Abraham Paiss
& associates

Building Sustainable Communities through Media, Marketing and Group Process

For Immediate Release

National Media Contact: Neshama Abraham
(303) 413-8066; Neshama36@comcast.net

COHOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS ACHIEVE RECORD LEVELS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY DUE TO CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY

New research finds cohousing residents use 50% less energy to heat homes and are comfortable in homes half the size of standard American houses;

Graham Meltzer, Australian PhD researcher and author of new book on *Sustainable Community* will meet with building professionals in Washington, DC on Sept. 9and Boulder, CO on Sept. 23 to discuss findings

Silver Spring, MD; September 6, 2005: Graham Meltzer, PhD, author of the newly-released book, *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model* (Trafford Publishing, Canada, 2005) has spent almost 10 years documenting how people use less energy and resources living in cohousing as compared to their life before they moved into their environmentally-conscious neighborhood. His findings show that cohousing residents in four countries – Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United States – achieve a more environmentally sustainable and energy-efficient lifestyle as a direct result of being part of a close-knit community.

"One of the clear findings from my research is that the strong social cohesiveness of cohousing neighborhoods was a decisive factor in members driving less, biking more and consuming less water and energy," said Meltzer who conducted in-person interviews while living in cohousing neighborhoods in the U.S. and abroad as part of his PhD dissertation.

"When people live cooperatively in close proximity to their neighbors, they are comfortable in smaller homes and are willing to live in more densely developed communities," said Meltzer. "I found that the social dynamics of the resident group directly drove the degree of environmental sustainability of the neighborhood; the most cohesive communities were also the most socially and environmentally sustainable."

The cohousing neighborhoods he researched were twice as dense as that of modern suburbs, with cohousing neighborhoods averaging 12 homes per acre. Meltzer reports that 84% of cohousing residents he interviewed live in homes with attached walls, versus the standard American-style detached home. He also found that cohousing homes are on average *half* the size of the typical U.S. home of 2,200 square feet home, according to data from the National Association of Home Builders.

Cohousing is a neighborhood model combining private home-ownership with shared common land and facilities that came to the U.S. from Denmark 15 years ago with the publishing of the *Cohousing* book in 1988. These innovative communities have grown from a grassroots movement mostly created by group members to an $800 million niche housing industry now more commonly initiated by developers in an active partnership with the future residents. There are 82 completed cohousing neighborhoods in the U.S. with dozens in the development stage across the nation.

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Meltzer found that cohousing residents use an average of 50% less heating energy by living in tightly-built, well insulated homes designed to maximize passive solar energy. His research concurs with a 1994 study conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Nyland Cohousing neighborhood in Lafayette, CO, documenting that utility bills in the Nyland cohousing homes were 50% lower than those in the surrounding neighborhood.

Green Building Professionals Drawn to Cohousing

All of this adds up to a significantly lower impact on the environment which has attracted a growing number of green building and design professionals drawn to cohousing's smaller housing footprint and the residents' commitment to living a more ecological lifestyle. Professionals involved in cohousing development include:

- Kathryn McCamant and Chuck Durrett, architects, The CoHousing Company with offices in Nevada City and Berkeley, CA (www.cohousingco.com)
- Jim Leach, developer, Wonderland Hill Development Company based in Boulder, CO (www.whdc.com)
- Nick Meima, developer, Cohousing Development Co. in Ann Arbor, MI (www.cohousingdevelopment.com)
- Mary Kraus and Laura Fitch, architects, Kraus-Fitch Architects of Amherst, MA (www.KrausFitch.com)
- Don Tucker, architect/developer, Eco Housing Corporation based in Bethesda, MD (www.ecohousing.net).

Ann Zabaldo specializes in cohousing marketing and outreach and was the cohousing consultant on two large, green, cohousing projects: Eastern Village , a 56 community on 1/3 acre in Silver Spring, MD and Takoma Village, 43-household neighborhood on 1.43 acres in Washington, DC both developed by the EcoHousing Corporation. Having marketed over 21 million dollars worth of cohousing homes in the last six years, Zabaldo has witnessed the appeal of environmentally-friendly cohousing residences.

Said Zabaldo, "Homebuyers today are interested in living a more environmentally conscious lifestyle and they are willing to downsize their homes to achieve this. Since cohousing neighborhoods offer a large, well-utilized, multi-purpose community building, residents have their own extended living room to enjoy daily and don't need as large a private home," said Zabaldo who lives at Takoma Village Cohousing.

For instance, no cohousing home built to date by the Eco Housing Corporation is larger than 1,750 sq. ft. The community building or Common House at Takoma Village is 4,000 sq. ft. and the Common House at Eastern Village is 6,000 sq. ft. Typical amenities in the Common House include two guest rooms for overnight friends and family, an exercise room, a children's play area, laundry room, extensive workshop area for tools, office space with shared equipment, a library, and a large multi-purpose Great Room for social events, meetings and classes.

Graham Meltzer is a native Australian who conducted eight years of research during the 1990's, including living with and interviewing residents from 18 cohousing communities in North America in 1996. His dissertation is entitled "Cohousing: Toward Social and Environmental Sustainability." (available online at http://www.grahammeltzer.com/cohousing/index.htm. Meltzer will be in the Washington, D.C. area from September 9 – 12 and will speak about his findings during a special tour for building professionals and the media sponsored by Mid Atlantic Cohousing (http://ww.cohomac.org) at Eastern Village Cohousing in Silver Spring, MD on **Friday, September 9 at 4 PM.** To RSVP for the Eastern Village tour contact Zabaldo at **(202) 291-7892.**

Meltzer, a professional photographer, will also give an A/V presentation of images and tell stories from his travels to cohousing neighborhhods on three continents at the Elder Cohousing "Getting Started" Workshop in Boulder, CO on **Saturday, September 24th**. To reach Meltzer in Colorado please contact Neshama Abraham of the Elder Cohousing Network at **(303) 413-8066.**

Graham Meltzer, Ann Zabaldo, Don Tucker, Nick Meima, Jim Leach, Charles Durrett, Kathryn McCamant, Mary Kraus and Laura Fitch are available for interviews. High-resolution digital photos are available of cohousing communities nationwide. For information, photos or to arrange media interviews with cohousing professionals please contact Neshama Abraham at 303-413-8066 or via email at Neshama36@comcast.net.

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