REAL ESTATE

Cohousing puts emphasis on community

● A Brunswick housing development creates separate residences with a shared community building and land.

By NANCY McCALLUM

Since college, Andrew Wilcox has thought about living in a cohousing community.

Cohousing is based on the idea of creating a community of people living together on shared land, with shared facilities and resources, yet with independent living spaces. It has been done for 25 years in Europe, but it has been much slower to seed in America. The first cohousing community in the United States was created six years ago in Davis, Calif. Since then, dozens of groups have sprouted.

In Maine, several groups have attempted to launch cohousing projects. Two Echo Cohousing Community in Brunswick is the first to break ground, with the first two homes to go up in the fall. Wilcox, 30, will have his own home there.

Wilcox remembers reading a book about cohousing and realizing the social benefits.

"It was just a sense I had then, that buildings and houses weren't really built and laid out for people," he says. "I had a sense that a lot of people were looking for more of a sense of community."

In America, just the geographical layout of building lots contributes to isolation from neighbors, he says. "One of the things I noticed was that people were building their houses so they were driving past each other."

The idea of community is also



Staff photo by Jack Milton

An excavator and a bulldozer grade land in the Two Echo Cohousing Community being built in Brunswick. The first homes are expected to be built this fall.

and friends, they wanted richer connections. "It's not the same thing as having involvement in your daily living," she says.

Besides offering stronger community, cohousing also uses land and resources better. By clustering homes, more land can be left in its natural state. Seventy acres at Two Echo will be placed in a conservation easement.

The Two Echo Cohousing Community, which formed six years ago, (and was known as Greater Portland Cohousing) has sold 13 of its 27 available lots. It is on a 92-acre

SITE WALKS

Two Echo Cohousing has presentations and site walks once a month. For information about these, you can reach Andrew Wilcox at 933-3750.

Portland. It is also close to Lewiston and Augusta.

Another important factor was the town's willingness to consider this relatively new use of land.

supper," she says.

Sharp says one of her projects is going to be to develop a "community car system" to maximize the use of vehicles.

While group members may have similar ideas about what makes a good living environment, they are not bound together by any particular religious, political or social philosophy. "We're not all vegetarians," Wilcox says with a laugh.

The cohousing project has attracted singles, couples, retired couples, two-parent families with children, single parents. The diver-

TWO ECHO TENETS

Here are some of the features Two Echo's members have agreed on:

A common house, which includes a large dining/meeting area, kitchen facilities and play area for children.

A garden space and a field suitable for ball games.

Space for a workshop, a greenhouse and an animal barn.

A pedestrian-oriented interior, free of parked cars and trucks, and open only to emergency and service vehicles.

Carts to be used for moving items and small children between parking lot and service vehicles, homes and the common house.

Nine homes with at-house parking, with preference given to the elderly and disabled.

owners, it is $2,500.

Also, a monthly fee for the homeowners association is required, for management, maintenance and other costs for the common property. That hasn't been finalized yet, but members expect it to be around $100 per month.

When it comes to building, the group has agreed the design should meet a "New England village theme." There are different styles to choose from, so there won't be the cookie-cutter look common to many condominium projects.

"The opportunity to create one's own house is a very positive thing," says Enid. While the ownership structure may differ from the "stan-

Waldoboro.

"We, like so many others, wanted an isolated, rural life in Maine," she says. "That's why we moved here in 1979." It proved to be a bit too isolated, she says. "We realized it wasn't what we'd like it to be."

Although they made connections as single units or duplexes on a 20-acre piece. About 25 sites were looked at by members before the property was purchased.

Brunswick had several selling points. Wilcox, who lives in Monmouth and commutes to Wiscasset, likes the proximity of Brunswick to

mitted us to cluster homes together," Wilcox says. The project is treated as a condominium project. Although it might resemble that concept physically, it differs in its intention. People come here for a reason: to know their neighbors, to interact, to share.

"I think the sharing is an important aspect," says Wilcox. "Having other people you can count on – and they can count on you."

Although there are separate living spaces, there is also a common house, where residents may opt to eat dinner together. This struck a chord with Sharp.

"We liked the idea of sharing

Wilcox, who is single, will share a duplex with Sharp and Marshall. They are planning to have a connecting door. He says that will help both households.

"So when they get older they'll have someone who can pop in and check on them," he says.

The lot prices range between $46,500 and $51,500. The price includes improvements: water, septic, roads. Lot owners also purchase a 1/27th interest in community assets – the roads, common house, land, utility systems, etc. Lot owners also pay a fee called "fair share" for various costs incurred to implement the Two Echo plans. For new lot

dard, members have not had problems seeking bank financing. The options are the same as for any other building project: pay cash; purchase the lot only; seek a construction or a turnkey loan. Wilcox is looking into the Finance Authority of Maine's first-time homeowner program. Sharp expects to build next year; the couple's Waldoboro home is now up for sale.

Two Echo seems to offer the best Maine has to offer: "The people are just wonderful," Sharp says, "and the land was just wonderful."

Nancy McCallum of Kennebunkport is a free-lance writer.

State to celebrate home ownership

From staff reports

AUGUSTA – A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development official will visit Maine Monday to kick off National Home Ownership Week June 7 to 14 and honor the state's commitment to home ownership.

Nicholas P. Retsinas will meet with Gov. Angus King and Maine State Housing Authority Director David Lakari at 9 a.m. Monday to kick off the week. Retsinas will honor Maine's commitment to home ownership, noting that Maine has the highest home ownership rate in the nation.

Retsinas also will tour an Augusta neighborhood where several homes will be rehabilitated under the Partners in Home Ownership HUD designation. Augusta is the first city in Maine to receive the designation.

"This is a week when those of us who are homeowners should reflect on what our homes mean to us and our communities," King said.

King noted that one reason Maine has a high home ownership rate is the work of the Maine State Housing Authority, which finances about one of every five home sales in the state.

"The housing authority has helped 30,000 Maine families become homeowners, he said. "Over the past two years, the agency's financing enabled 3,600 Maine families to become homeowners for the first time."

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