ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES

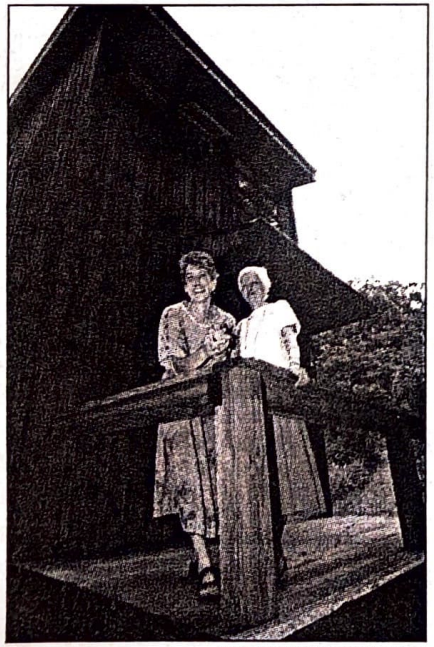
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Field of dreams

Mother, daughter look forward to life in community developed with Danish co-housing concept in mind

By Nancy Marlowe
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

A community based on the Danish concept of co-housing is being planned in West Asheville. The mother and daughter whose dream it is expect to live in Westwood Co-Housing Community surrounded by people of all ages who share a desire to live among congenial neighbors.



STEVE DIXON/CITIZEN-TIMES

Elana Kohnle (pronounced Conley) plans to live there as a single woman surrounded by neighbors and friends who will share in the cooking and for whom she will in turn prepare meals. Her mother, Lotte Meyerson of Gary, Ind., and her father, Seymour Meyerson, plan to move to Westwood and make it their retirement home. "In this way," Lotte Meyerson said, "as we get older we won't be relying entirely upon our daughter." She envisions that her husband, a chemist and gifted teacher, will be able to help children in the community with their homework without any formal tutoring arrangement.

The mother and daughter explain that co-housing is a concept introduced 23 years ago in Denmark, with the idea of creating a neighborhood where people knew each other, where children could play safely and where a sharing of resources would take place. The idea spread throughout Scandinavia, Germany and Holland. There are about 200 such co-housing communities in the planning stages in the United States and 10 in use. Groundbreaking for Westwood is planned in the fall of 1995.



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Above: Elana Kohnle, left, and her mother, Lotte Meyerson, visit the site of Westwood, a European-style co-housing development proposed for West Asheville. They are shown at the edge of the field where 18 dwelling units, studios and a common kitchen-dining building will be built. Left: Elana Kohnle, an artist, has a studio in the "field of dreams."

Kohnle has been meeting with a group of interested persons and potential residents for a year and a half. As the group envisions it, Westwood will be a pedestrian-friendly community of 20 to 23 houses that will face inward, keeping garages and cars on the perimeter. Individual dwellings will be self-sufficient (with kitchens, etc.) but will be complemented by extensive common facilities, which include a central kitchen and dining room, studio-office complex, children's play area, laundry facilities and exercise room. The dining room will double as a meeting room, a place for performances, dances, parties.

In a corner of the campus, will be a collection of studio offices so that residents who choose may work at arts, crafts or computer-based businesses in the community.

All residents will have the option of shared meals, with each resident taking a once-a-month turn at cooking and cleaning up. Kohnle said the prospect of shared meals and shared child care is a major part of the appeal of co-housing. "It saves so much time and money," she said.

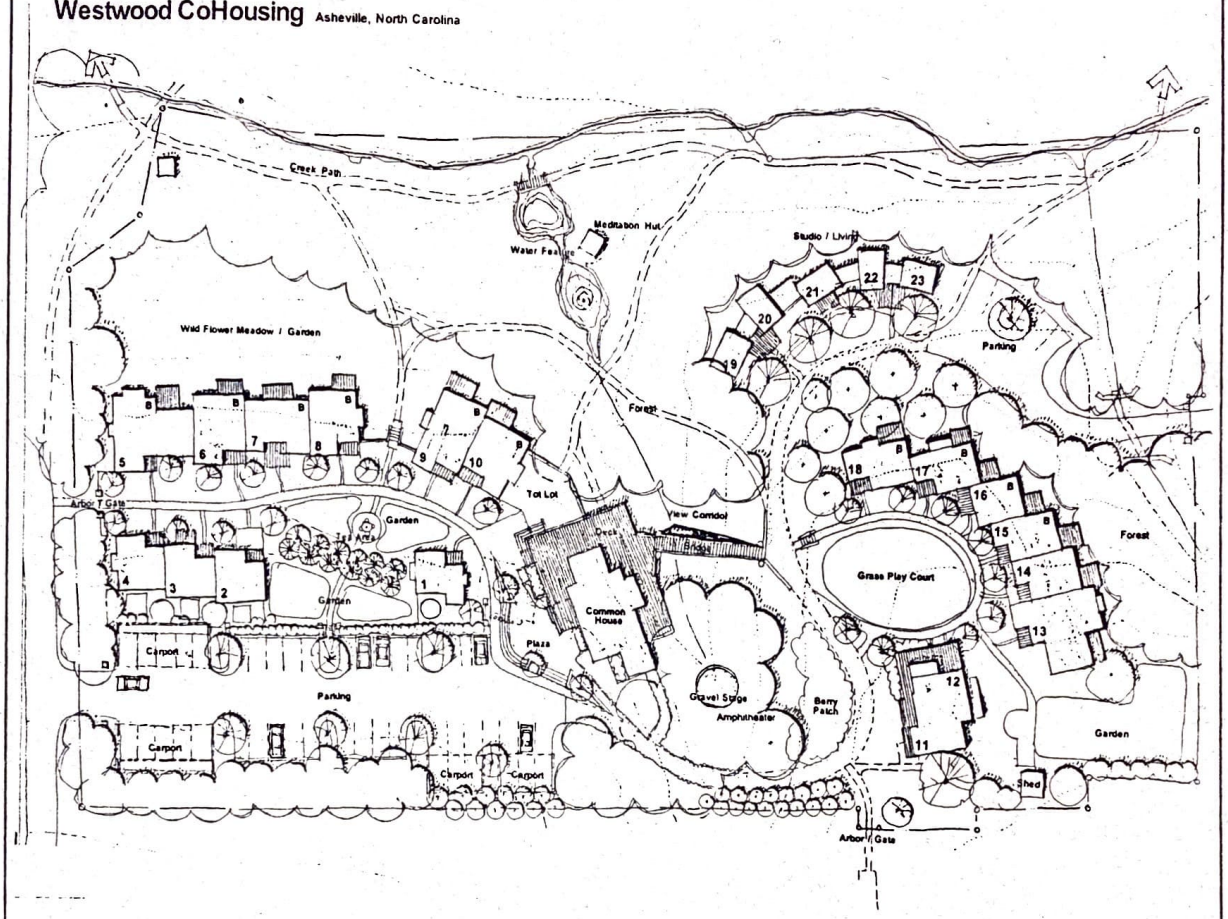
Ownership of the houses in Westwood will be on a condominium basis, with joint ownership of the common facilities. In co-housing, more of the resources are directed toward the shared facilities, Kohnle said.

Whereas condominium design usually aims for maximum privacy, the women said, co-housing units face inward toward shared space. A small back yard affords each home privacy, "but the houses are designed and placed to facilitate community," Kohnle said. The common building will offer, in addition to the kitchen and dining facilities, a central mailroom, guest rooms and perhaps a library. Those decisions will be made by the residents.

Currently, Westwood is only a concept waiting to be shaped by those who buy property there. Architect Jan Wiegman has been retained to design the community according to residents' desires. Chuck Marsh is working on landscaping that will integrate humans and the natural environment. Bill Fleming is engineer for the project.

The four-plus acre site is north of the WNC Farmers Market, west of Vermont Avenue and south of Haywood Road in the vicinity of the Wachovia Bank. "If people drive around, they won't find

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over →



Working with the earliest members of the community, Wiegman Associates has completed the preliminary site plan for Westwood CoHousing Community. Numbers 1 to 18 are private dwellings; 19 to 23 are studios with possible apartments above.

Field

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it," Kohnle said.

The price range of the houses is expected to range from about $60,000 for a 600-square foot efficiency unit to $125,000 for a three-bedroom house.

A workshop is planned in October and November during which persons who have bought into the concept will meet with the architect and help design the community. "After that," Kohnle said, "We will have site plans and floor plans and people can point to something and say, 'I want that.'"

Kohnle said she likes the idea of co-housing because "I like having people around, having activity right outside my door and not living in the isolation that is part of the way Americans live now. I want to be in a place where you don't have to jump in your car to go visit friends. I like the idea of having all ages of people around, having children to play with each other. Shared meals are a big plus for me. I like cooking for other people and I like eating with other people. I just find more excitement, more possibility for growth where there is a community of people around."

Slide show

A free showing of color slides about Westwood, the co-housing community proposed for West Asheville, will be held from 7 to 8 p. m. every Sunday in August. Showings will be at Shelter Technology, 247 Biltmore Ave., around the corner from the Re/Max realty office.

Westwood will be a resident-managed community of privately-owned homes clustered around a central building for optional shared meals and other services and activities. Open space will be for all residents to share.

For more information, call Westwood CoHousing Community, 252-2118.