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## In Fridley, a utopian vision for housing

At a new community in Fridley, residents will rely on one another -- governing themselves, preparing meals together, sharing child care and more.

[Sarah Moran](#), Star Tribune

A developer and residents in Fridley want to buck the isolation of a garage-door-goes-up, garage-door-goes-down lifestyle.

Island Park will be the first new cohousing development in the state in years -- a close-knit place where a self-governing group of neighbors might share a community garden, gather for a movie night or even forage for food in a shared plot filled with chestnut trees, raspberry bushes and strawberry plants.

The residents might chip in for a few kayaks to use on the Mississippi River, which passes nearby. There's talk of an exercise room and meditation room. Need to use a circular saw or find child care? There could even be shared power tools and baby sitters.

The community has started to take shape in existing apartments and duplexes that are being renovated by developer Grant Rudolph.

"It's really refreshing to have some real conversation and just to relax and have fun with your neighbors," said resident Kevin Broughton, who has attended a few Monday night dinners in the community room that's shared by all. "I love that idea of being part of a community where you're kind of getting back to old-fashioned values where you know your neighbor and your neighbor knows you."

Shared values are part of the appeal, and an environmentally friendly lifestyle is a selling point.

Solar water heaters have been installed on the roof of one building, and a wind tower to generate energy could be on the way.

Responsibility is part of the deal, too. Residents are expected to pull their weight by helping out with gardening, for instance, and contribute to community spirit by getting to know the neighbors and taking part in group activities.

"I think working together in a cohousing situation, a community setting like that, is genuinely beneficial financially but also spiritually and mentally," Broughton said.

### **A response to sprawl**

The idea started in Denmark, where there are now about 400 communities, and spread in the United States in the early 1980s. Monterey Cohousing in St. Louis Park was the first to form in Minnesota, in 1992. There are about 90 completed communities across the country and more than 100 others underway, said Neshama Abraham, co-founder of the Elder Cohousing Network in Boulder, Colo.

Cohousing is partly a response to housing patterns in the 1960s, when suburbs boomed and people got busy, said Sue Marshall, president of Minnesota Realty Investors.

"There was an era where nobody needed help and said 'I can do it by myself,' " she said.

Now some people have decided they want independence but they also want help and connections.

Becky Yust, professor of housing studies at the University of Minnesota, said that in cohousing, neighbors are "actually functioning together almost like a household." "There is that level of commitment. It's certainly something that's been missing in society for a while, but I'm not sure the general population is ready for the level of commitment that is required and desired in a true cohousing experience," she said.

### **Sticking to the vision**

So what made Fridley a good location for cohousing?

Location, for one thing, said Rudolph, the developer. There's a quick commute to the cities, the future Northstar Commuter Rail stop a couple of blocks to the north, and the Mississippi River and nature trails nearby.

So far, Rudolph owns four 12-unit apartments and a duplex, which will serve as the common houses. He hopes to add more nearby properties soon. Some apartments are being renovated with energy-efficient windows, filtered water systems and bamboo or cork floors. The first units will be priced at \$130,000 to \$170,000.

Some residents will stay when the development is officially transformed in the next few months and buy their units as condos. Other apartments will remain for renters who want to try it out.

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