



People Can Become Neighbors Again

by Kelly Everett

A new and unusual kind of “neighborhood” might be sprouting between Silverdale and Bremerton, near the Fairgrounds.

It’s set apart by its very structure: no roads in, pedestrian traffic only, cars park outside, independently-owned units in duplexes, triplexes and individual houses. There are commonly-owned buildings and property such as community centers, gardens and recreational fields.

It’s called “Bartimaeus Cohousing” and it’s a throw-back to an age without cars, when neighbors talked to each other daily and children romped safely, without worrying they’d chase a ball into the street and get run over.

“It’s not a commune” said Barbara Buckham of Silverdale, referring to the 1960s “back-to-basics” movement. “Because all land is not held in common. We each own our own homes, with only some of the land owned in common.” Buckham is one of about 20-25 individuals and couples planning the cohousing project, off Fairgrounds Road just east of and next to Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue Station 41 at Fairgrounds and Old Military Road N.E., between Bremerton and Silverdale.

Although the concept was originally religious, and although Buckham and her group are loosely formed around a nondenominational Christian fellowship, modern cohousing in the United States is chiefly secular. It resembles suburban courts of the 1950s – but the traffic is pedestrian, with cars parked on the perimeter. Pedestrian paths “Keep people from hiding behind their garage doors,” said Chris ScottHanson of Bainbridge Island, a cohousing consultant.

The concept tries to cure a common phenomenon: Neighbors who live next to each others for years, but who remain virtual strangers. “By eliminating cars, we make people walk. They can’t help but make eye contact. People become true neighbors again,” he said.

Making eye contact is the crux of the concept, hence the name Bartimaeus, a man whose sight was restored after meeting Jesus Christ. Buckham said there is a cohousing project on Bainbridge Island and several in Seattle. The neighborhoods often form associations and are self-governed, she said.

ScottHanson said, “I believe this is where we need to move in the future.” Chris ScottHanson is a travelling cohousing consultant with wife, Kelly, as partner. The ScottHansons often live for a while in each cohousing project they’re involved with, then move on. They currently live near but not in the project on Bainbridge. “We just completed the pre-application process with the county for the (new) one in East Bremerton,” he said. “We’re doing a site plan this weekend,” he said when interviewed the week of September 29. “We look at what the group of prospective home owners wants, and try to make sure we’re within the zoning laws of the county or town we’re in.” ScottHanson has been a development consultant since 1976, and has specialized in cohousing since 1988. His wife is actually heading the local project, while he still works on one in Boston.

“Our site (next to the fire station) will have about 25 units in clustered town houses with shared walls, plus a large community building for dining,” said Kelly ScottHanson. “Residents will take turns fixing dinner for the whole neighborhood in the common eating hall.” The average unit will sell for \$150,000 to \$200,000 and be 1,500 to 2,000 square feet in size. “The nice thing about the variability in size and number of units is that the cohousing project is intergenerational – you can house several generations and an extended family in the same project.”

She also said it’s not like the old-fashioned notion of a rustic commune. “You have your own house you can sell,” she said. Also, the plan promotes not only neighborliness, but better air quality (with the cars outside), less noise, and



Nancy Conrad, one of two dozen or more prospective cohousing residents, stands at the seven-acre spot where the unique housing project is planned - off Fairgrounds Road just east of CKFR's Station 41 at Fairgrounds and Old Military Road N.E. (Photo courtesy of Bartimaeus Cohousing)

greater safety with neighbors close enough to watch out for each other. “It’s a lighter footprint on the earth,” she said. “Not as much asphalt, more eco-friendly, yet a sustainable real estate enterprise.”

She listed other places cohousing has sprung up: Kansas, California. “We’ll break ground in two years, move-in in three years.” Although not like the old-style communes, the cohousing project and its residents will act as stewards to nearby Steele Creek and its wetlands, she said. “We’ve already contacted a wetlands biologist,” she said.



[HOME](#) | [COMMUNITY LIFE](#) | [BUILDINGS & GROUNDS](#) | [PEOPLE](#) | [VISION](#) | [CONTACT](#) | [BACK TO TOP](#)