

Why would anyone join a cohousing group?

By Rob Sandelin

Reprinted with permission from the author

My perspective comes from living in cohousing for over 15 years now, visiting and talking with bunches of other cohousers in gatherings and conferences, and visiting other communities. So here is my top ten list, from my perspective of living in cohousing:

1. Living in community offers security. You can rely on your neighbors to help you, even when you don't ask. This is huge for me, that my family is in a safe and supportive place. My grandmother died recently, my neighbors knew all about it, sent cards and sympathy and support to my family. HER neighbors didn't even know she was sick, most of them didn't even know her name. How many of them could she ask for help if she needed it?
2. Community offers social opportunities. I can have wonderful and meaningful interactions with people I like, who are my neighbors, just by sitting out on my porch. I really enjoy hanging out and talking with folks about everything, politics, the news, kids. Sharing our histories and ourselves grows a wonderful bond among us.
3. Supportive place for kids to grow up. Safe, lots of friends-both other kids and adults. Kids can play and I know any adult in the neighborhood will be there for them in case of need. Fun place to be an adult, lots of play opportunity with kids, and other adults.
4. Great place to collaborate with people who share similar interests. Small groups form revolving around shared common interests, beer making, sewing, gardening, music, etc. I don't have to "go" anywhere to enjoy a beer making club; my neighbors and I can do that. The common house is great for that.
5. A sense of togetherness and belonging. I am part of something that is really wonderful, it is a model for a better way to live, and we all together are doing it. I can't explain this in words very well but there is a strong feeling of happiness that comes from working with my neighbors on a variety of projects.
6. A great restaurant in the middle of my neighborhood, called the common house, where I can go have dinner and great conversation with friends when I want to.

7. Great place to learn new things. I always wanted to try making beer. Having a couple of neighbors share that interest got me home brewing. We learn and try new stuff all the time.

8. A great place to share ownership of things that I couldn't really afford myself, such as a workshop, play structure, tools, library etc.

9. Huge personal resources available. Want to know about bee keeping? I go ask Mel, and get all kinds of info. Having problems with my car? Mark knows lots about such things. Want to build a shed? Bob can give me advice, help me scrounge materials, hell, did half the work one Saturday. A neighborhood like mine is a collection of 26 lifetimes worth of experience in all manner of things. What a treasure trove!

10. Privacy. I get ALL the great benefits of cooperative living, and also get huge amounts of privacy, whenever I want just by going home and closing the door or going into the 25 acre woods that surround my house that everybody shares ownership of.

I would say the \$ value of all those things, to me, would be in the million dollar range. My house cost me less than market value to build and is worth way more than I paid for it should I ever move to another community. Notice I said move to another community. It is inconceivable for me to ever move back to a "normal" neighborhood, where everyone is a stranger and I have to be afraid every time my kid goes out the door.

Rob Sandelin is a community activist living in Sharingwood Cohousing. He was particularly active in the cohousing movement during the late 90s, providing facilitating training and working with a variety of forming and established cohousing communities. Since then, Rob has largely turned his attention to environmental education. Rob was also a NICA (Northwest Intentional Community Association, a non-profit organization) board member and continues to be active online communicator via Cohousing-L, an Email-based list about cohousing started in late 1992. Rob wrote the book *Cohousing Resource Guide*.