutherland Fallin in the spring of 1991.

After numerous meetings in which the group's input was solicited and incorporated, the design team produced a site plan that was acceptable to everyone. Preliminary approval of the site plan was granted by the Board of County Commissioners in August of 1991.

A preliminary application to the Planning and Zoning office has been tendered (as of September, 1991). A two step approval process is anticipated to conclude in the spring of 1992 and construction will commence at that time.

4.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Common Ground Housing Association, Inc. proposes to construct a mix of approximately twenty-one (21) affordable, deed restricted residences on the approximately 2 acre Community Center Site. The potential development plan may consist of seven (7) 1-bedroom townhouses, nine (9) 2-bedroom townhouses and five (5) 3-bedroom townhouses. The units will be clustered in groups of four to seven units per building.

The site plan (figure 4.1) reflects a more progressive approach to housing; one that aspires to intentional neighborhood design with planned interaction among the residents, as well as individual private green spaces. It is envisioned as a diverse community, both in terms of the residents and the physical configuration of the units. There will be three (3) income category types, as well as 3 different bedroom configurations (1,2,and 3 bedrooms per unit). The site is intended to foster a pedestrian oriented atmosphere, with car parking at the perimeter, and access to all units from a centrally formed pedestrian route through the complex. The proximity to the center of town and the easy availability of public transportation further provides non-motorized access to the site. The existing curb cuts will be retained for car access and the overall traffic impact should be less than the current Community Center use.

Perhaps the most unique feature is the inclusion of a common house as an integral part of the design and philosophy of Common Ground. The two-story portion of the existing Community Center building will be renovated to provide spaces for shared communal activities, such as cooking and eating group dinners, a greenhouse, recreational and lounge spaces for both children and adults, storage spaces and guest rooms for residents' visitors. Although not physically in the center of the site due to the existing location, the common house will serve as the focal point for shared group activities.

Outdoor spaces will be much more than just "open space", as Common Ground intends to develop a children's play area, a garden, and a terrace overlooking Hunter Creek, as well as a community commons in the center from which all units have their access and "front" orientation. In addition each unit will have it's own private "backyard" space, away from the common areas.

The character of the buildings will strive for a human scale development with a diversity of architectural form. All the townhouse clusters are a mixture of one and two stories, with a staggered configuration in the plan to allow all units to have some Southern exposure and a view toward Aspen Mountain. The roofs of all the units are sloped in a variety of configurations which is compatible with much of Aspens residential appearance.

All units will have their own patio and individual front entry from the commons as well as a clearly defined private area in back. The existing portion of the Community Center Building to be retained for the common house is a 2 story, flat roofed structure, however, most of the first floor is below grade, which mitigates its mass. A functional greenhouse will be added on the South Side, and communal functions can extend outside in seasonal weather through the addition of a terrace at grade on the West Side and an upper level deck to the East. Almost all of the existing trees can be retained, and new landscaping will be added around the site. Some of the areas around parking will be bermed to soften the visual impact of cars, both to the Lone Pine Road as well as the units themselves. (see site section) A decorative entry gate and special landscaping will serve to give an identity to the project and reinforce the pedestrian access to the common area.