Nomad Cohousing Fact Sheet

Location: Boulder, Colorado, about two miles from downtown.

History: The group formed in 1995 and looked for land for four years. Construction Started in December 1997 and community members moved in during November and December of 1997.

Site: urban, 1 acre, built next to the 1950's historic landmark professional Nomad Theatre.

Homes: 11 townhomes located in two buildings. Homes range from one to five bedrooms. From 675 sq. ft. to 2,400 sq. ft.

Price Range: Homes were originally purchased starting at $80,000 to $300,000. Current sale prices start at $100,000 to $500,000. Of the 11 homes in this mixed-income project, 7 are designated permanently affordable by the City of Boulder, and 4 are market rate.

Style: New urban modernist inspired by the adjacent Nomad Theatre. Common House attached to the existing Quonset-hut style Playhouse.

Residents: Adults: 15 Over 55: 3 Kids (0-12): 6
Teens: (13-18): 0 Renters: 2

Governance: Self-managing Homeowners Association with three rotating officers (2 year terms). Teams for Design Review, Social, Landscaping, Budget Review, Conflict Resolution, Building Maintenance.

Meetings: Business meetings take place monthly. Community meetings are quarterly. Parents get together twice a year around parenting issues. Members are required to participate in six three-hour work days during the growing season and are responsible for half a dozen additional tasks in managing the neighborhood.

FEATURES:

Site: Situated one block from the city bus line and next to a small shopping center with grocery store, coffee shop, two restaurants, video shop, etc. Ten-minute walk to open space including a hiking trail around a lake.

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Common House (800 sq. ft.):
One room space with Kitchen and Dining area/multipurpose space.
The Nomad Common House is used for community meals twice a week and members cook approximately once every 6 weeks. Residents use the space for yoga, arts & crafts, social functions & celebrations and monthly business meetings. In addition, the Common House hosts a variety of Boulder area functions and the Theatre uses the space for opening night receptions.

Homes: Highly energy-efficient design and construction using low E windows, high efficiency mechanical systems, non-toxic interior finishes, natural materials such as low VOC paint and wool carpeting, cellulose insulation, and passive solar orientation. Most residents installed bamboo flooring and two members chose radiant heating. Members participate in a Neighborhood Eco-Pass bus program to compensate for reduced number of parking spaces from the City of Boulder.

Outdoor amenities:
Landscaping with native water conserving plants, Organic Community Garden, Community-wide composting system, Central Green Courtyard Fountain, Children's Play area, 11 Garages.

Design & Construction
Designer: Rick Epstein Architects of Boulder, CO.
Developer: Wonderland Hill Development Company of Boulder, CO.

For more info, contact: Arthur Okner (303) 442-3038; ArtOkner@att.net

Community website: www.nomdcohousing.org.

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Denver Post

Co-housing efforts seek diversity

Community-living conference at CU to aim for more cultures

By Kristi Arellano
Denver Post Business Writer

Monday, June 16, 2003 - Co-housing residents used to struggle to convince neighbors and zoning departments that their communities weren't cults or hippie communes.

Now, proponents of these community-focused housing developments, where residents share meals, cars and parenting duties, are working to move beyond their white, middle-class roots and bring a greater cross-section of the community into their fold.

"Co-housing is focused on creating diverse communities," said Arthur Okner, who lives at Nomad, a north Boulder co-housing community. "The next step for us is to bring in more income levels and more people of color."

Leaders of the co-housing movement will focus their attention on the diversity issue this week at the National Co-housing Conference at the University of Colorado at Boulder. About 200 residents, developers and planners are expected at the four-day conference.

Planners brought the biennial event to Boulder because Colorado is one of the hottest co-housing markets in the country. Colorado and Washington state share the distinction of having the second-largest number of completed co-housing communities in the nation, with nine each. Only California has more, with 14 finished projects.

Colorado also has a high concentration of co-housing developers and consultants.

Co-housing communities in Colorado range in size from the 11-unit Nomad Co-housing in Boulder to the 42-unit Nyland community in Lafayette. There are three other projects underway - in Boulder, Carbondale and Longmont.

"There is a very strong support system for co-housing in Colorado," said Zev Paiss, a conference organizer and Nomad resident. Paiss and his wife, Neshama Abraham Paiss, run a consulting firm that helps new co-housing developments market their projects. Zev Paiss also manages a fund that provides financing to emerging developments.

People who live in co-housing communities said they were drawn to them because the developments allow them to build close relationships with their neighbors. Homes in the developments typically face a central courtyard and have a common house, where residents gather for meals once or twice a week.

"It's possible, I suppose, to generate a strong sense of community in a traditional setting, but co-housing makes it so much easier," said Kellie Teter, a public-health worker who lives at Hearthstone, a co-housing complex in the Elitch's redevelopment in northwest Denver. "The communities are physically and intentionally designed to foster community."

Co-housing groups typically form long before they've found property. They participate in a consensus-driven design process and are required to contribute a set number of hours for community upkeep.

But the real key to co-housing, residents said, is the day-to-day interaction fostered by the communities. Residents walk freely into one another's homes and often take care of one another's children.

"Instead of going next door and asking for a cup of sugar, you go next door, open the cupboard and get the sugar," Paiss said.

The developments often attract families who are seeking the support of other parents.

"As a stay-at-home mom, it can be very challenging to provide a social atmosphere for your child," said Angelique Espinoza, who moved to Nomad with her husband, David Vollmor, and their 2- year-old son, Luka, in March.

Living in the development allows Espinoza to socialize with other adults and gives Luka a chance to play with other children, she said.

"Since we moved in, he's just blossomed. His language skills and motor skills have increased because he's always trying to keep up with the older kids," Espinoza said.

Co-housing also appeals to singles and seniors, who say it provides them with extended families.

"Once you're retired, if you don't have family around, all you can really do is hang out at senior centers and hope that somebody will invite you to dinner every once in a while," said Okner, 61.

Okner said he rarely sees his grandson, who lives on the East Coast, but he's become the self-appointed grandfather to the children in the community.

"I no longer lead a life of desperation," he said.

Co-housing has attracted a variety of age groups, but because the cost of the common indoor and outdoor areas are rolled into the home price, the projects have eluded many lower-income residents.

Jim Leach, president of Wonderland Hill Development Co., a Boulder-based co-housing builder, estimates that homes in co-housing communities can cost from 10 percent to 30 percent more per square foot than traditional homes.

"If you buy a $200,000 house in co-housing, its going to be smaller than a regular $200,000 house," he said.

But Colorado's newest co-housing community - a 34-unit development called Wild Sage that broke ground Saturday at the Holiday Drive-In redevelopment in north Boulder - will be the first to partner with a nonprofit housing provider to make some units affordable to low-income residents.

Wild Sage has teamed up with Habitat for Humanity to build four homes at Wild Sage. Ten more units will be kept permanently affordable as part of requirement of the city's housing authority, Boulder Housing Partners.

But it's the Habitat units that excite Wild Sage residents.

"If you're going to have diversity in a community, it's very important that we have all types of diversity, not just age," said Annie Russell, who will move to Wild Sage once it's completed.

Habitat has already selected the families that will occupy the units, and they have spent several months meeting with the residents and helping plan the development.

"It's a refreshing change to work with people that are excited to have some income diversity," said Kurt Firnhaber, executive director of Flatirons Habitat for Humanity. "Typically we face a lot of opposition, but, in co-housing, they actually think it's a quality that adds to the community."

The units will be slightly more expensive than traditional Habitat homes, but Firnhaber said there are valuable benefits to living in supportive communities.

"Habitat and co-housing have similar community goals. It's a really good mix," he said. "If I had my way, all of our future developments would be in co-housing."

As co-housing groups make headway in bringing more income diversity to their ranks, they're also working to bring more cultures into their mix.

The Co-housing Association of the United States has scheduled its 2005 conference to be held at Morgan State University, a historically black university in Baltimore.

Association members are in talks with the schools leadership about partnering to build a multicultural co-housing community.

"The best way to get our message out to communities of color is to take it directly to them," Okner said.

HOW CO-HOUSING WORKS

Participatory process: Residents have a role in the planning and designing of the development.

Neighborhood design: Encourages a sense of community.

Private homes, common facilities: Each household has a private residence with access to all of the common facilities. The common house is designed for daily use and supplements private living areas. Other common facilities might include courtyards, children's play areas and vegetable gardens.

Resident management: Residents take responsibility for ongoing management, organizing cooperatively to meet their needs.

Nonhierarchical structure: While there are leadership roles, responsibility for decisions is shared by the community's adults.

Separate income sources: No shared community economy.

ON THE WEB

Go to for the Co-housing Association of the United States

Source: Co-housing Association of the United States

BOULDER DAILY CAMERA
November 2, 1997

Cohousing aims to create community

Nomad development debuts in N. Boulder

By TOM LOCKE
Camera Business Writer

Kay Abrahams lived in a New York City apartment for 14 years before moving to Colorado a year ago. She could hear the flush of toilets in other apartments, but she didn't know the people flushing them. Brief exchanges in or outside the elevator served as neighborliness.

Now Abrahams has her first baby on the way, and she wants an alternative — a community environment in which to raise her child, a support structure to serve as sort of an extended family.

She thinks she's found it.

In mid-November she and her fiance, Zev Paiss, will move into the Nomad Cohousing development, an 11-unit project at 1460 Quince St., adjacent to the Nomad Theater in North Boulder. Six of the units at Nomad have been completed, and the first residents have moved into four of those units during the past week. The community features condominiums ranging from 675 square feet to 2,700 square feet and prices from $79,000 to more than $300,000.

Cohousing developments, first introduced in Denmark roughly 30 years ago, are "small-scale neighborhoods that provide a balance between personal privacy and community," said Paiss, president of the Boulder-based Rocky Mountain Cohousing Association.

More specifically, cohousing typically features: resident participation in the process of creating the community; a pedestrian-oriented design to enhance the feeling of community; common facilities, such as a dining room for shared meals a few nights a week; and resident management.

Abrahams thinks those qualities will make a difference with her baby, both in terms of neighborly support and instilling a sense of shared resources. "The child is frankly going to grow up, I think, with some wonderful values."

Cohousing is still in its infancy nationally. The first U.S. project, the 26-unit Muir Commons, was completed in 1991 in Davis, Calif. Now there are roughly 2,000 people living in 28 completed cohousing projects in North America, and by the end of the first quarter of 1998, the number of developments is expected to reach 50, said Abrahams, who works in media relations for the cohousing industry.

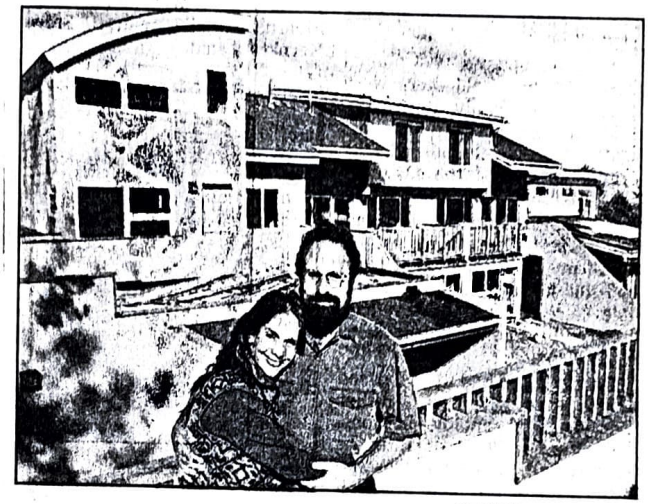
Colorado is one of the hotbeds in the country for cohousing, along with the Seattle area, northern California, Massachusetts and North Carolina. And Boulder-based Wonderland Hill Development Co. is a key reason for Colorado's importance in the growth of the alternative communities. Of the six cohousing communities in Colorado, Wonderland has developed all but the one in Aspen. In addition to Nomad in Boulder, Wonderland has developed communities in Fort Collins, Golden, Littleton and Lafayette.

More Colorado cohousing is on the way. Paiss said cohousing communities are in various stages of planning in urban Denver, Durango, Telluride, Loveland, Colorado Springs, Lakewood, and Larimer County, near Lyons.

Jim Leach, president of Wonderland, said Nomad is smaller than most other developments, something that brings advantages and disadvantages. The smaller scale limits the amount of resources that can be devoted to a common area, but it also enables residents to get to know each other better, he said.

In addition, to convince the city of Boulder to increase the allowable density on the property, Wonderland designated seven of the 11 units at Nomad as "permanently affordable." Of the seven, three are for "low-income" residents, those with 60 percent or less of the area's median income. The other four are for "middle-income" residents, those with 80 percent to 120 percent of the median income.

(See COHOUSING, Page 8B)



KIRK SPEER / Daily Camera

Kay Abrahams and Zev Paiss, scheduled to marry Jan. 4, will be moving this month into the Nomad Cohousing development at 1460 Quince St. in North Boulder. It's the first cohousing development within the city of Boulder.

Builder leads nation in evolving housing concept

Co-housing built on need for close-knit neighborhoods

By Bill Simpson
Boulder Planet

As many Front Range builders churn out cookie-cutter homes that swallow huge tracts of land, one Boulder developer has almost single-handedly nurtured an evolving building style to a level of national recognition.

Wonderland Hill Development Co. has earned itself a national reputation as a leader of a design concept called co-housing that until recently was stuck on the ideological fringe of the housing market.

First developed in Denmark 25 years ago, co-housing now is beginning to gain widespread recognition in the United States.

This year, six co-housing projects were among the 63 winners of the "Building Innovation for Homeownership" awards presented by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Two of the winning sites were developed by Jim Leach of Wonderland Hill.

"We're doing developer-driven models," Leach said of the co-housing ventures he admits were far from a sure thing.

Leach is working on his fifth co-housing project in Colorado, the first one in Boulder, at a site adjacent to the Nomad Theater near the intersection of North Broadway and Quince. And with each project he develops, the process gets easier, Leach said.

"We've seen co-housing grow quite a bit," said Leach, the largest co-housing developer in the country. "It's about to catch hold as a real viable option."

Co-housing developments have traditionally been organized by homeowner groups who wanted to create their own community. The process of finding potential building sites and gathering enough interested buyers to attract a developer often took several years.

With the proven success of the idea, Leach and other builders are starting to take the lead on such projects now that the organization process has a more streamlined structure.

"In the end, (co-housing) is more work from the developer's standpoint because you have to spend more time with the people in the (proposed) community" deciding how the project will progress, Leach said.

Co-housing homeowners regularly meet to decide on various aspects of their future homes, making the design almost a custom project.

The tradeoff for the extra time spent during the development of such a project is that most of the homes are presold to the people providing input, removing much of the financial risk for the developer.

"The good news is they're pre-sold; the bad news is they're pre-sold," Leach said of the co-housing units.

The costs and financial rewards of such communities are essentially the same as building more-traditional homes, Leach said, but the environmental impact of co-housing projects is often significantly reduced.

For starters, Leach said, the buildings are designed to take up less space than the same number of free-standing homes, creating the type of neighborhood atmosphere that Boulder residents fawn over. And developers drawn to the idea of co-housing often incorporate energy-saving concepts into design plans, said Zev Paiss, president of the Rocky Mountain CoHousing Association.

That ideology is usually encouraged by homeowners who share a strong commitment to "living lightly in the world," an ideal voiced by several residents of the Nyland community, a co-housing project in Lafayette.

The goal of co-housing developments, like Nyland and Longmont's Nomad, is to create tight-knit communities rarely found in today's housing market, said Paiss.

> Even the community dinners, which are usually vegetarian fare, reduce the energy that would be used if the 50 to 70 guests prepared their meals independently.

The communities often become so close that residents lend each other everything from the traditional cup of milk to the family car and occasionally even the money to make monthly housing payments.

Along with community dinners, residents in co-housing developments also share maintenance chores on the communal land they share and, typically, a very eco-conscious approach to living.

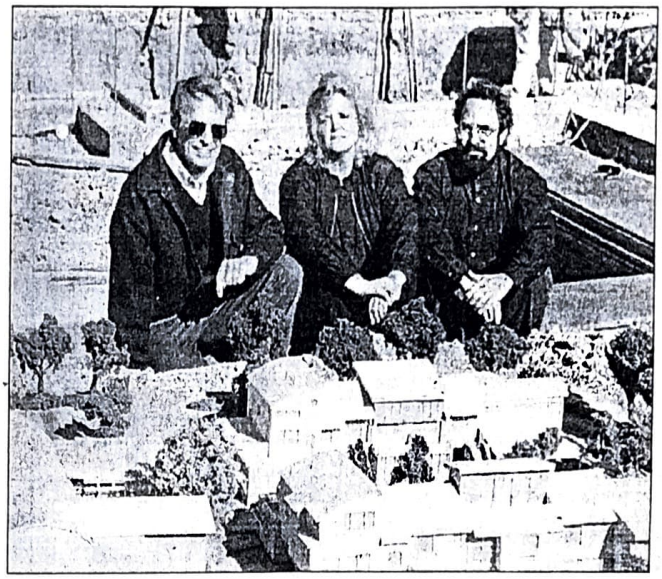
Almost all biodegradable garbage produced by the Nyland residents is dumped into a compost heap that is used in the community garden, where produce is grown for resale to residents.

All property is xeriscaped, reducing the amount of water needed to maintain a yard and cutting down exhaust and noise pollution from lawnmowers. Even the community dinners, which are usually vegetarian fare, reduce the energy that would be used if the 50 to 70 guests prepared their meals independently.

Parking for the residences is usually located on the outer rim of the property, again decreasing noise and exhaust, while also making the community safer for playing children.

Aside from the physical safety, the tightly knit communities also offer a heightened level of security. Like the neighborhoods of yesteryear, neighbors watch over each other's houses and instantly recognize strange people or vehicles.

To many, co-housing may seem to have married modern economic reality and privacy with the commune concept of the 60s. But such comparisons elicit an immediate flinch from anyone associated with co-housing.



Jon Hatch / Boulder Planet

Zev Paiss, Cynthia Symons and Jim Leach with model of future Nomad co-housing development.

Usually, the vast majority of the homes are privately owned, and everyone has very independent lives that happen to intersect in their community, said Kay Abrahams, a spokesperson for the two local co-housing sites.

And the Nomad site even has a special pricing structure that keeps certain units affordable, Paiss said. Seven of the 11 homes are locked in as permanently affordable and city subsidies ensure three units are kept for low-income residents.

The base prices for the Nomad homes run a pretty full spectrum — $80,000 to $265,000 — Paiss said. Aside from making several houses available to potential homeowners with average incomes, the price range also helps serve the higher purpose of increased diversity in the community — a trait lacking in many of today's housing developments.

As Boulder struggles with providing housing for its residents while preserving the scenic beauty everyone loves, more developers may be sitting down at the co-housing table. ❑

WINTER 1997

CoHousing Communities by WONDERLAND

Wonderland Hill Development Company
The Nation's Leading Developer of CoHousing Communities

What is CoHousing?

In an effort to create more sustainable communities that better fit our present-day lifestyles, Wonderland designs and develops a housing option that redefines the concept of "neighborhood." This approach combines the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of community living. Initially developed in Denmark as "living communities," these practical options are known in this country as "CoHousing."

Each household has a private, self-sufficient residence with its own kitchen, laundry, and living facilities. In addition, extensive common facilities are incorporated into the community to make life easier and more friendly for all neighborhood members. Facilities shared by all neighbors usually include a community kitchen and dining room, a child care area, gardens, workshops, and guest rooms. The shared facilities are the most important aspect of CoHousing, as they provide both social and practical benefits not usually found in a typical neighborhood.

Nomad CoHousing Breaks Ground in Boulder



Housing Director Kathy McCormick, Planning Director Will Fleissig, and Future Resident Sali Randal, break ground for Nomad CoHousing in Boulder

Boulder, Colorado

Representatives of Wonderland, the Nomad community, Nomad Players and City of Boulder broke ground December 12 on Wonderland's fifth CoHousing community. The community is a small but exemplary project designed to meet many of Boulder's goals for affordable, pedestrian-oriented and sustainable housing. The project is economically diverse, offering low, moderate and market rate priced housing.

Located just two miles north of downtown Boulder and within walking distance of shopping, restaurants, and Open Space, the community is just a block away from public transportation to downtown Boulder and Denver. As an example of shared resources considered a goal of all CoHousing communities, an addition to the adjacent Nomad Theatre will serve as the common dining and meeting room for the CoHousing community; and when the Nomad Players are holding performances, the space will double as a "Cafe" during intermission. Residents are expected to move in late Summer or early Fall of 1997.

For further information on Nomad CoHousing in Boulder and units still available, contact Marilyn Moses at 303-443-7876 x 106.

May We Share?

A new CoHousing development in Boulder proves that communing is alive and well.

By Tony Perez-Giese

There are those who think that communes reached their popular peak in the Sixties, but a new style of communal living called CoHousing is springing up in Boulder. These residential developments, which combine private and public living spaces, have helped some people solve their growing feelings of social isolation. CoHousing's arrival in Boulder has also helped the struggling Nomad Theater, which has been closed since the summer of 1995, get back into action. But even though this is Boulder, and even though CoHousing borrows heavily from communes, these are the Nineties, not the Sixties.

"Sometimes it's difficult for people to understand that CoHousing is not just a modern version of a commune," explains Zev Paiss, president of the Rocky Mountain CoHousing Association. "I tell them that it's more like a condominium."

Paiss, who has lived in the Nyland CoHousing community in Lafayette for the past four years, is now preparing to move into the eleven-unit Nomad CoHousing community, currently under construction between 15th and Broadway in north Boulder, adjacent to the historic Nomad Theater. Proceeds from the sale of some of the theater's land to the CoHousing group are expected to help reopen the neighborhood playhouse by this spring.

The concept of CoHousing communities originated decades ago in Denmark, its proponents say, but the idea of combining the autonomy of private ownership of individual homes with shared common facilities such as dining halls has slowly begun to catch on in the States. The townhomes are self-contained, allowing for more privacy than in the hippie communes of the Sixties, but residents share common areas and responsibilities such as child care. "The unique thing about CoHousing," says Paiss, "is the ongoing connections among the residents. If a problem bubbles up, you can nip it in the bud because you know everyone personally."

More than 24 CoHousing communities have sprouted up around the country over the past five years; Colorado has at least three, in Littleton and Aspen as well as Lafayette. Paiss describes them as an attempt to re-create the intimacy of the old town neighborhood. "It's almost like having the safety of a gated community without the gates," he says. "Everybody knows each other, and as a result, there's very little crime. Some people don't even lock their doors." In the four years he's been living in Nyland, Paiss says, he recalls only one criminal incident: A burglar broke into several cars parked on the periphery of the development.

Nyland has attracted an economically diverse group, including architects, entrepreneurs and a retired Air Force pilot, says Paiss. And that diversity, he adds, is being specifically encouraged in the Nomad development. Diversity happens almost naturally, say CoHousing proponents, because the Nomad units range in price from $80,000 to $300,000, ensuring that they will attract more than just yuppies. And the originators of CoHousing projects screen applicants by inviting them to community dinners and meetings. "Unless you're completely antisocial," Paiss adds, "you'll fit in."

The Boulder development is scheduled to open this August. In a show of togetherness, residents, developers and members of the Nomad Players conducted an "earth blessing" at the construction site last month. But the marriage between CoHousing and the Nomad Theater is one of convenience as much as ideology. Howard Bashinski, president of the playhouse's board, says he is pleased about the prospect of being neighbors with a CoHousing community. The theater will even share a common dining facility that will be used as a cafe during performances. But he acknowledges that the playhouse's primary goal was to raise enough cash to reopen.

The curtain dropped on the 150-seat theater after the City and County of Boulder put pressure on the group to make renovations in order to meet fire and safety codes. The actual playhouse takes up only part of the land that was donated to the theater group in the early Sixties, so the board decided to sell off the remaining parcel to raise the needed cash. A CoHousing group, which had been looking for a plot of land in Boulder for several years, jumped at the deal.

"We liked the general idea of CoHousing," says Bashinski, "but to tell the truth, we realized that selling to the CoHousing group would be better for us financially" than if the board had sold the land in plots for individual residences. Selling the land to the CoHousing group also helped speed up the sale. "It was the type of project that the city of Boulder could get behind," he explains.

That's because one of the CoHousing movement's primary goals is to create moderately priced housing. "Boulder has a strong commitment to affordable housing," says Boulder planning director Kathy McCormick. "Because of this we supported the CoHousing project as a positive housing solution."

Without support from the city's housing division, all parties say, the sale of the Nomad property could have taken longer to complete. And a main reason for the city's support was that seven out of the eleven Nomad CoHousing units are to be "permanently affordable." Those units have deed restrictions mandating that any resale must be at a price within the income range the unit originally was designed for.

CoHousing projects traditionally have been sparked by groups of people who want to find some economical way to create their own community. And that's made the process slow as potential residents struggle to find builders and wade through the construction process. But the Nomad development marks a change: It's the first one in which a developer has taken the reins from the start. And developers have much more experience in handling zoning laws and finding financial support.

"My previous experience was mostly with building custom homes and planned communities," says Jim Leach, president of Wonderland Hill Development Company, which is overseeing the Boulder project. "CoHousing combines both of these aspects at the same time."

After 25 years of building more traditional planned communities, Wonderland Hill became involved in CoHousing when the Nyland residents approached the developer for assistance in the latter stages of their CoHousing development. The company has been involved with the Nomad project since its inception.

Leach does point out that even though the idea of shared space would seemingly lower the cost of individual units, in fact CoHousing "really isn't a lot cheaper than a traditional home." Leach says that CoHousing groups as a rule tend to demand a higher-quality product, and because of this, the price goes up.

Nevertheless, he says, the demand for CoHousing projects is increasing. In order to meet that demand, Wonderland Hill and other developers have several other CoHousing communities in the works. Zev Paiss contends that the lifestyle and sense of community that CoHousing offers may make such projects more popular than traditional suburban enclaves.

Leach echoes Paiss's optimism, adding that CoHousing has a rich future in part because it's much less threatening than sprawling planned communities.

"Governments like the idea of CoHousing because it's socially progressive and encourages community," he says. "Neighborhood groups like it because the CoHousing residents are community-oriented individuals. The concept sells very well." W



Room for everyone: A model of the Nomad CoHousing project in Boulder.