Cohousing, Environmental Justice, and Urban Sustainability

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Several researchers hold that the cohousing movement supports sustainability, but it remains economically restrictive. This condition challenges cohousing's status as sustainable, considering that its financially exclusive nature fails to meaningfully address sustainability's social dimension. Yet, it is doubtful that the cohousing movement set out to create this outcome. When we examine the historical conditions that pertain to multifamily housing, we discover a long-standing pattern of discrimination. For today's cohousing communities, we see that they are dealing with the residual effects of such prejudicial practices. Most of the unfair treatment comes from zoning and lending, but we also see that cohousing has internal challenges that complicate matters. Through employing an environmental justice framework, however, we can parse kinds of responsibility. If planners, financiers, and cohousing communities can remove these barriers, then cohousing can bolster efforts in urban sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

While there are several ways to design cohousing communities, they are usually defined as intentional, multi-residential units that have some socially shared space.[1] For a typical cohousing community, each family has their own private house or apartment, but they often share common areas such as a group kitchen, dining hall, and/or courtyard.[2] The idea is that these environs promote social cohesion, provide a sense of community spirit, ease economic demands through sharing resources, and they lessen environmental impacts through reducing energy consumption and waste, along with opportunities to share transportation and food.[3] Bearing in mind the basic threefold sustainability model that focuses on environmental, economic,

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[1] For a detailed account, see McCamant and Durrett Architects, "Cohousing Is . . . ," McCamant and Durrett Architects, The Cohousing Company, http://www.cohousingco.com/cohousing. Also see Helen Jarvis, "Saving Space, Sharing Time: Integrated Infrastructures of Daily Life in Cohousing," Environment and Planning A 43, no. 3 (2011): 560; Robert Boyer and Suzanne Leland, "Cohousing for Whom? Survey Evidence to Support the Diffusion of Socially and Spatially Integrated Housing in the United States," Housing Policy Debate 28, no. 5 (2018): 1, https://tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10511482.2018.1424724?journalCode=rhpd20.

[2] Jarvis, "Saving Space," p. 568.

[3] Ibid., pp. 560–77.

and social elements, these initiatives hold promise for such efforts, especially for cities.[4]

Although advocates of cohousing argue that it is a sustainable enterprise, an environmental justice critique shows that it falls short when it comes to its social dimensions.[5] Some of its shortcoming are inherent to current practices in cohousing, and others elements stem from long-standing zoning and lending practices that favor single-family homes. Despite having such promise for sustainability, municipalities and financiers have policies and practices that hinder cohousing initiatives.[6] Moreover, there is an extensive history wherein *all* multifamily housing (e.g., apartments, condominiums, quadplexes) arrangements have been marginalized or, in some cases—vilified. In turn, cohousing is caught in the crossfire, subject to these discriminatory effects because it fits the profile of a housing practice that is not for single families. Due to these conditions, cohousing proponents must engage in a long-standing battle.

In select cases, cohousing communities have developed workarounds to succeed, and in other instances they have taken drastic steps to create these intentional communities.[7] Yet, the bigger problem is that people who could use cohousing to improve their lives cannot access it.[8] Within this claim, there are numerous problems that we can reveal, and properly uncovering them will provide a way to work toward their removal.[9] Despite these circumstances, cohousing does favor sustainability, and as such it deserves a place in the literature that aims to uncover how it can best support sustainable living.

Undertaking this task is my purpose in this paper, and it begins by providing the historical conditions that have set the stage for this struggle. Next, I discuss the kinds of impediments that stymie cohousing's progress and employ an environmental justice paradigm to identify the elements that work against cohousing. Through making this assessment, we can better serve cohousing's ability to support socially just urban sustainability. In closing, I make some recommendations for advancing this agenda, along with some insights regarding its broader impacts.

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[4] This paper focuses on cohousing in the United States.

[5] It is worth mentioning that in order to critique cohousing's aims at being sustainable, we need a more robust account of sustainability. I carry out this task later on in the paper.

[6] Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing." p. 1.

[7] For several examples that make this notion apparent, see: Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities*, (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1994).

[8] For example, see Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing," pp. 9–10.

[9] This point is not to say that these issues have not been discussed (at least a broad sense) in the cohousing literature. For example, Boyer and Leland. "Cohousing," pp. 1–14, deals with the topic to some extent. However, they do not examine the subject as an environmental-justice critique of cohousing as a sustainable practice.

COHOUSINGS' HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Through studying the historical conditions that surround single-family versus multifamily residences—beginning in the 1800s—we come to understand that the "battle" for cohousing is one that is deeply entrenched in profit motives that remain conveniently bound to ideology.[10] For example, Kenneth Barr examines the historical conditions that would set the precedent for zoning regulations, noting that by the 1840s, public health officials began calling for building codes.[11] This aspect is significant because it counts as the initial attempt to regulate people's living conditions, a situation wherein we find measures to ensure public health and duties for landlords. Such actions reveal that a municipality could codify multi-family living arrangements. Due to the epidemics during the mid-1860s, Manhattan, Boston, and Chicago implemented such policies.[12]

Before the turn of the twentieth century, tenement reform was a concern for the U.S. Congress, states, and municipalities, and reports detailing the horrific living conditions associated with rental units were widespread in the media.[13] Coupled with public-health aspects, official reports of multifamily residences held that they produce immoral people who subvert good citizenry.[14] Reform efforts soon followed, but some reformers went as far as to push against *all* forms of multifamily dwellings without any concern for their improved quality, arguing that they would have unhealthy and immoral impacts.[15] While implementing controls that would benefit public health are straightforward and seemingly uncontroversial, sentiments that addressed immorality were piggybacked into regulations. This conflation suggested that if you wanted to improve public health of rental units, then you also had to address the "fact" that such living arrangements when against established social ideals of moral living.

Despite such attacks, the lure of New York City apartments changed the perception of multifamily residences, bringing respectability to their image—and investors who would champion their place in the urban landscape.[16] Although apartments

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[10] Kenneth Baar, "The National Movement to Halt the Spread of Multifamily Housing, 1890-1926," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 58, no. 1 (1992): 39. To gain an understanding of cohousing's history as an architectural practice, along with how it fits in with the values, ideologies, and policies that have shaped debates on housing, see Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1994).

[11] Baar, "The National Movement," p. 39.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., pp. 39–40.

[14] Ibid. .p. 40.

[15] Ibid. p. 40. Also see Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), and David Ward, *Poverty, Ethnicity, and the American City, 1840–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[16] Baar, "The National Movement," p. 41.

were gaining social acceptance, the movement against their presence remained constant, holding that their mere design was unwholesome, went against the family structure, and would subject their occupants to an immoral lifestyle that was bent on self-destruction.[17] Compromise was not an option: all multifamily housing would harm single-family homes, bringing property values down through proximity.[18]

While there were legitimate safety and health issues surrounding tenement housing, cities used strict fire codes and height regulations to curb their development, and in some instances they went too far.[19] For example, Baar notes that some municipal officials in major cities called for extensive and costly fire protections for multifamily residences, while private homes and two-family homes would not require the same compliance.[20] These stipulations were attractive to planners in other cities, inspiring similar measures that demanded unnecessary requirements that would make multifamily residences financially inaccessible.[21] The next decade saw several instances wherein planners used zoning as a way to promote single-family homes while prohibiting multifamily dwellings.[22]

In the 1920s, the U.S. Department of Commerce began a nationwide movement for homeownership that backed exclusive zoning for single-family homes that would regulate density.[23] Following this decree, numerous cities across the U.S. were zoned for single-family homes, but builders fought back, and the demand for multifamily dwellings gained momentum.[24] During this time, financial institutions began requiring that loans for single-family residences also have correlative zoning ordinances.[25] That is to say, they would only provide loans for these homes if they were properly zoned. While zoning was not a completely institutionally accepted practice nationwide, its future was on the horizon.

The benchmark case of *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.* would establish a precedent for municipalities, giving them police powers to create zoning ordinances.[26] In turn, they could restrict property owners' rights, institutionalizing local control for the interests of public welfare.[27] In this case, the court held that the village of Euclid, Ohio could put zoning ordinances in place that would prevent Ambler Realty from industrial development, a move that would negatively impact that character of Euclid.[28] This case holds a prominent place in urban planning's

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 41

[19] Ibid., p. 43

[20] Ibid. p. 43.

[21] Ibid., pp. 43–44.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 44. Also see Marc Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

[24] Baar, "The National Movement," pp. 44–45.

[25] Ibid., p. 44.

[26] *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365, 47 S. Ct. 114, 71 L. Ed. 303 (1926). Also see Barr, "The National Movement," p. 46.

[27] *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*; Baar, "The National Movement," p. 46.

[28] *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*; Baar, "The National Movement," p. 46.

history because it eliminates any questions concerning the constitutionality of zoning, but it also provided a way for municipalities such as Euclid to separate kinds of housing.[29]

In addition to the formal powers that this ruling held, it also played a role in setting the tone toward apartments, shaping public opinion on the matter. The language within the decision showed favoritism on behalf of single-family homes, and it painted a picture showing apartments as urban burdens. For example, the court held that

> . . . very often the apartment house is a mere parasite, constructed in order to take advantage of the open spaces and attractive surroundings created by the residential character of the district. Moreover, the coming of one apartment house is followed by others, interfering by their height and bulk with the free circulation of air and monopolizing the rays of the sun which otherwise would fall upon the smaller homes, and bringing, as their necessary accompaniments, the disturbing noises incident to increased traffic and business, and the occupation, by means of moving and parked automobiles, of larger portions of the streets, thus detracting from their safety and depriving children of the privilege of quiet and open spaces for play, enjoyed by those in more favored localities,—until, finally, the residential character of the neighborhood and its desirability as a place of detached residences are utterly destroyed.[30]

Although some of the above-mentioned reasons to rally against multifamily homes lack merit, today's urban landscape shows that similar sentiments motivate planning decisions that deliver the same results, citing harmful effects on traffic, local budgets, and the environment.[31] Moreover, several contemporary researchers hold that the same attitudes that were present throughout the history of multifamily residences remain present in cohousing's struggle for recognition and acceptance. Categorically, cohousing differs from tenements or apartments, but, as forms of multifamily housing, they all share common ground, and we can view the opposition toward them as rooted in the hostile views that emerged against apartments in the 1800s. Understanding how these forces continue to work against cohousing is paramount because it reveals that misuses of power through policy and protocols can harm people and prevent them from living in their chosen manner without unnecessary restriction. To fully understand this view, I examine some of the challenges that contemporary cohousing initiatives face in the following section.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPEDIMENTS TO COHOUSING

The account above illustrates that there was a lengthy effort to suppress multifamily housing, and the same attitudes still exist today. Despite the prevalence of apartments across the U.S., negative attitudes and active opposition toward

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[29] *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*; Baar, "The National Movement," p. 46.
[30] V*illage of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*; 272 U.S. 365, 47 S. Ct. 114, 71 L. Ed. 303 (1926).
[31] Baar, "The National Movement," p. 46.

additional developments remain.[32] For example, in 2006, a report prepared for the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University shows that homeowners often oppose the construction of new apartments on the grounds that they attract criminals, burden public schools, take more from the government while contributing less, decrease property values with their presence, exacerbate traffic, and create problems for parking.[33] In turn, it seems reasonable to think that cohousing will have to fight against the same mentalities that rally against apartments, but it must also contend with people who associate cohousing as hippie communes.[34]

Due to this history, along with the lingering contemporary attitudes described above, we cannot ignore the pattern of prejudice that exists among urban and suburban residents that targets multifamily homes. Robert Boyer and Suzanne Leland make a bold, succinct claim that summarizes how to view the historical conditions that surround contemporary cohousing: "Over the past century, alignments in regulatory, technological, financial, and moral structures have transformed housing into a mass production industry, oriented to serve the profit imperatives of residential developers rather than the complex spatial and social needs of future inhabitants or the community at large."[35]

The significant element that we see in Boyer and Leland's claim is that they recognize that numerous forces remain aligned in a manner that systematically impede cohousing. While this claim could lend support to a conspiracy theory—cohousing's version of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*—the reality is far less dramatic. The outcome wherein single-family homes are the norm comes from a socio-material arrangement that we can piece together from the events described above. Aside from any harmful forces that deter multifamily housing, the established pattern of only recognizing what counts as an acceptable or preferred form of housing is the significant encumbrance. Bearing in mind that the opposition against multifamily housing has a history that spans over two hundred years, it is unlikely that negative attitudes toward multifamily housing will ever be completely eliminated. However, if we can examine the history of how all of the elements that work against cohousing fit together, then we can pinpoint the aspects that we must address in order to dismantle cohousing's systematic marginalization so that would-be cohousing communities can rightly exist.

The problem with engaging in such an undertaking is that the issues are bundled and interdependent. That is to say, while we need to identify the exact ways that cohousing is held back, moving it forward requires that we deal with it in a way

[32] Mark Obrinsky and Debra Stein. "Overcoming Opposition to Multifamily Rental Housing," *National Multi Housing Council (NMHC) White Paper* (2007), http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/rr07-14_obrinsky_stein.pdf.
[33] Obrinsky and Stein, "Overcoming," p. 4.
[34] Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing," p. 6. Also see Josh Lockyer, "Sustainability and Utopianism: An Ethnography of Cultural Critique in Contemporary Intentional Communities," (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 2007).
[35] Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing," p. 1.

that does not discount its connections to other issues. The benefit of thinking about these challenges in this manner is that we can see how each area of concern has its own inherent shortcomings with respect to cohousing, but we can also see how these elements interact. By analyzing how these interactions create barriers, we can move toward a better understanding of the problem. Bearing this point in mind, we can develop ways to remove them so that cohousing can advance. While there are numerous dimensions that contribute to cohousing's limitations, studying the historical conditions above reveal that two of the most influential impediments are power in the form of zoning and the accessible monies that that financial institutions control.

Regarding the former, established zoning ordinances could require changes to accommodate cohousing. While this idea sounds feasible, there is no reason to think that all municipalities will enthusiastically welcome it. Keeping the extensive history of marginalizing multifamily housing in mind, it seems reasonable to think that removing its barriers would demand a considerable amount of technical and legal expertise, along with time and attention. Such requirements might be feasible for people who have the time and resources to attend to such measures, but vulnerable people might be hard-pressed to do the same. Consider, for example, that Boyer points out that zoning ordinances are usually hundreds of pages long, and they often have specific rules for making any changes.[36] Although anyone could access this information, it is unrealistic to assume that people who are living paycheck-to-paycheck could devote time to such an undertaking.[37] Due to such a condition, this is not a realistic option for many of the people whose lives would significantly benefit from cohousing.

In terms of the financial obstacles to cohousing, securing a loan is the final step in long series.[38] The process involves finding (future) community members, agreeing on and selecting the location, securing planning approvals, finding an architect, and hiring a lawyer to address agreements.[39] After community groups deal with all of these affairs, they could still be denied a loan. Without securing funds, there is no chance that cohousing participants could complete the project. Within the scope of this concern, we must examine the practices of lending institutions.

From the outset of such an inquiry, it is important to note that financiers are accustomed to dealing with individuals, not with a group *as* an individual.[40] Moreover, cohousing pushes against lending standards, and the early reactions from these in-

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[36] Robert Boyer, "Land Use Regulations, Urban Planners, and Intentional Communities," *Communities* 168 (2015): 38.

[37] It is worth pointing out that the challenges to cohousing in this paper are non-exhaustive. For instance, some cohousing communities report that the constant turnover in municipal administration makes it difficult to bring a cohousing project to fruition because they have to basically start anew when new people exit and enter municipal government. For more information, see McCamant and Durrett, *Creating Cohousing,* p. 159.

[38] McCamant and Durrett, *Creating Cohousing,* pp. 222–31.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing," pp. 1–15.

stitutions suggest that mainstream acceptance of cohousing is not in the immediate future. In the U.S., for example, cohousing was introduced over thirty years ago, and despite have 165 communities nationwide, it remains a nascent enterprise.[41] In turn, would-be communities are often disappointed when dealing with financiers. Consider, for instance, Doyle Street, a cohousing community in Emeryville, California, ran into difficulties when they initially tried to secure financing.

Fannie Mae took one look at the Doyle Street Cohousing Community's CC&Rs (codes, covenants, and restrictions) and decided that the concept was too new and untried. It flatly turned down the project and banks that had tentatively offered loans to the residents withdrew their offers. At an emergency group meeting, faced with the possibility of being unable to finance the purchase of their homes, the residents decided to amend the CC&Rs to make no mention of the cohousing nature of the project. Even the legal name was changed to Doyle Street Condominiums. While they are free to amend their CC&Rs at any time, at this point, legally, residents have no way to ensure that this project will remain a cohousing community. Although the decision was difficult for the residents, once these changes were made banks were willing to loan on the project—and it is a very high-functioning community to this day.[42]

While the passage above only accounts for an isolated incident, it emblematizes the resistance that cohousing projects could (and probably will) encounter while trying to secure financial backing. Despite such a reality, this passage shows that groups can find creative ways, "workarounds," to bring their cohousing plans to fruition, and Doyle Street Condominiums are not an isolated case wherein they had to develop a clever solution to be able to proceed with their plans. Although they are not a set of condominiums, presenting themselves as condominiums might have helped them gain financial backing. Numerous other cohousing operations have had to develop similar measures or come up with alternative ways to secure loans.[43] Although these groups' innovative efforts contribute to the momentum of cohousing, signaling a humble shift in how communities can establish themselves within the mainstream, one could argue that they should not have to employ clever tactics to break ground. Yet, to advance their goals, one could argue that they must undertake such actions until cohousing becomes a generally recognized and accepted form of living.

Although these communities might accept having to develop cunning solutions to get projects off of the ground, and engaging in such practices might not concern members that much, there is no good reason why they should not be allowed to engage in a manner of living that does not have a negative impact on neighboring

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[41] Ibid., p. 3.

[42] McCamant and Durrett, "Cohousing," p. 149.

[43] For several instances of how cohousing can secure financing, see Jerome Garciano, "Affordable Cohousing: Challenges and opportunities for supportive relational networks in mixed-income housing," *Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Development Law* (2011): 169–92.

residents. This process should include the ability to freely use "cohousing" in a community's name, assuming that such elements bear weight when it comes to how financial institutions make decisions. One would not be wrong to claim that examples such as the Doyle Street Cohousing Condominiums were practicing a mild form of chicanery through gaming the system. That is to say, they are not *actually* a complex of condominiums. They merely adopted the title to achieve their goal. Though they could not be true to their name, they did not do anything that is seriously morally questionable. While assigning blame in these cases will not do much to benefit cohousing, accountability should rest with the planners and financiers because they are participating in the continuation of an injustice that spans centuries, if one considers that the harms mentioned above concern all multifamily dwellings (e.g., apartments), which includes cohousing.

The problem here is that the Doyle Street Cohousing Community wanted to establish their formally recognized identity as a multifamily living arrangement, an identity that is separate from the identity of a complex of condominiums. For instance, referring back to the description of a cohousing community during the introduction, we see that cohousing is about more than a traditional multifamily residence, but it is also about genuine and robust community living wherein members depend on each other and act in concert to support sustainability. It is a lifestyle that challenges the norms and practices of the mainstream. A complex of condominiums does not have the same essential characteristics. Through denying financial backing to the Doyle Street Cohousing Community due to their name, a situation that was dismissed when they changed it, these institutions played a role in denying the formal moniker of identity that would allow them to be recognized as a social group with a set of shared values, assuming that such a factor carried weight in the eyes of the financier. Although this point is minor when considering that the group eventually formed, it reveals that the dominating power structures do not give the same considerations to different kinds of living arrangements.

Denying a group the ability to be formally recognized is problematic because it excludes people from the basic right to be socially recognized, a right that is unquestionably given to residents who live in single-family homes. Denying cohousing communities such a fundamental ability creates a power differential, wherein groups such as single-family home owners remain privileged. To create the conditions that would give multifamily homes the same considerations that single-family homes receive, one can argue that formal recognition is a necessary and essential step because it puts them on the same playing field as everyone else. Despite this reason for recognition, one could argue that groups such as Doyle Street are not engaged in a battle for recognition *per se*, but they are simply a group of upper-middle class people who did not get the lenders to bend to their desires. Although this is a strong claim, it does not dismiss the fact that the pattern behind such examples is a problem. As long as the dominant social group remains privileged, then it is challenging to dismiss the claim that there is an unfair predilection at play. This reason is paramount because it deals with self-determination,

social and political associations, quality of life, and the ability to live ethically with respect to environmental commitments to the nonhuman world.

What is more, through maintaining this power differential, municipalities and financiers prevent other people of lower socio-economic status, marginalized groups, and vulnerable populations from living in a cohousing community (a notion that I explore later in this paper), considering that it is not a feasible option that, one could argue, might exist if there were not historically rooted impediments that deter multifamily housing. Resolving these issues, however, entails that we examine the complicated nature of the conditions associated with housing.

For instance, one issue is that cohousing's impediments are often intertwined, which makes it difficult to pinpoint issues such as culpability. To give these topics adequate attention, in the following section, I employ an environmental-justice paradigm to reveal how we can understand the impediments of contemporary cohousing as they are understood in the chronological history of zoning injustices. The motivation behind this move is to show that there is an additional layer of depth to the issue at hand—that the zoning and lending practices that pertain to cohousing are merely symptomatic of a larger injustice.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND COHOUSING

We could build a strong case holding that the people who advocated for discriminatory zoning practices throughout the history of planning acted unjustly, and the effects of these actions had detrimental and lasting impacts that continue to harm people in the present. For example, Joseph Schilling and Leslie Linton—in an article published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*—exhibit that while separating residential districts from industrial settings had benefits for public health, the long-term effects of *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.* show that separating residential and commercial zones inhibits physical activities such as walking, a consequence that does not benefit human health.[44] They argue that the historically rooted zoning ordinances and land-use regulations hinder planners' ability to develop mixed-use neighborhoods, along with the necessary infrastructure that would bolster healthy lifestyles that would include walking and cycling.[45] Due to this outcome, they side with the increasing consortium of legal experts, urban planners, municipal officials, and public health experts who champion for planning designs that facilitate physical activity.[46]

Following the work of Schilling and Linton, Sacoby Wilson et al. argue that inequities, rooted in the established traditions of zoning and planning as mentioned above, have contributed to several discrepancies in the distribution of resources between

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[44] Joseph Schilling and Leslie Linton. "The Public Health Roots of Zoning: In Search of Active Living's Legal Genealogy," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 28, no. 2 (2005): 97.

[45] Schilling and Linton, "Public Health," pp. 100–01.

[46] Ibid., p. 97.

wealthy and poor neighborhoods.[47] They point out, for example, that lower-income communities often lack access to city parks, green spaces, recreational facilities, and pedestrian friendly areas.[48] These actions have led to harmful public-health outcomes such as increased risk of cardiovascular disease, among many others, raising concerns for environmental justice.[49] Due to these conditions, there is an increasing body of literature that focuses on developing policy-oriented solutions to these problems, but it excludes the issues that cohousing communities face.[50] In turn, we must reveal the unique conditions that make cohousing a special case for environmental justice thorough examining the power dynamics that presently impede cohousing's ability to flourish and the reasons for its limited availability as a housing option for numerous people who would benefit from it. To undertake this task, a robust account of the conditions for environmental injustice illustrate exactly why zoning and lending practices, along with the motivations behind co-housing, are areas of concern.

For instance, Robert Figueroa argues that conceptions of environmental injustice include the unequal distribution of harms and benefits to physical (and mental) health, but he also holds that we must consider harms to culture, heritage, and tra-ditional forms of knowledge.[51] While most accounts of environmental justice focus on concerns as they relate to distributive justice, Figueroa goes an additional step, arguing that an environmental injustice has occurred when policymakers exclude marginalized groups from having a voice in decisions that could harm them.[52] That is to say, if decisions are being made that will harm people, then there is a strong case that those people should (at minimum) be included in such decisions. If we use this paradigm to assess the history of planning, we could argue that there is a deep-seated environmental injustice that has been ongoing since at least the 1920s. For instance, in numerous instances across the U.S., zoning for multifamily hous-ing has put poor people at risk for environmental harm.[53] Environmental justice and zoning has been discussed at length in the brief history of the environmental justice movement.[54] However, if we give credence to *participatory* measures, then

[47] Sacoby Wilson, Malo Hutson, and Mahasin Mujahid. "How Planning and Zoning Contribute to Inequitable Development, Neighborhood Health, and Environmental Injustice," *Environmental Justice* 1, no. 4 (2008): pp. 211–16.

[48] Sacoby Wilson, Malo Hutson, and Mahasin Mujahid, "How Planning and Zoning," p. 213.

[49] Ibid., pp. 211–16.

[50] For an example, see Lauren Rossen and Keshia Pollack. "Making the Connection between Zoning and Health Disparities," *Environmental Justice* 5, no. 3 (2012): 119–27.

[51] Robert M. Figueroa, "Evaluating Environmental Justice Claims," in Joan Bauer, eds., *Forging Environmentalism: Justice, Livelihood, and Contested Environments* (Amonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 360–76.

[52] Ibid., pp. 360–61.

[53] For a detailed account of environmental injustice and zoning for such cases, see Juliana Maantay,"Zoning Law, Health, and Environmental Justice: What's the Connection?" *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* 30, no. 4 (2002): 572–93.

[54] For example, see Maantay, "Zoning Law," pp. 572–93. Also see Wilson et al., "How Planning and Zoning," pp. 211–16.

we must concede that environmental injustice in the form of zoning for multifamily housing demands additional attention.

Keeping this notion in mind, employing Figueroa's environmental justice paradigm reveals that these policies were unjust in 1920—and they remain unjust today. This point is significant because ignorance of environmental justice does not relieve us of its demands, and this view extends to the planning decisions in the past, and it applies to present situations. While this point is extreme, it is not without precedent in contemporary applied ethics. For example, researchers in animal ethics have long embraced the pattern of this argument to defend against the mistreatment of nonhuman animals, that ignorance of the harm does not entail that we have morally acted in our human-nonhuman relations.[55] If harming animals is wrong today, then, one could argue, it has always been that way. Along the same lines, ignorance of the conditions for environmental injustice in planning does not eliminate the possibility that it has not occurred. To amend such troubled situations, the distribution of harms and benefits must be addressed, and injured or would-be harmed parties must be meaningfully included in the policy decisions that could cause harm to them. This is the case if we stick with Figueroa's requirements for environmental justice.

When it comes to environmental justice and cohousing, the pattern behind many of the above criticisms lend themselves to these situations, suggesting that municipalities should address them to set things right. This point entails that planners who oppose cohousing should change their public attitudes and behaviors toward cohousing, and these communities ought to receive meaningful consideration and equitable treatment when it comes to zoning practices. Moreover, people who want to live in cohousing communities should be included in decisions that pertain to zoning as it affects their ability to live in a manner that includes topics such as free association and self-determination, among others. Yet, in addition to these kinds of concerns, there are also the issues that pertain to mental and physical health, along with cultural connections and community spirit, that are associated with cohousing, which are not options for marginalized groups, vulnerable populations, and socio-economically challenged people who could benefit from cohousing if they could live in such a manner. What is more, through keeping a closed mind about established zoning ordinances, municipalities are prohibiting people who want to take up cohousing as an ethical way to live through limiting housing choices.

Through creating zoning ordinances that favor one kind of housing, municipalities could have forced unnecessary hardships on to groups that could have benefitted from the sustainable lifestyle that is inherent to cohousing. Yet, making this claim is challenging, considering that it relies on proving that what does not exist could

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[55] For instance, see Hilde W. Nagell, "Moral Co-responsibility in Food Production and Consumption," in Matthias Kaiser and Marianne Elisabeth Lien, eds., *Ethics and the Politics of Food: Preprints of the 6th Congress of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics,* EurSAFE 2006, Oslo, Norway, 22–24 June 2006 (Wageningen, Netherlands: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2006), vol. 6, pp. 143–47.

have been beneficial for marginalized or vulnerable groups. However, if traditional zoning did not have a predication toward single-family homes, then there would not be a need to make this case. If cities want to set things right, or reverse this situation, then they must revisit the protocols that govern zoning, ensuring that zoning is not geared toward single-family homes in a way that harms and deters traditional or nontraditional multifamily residences. This point seems straightforward, but one could argue that simply changing zoning ordinances will not have a significant impact on the damage that has already been done, especially considering that entire cities have formed.

This is a fair comment, but it is unreasonable to ask today's planners to pay for the planning sins of their fathers. Although this point weighs against culpability, it does not dismiss concerns about restorative measures that could alleviate harms that stem from planning's history. If municipalities want to seriously consider this notion, and take active steps toward embracing housing that inherently supports sustainability, then they could develop their own projects or engage in (ethical) public-private partnerships that would facilitate affordable and inclusive cohousing. A claim such as this one might be a bit extreme, but it is an idea that favors environmentally just zoning and urban sustainability. While the points above indicate the kind of thinking that is necessary to deal with these kinds of issues on the side of planning, there are also concerns that affect the integrity of cohousing from within its practice that require attention.

For instance, numerous cohousing advocates and researchers focus on its design as a way to advance sustainability.[56] Their use of the term *sustainability* is not merely a selling point, but it is a central, inherent dimension of cohousing. Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, the architects who coined the very term "cohousing," included the term in the subtitle of their book, *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities*.[57] When examining how they use the term, their engagement with it goes beyond a superficial nod. They employ it in a multiplicity of ways, exhibiting that it is a foundational tenet of their building principles. Consider, for example, that they rely on the term with regard to construction, design, and, perhaps most importantly, the groups' motivations for wanting to live in a cohousing community.[58]

By making these claims, they subject cohousing to the same environmental-justice criticisms of sustainability, holding that the social pillar must be inclusive of all people instead of focusing on isolated aspects such as carbon reduction. Consider, for instance, the criticisms of sustainability from Julian Agyeman, Robert Bullard, and Bob Evans that challenge myopic conceptions of the term that highlight environmental considerations while neglecting social justice: "Our interpretation of sustainability is that its focus should be to ensure a better quality of life for all

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[56] For example, see McCamant and Durrett, *Creating Cohousing*. Also see Jarvis, "Saving," p. 573. [57] McCamant and Durrett, *Creating Cohousing*.
[58] McCamant and Durrett, *Creating Cohousing* p. 319.

and that this should be done in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems."[59] Applied to cohousing, environmental assessments suggest that they can reduce harmful impacts to the nonhuman world, outcomes that speak to the ecological aspects of sustainability.[60] Yet they must provide the same kind of consideration to all three elements that go into sustainability's conception.

For instance, while environmental considerations maintain a strong presence in many cohousing communities, Boyer and Leland indicate that there is a discrepancy between the people who actually live in cohousing communities and the people who would like to live in them, a notion that shows its exclusive nature.[61] For instance, the majority of people who live in cohousing communities are generally upper-class, highly educated, liberal, white people, mostly women. By comparison, in survey of 1,000 people living in 121 cohousing communities, non-whites only make up 5.2 percent of residents.[62] Yet, a survey about interest in cohousing with 825 valid responses shows that white people did not favor cohousing more than respondents of other races or ethics groups, and the same can be said about people with different levels of education, gender, or age groups.[63]

Although one could argue that racism is not typically associated with liberal values, disparate impacts hold that motivations and intentionality are not elements that we must consider.[64] Instead, through focusing on outcomes, we can detect systematic racism that might otherwise go unnoticed. When examining Boyer's and Leland's survey, this aspect cannot be ignored, unless we want to reframe cohousing as an environmentally progressive housing philosophy instead of a sustainable undertaking. However, if we want to label such efforts as *meaningfully* sustainable, then they must take the necessary steps to deliver an outcome that moves toward just sustainability. To say that cohousing is sustainable, we must confront the worries that pertain to all multifamily housing as outlined earlier, but in order to advance cohousing as a sustainable enterprise, this concern requires attention *and* action, increasing its accessibility to all people.

Addressing these points requires action on two fronts. First, they should continue to develop workarounds so that cohousing becomes a realistic option for

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[59] Julian Agyeman, Robert Bullard, and Bob Evans, "Exploring the Nexus: Bringing together Sustainability, Environmental Justice and Equity," *Space and Polity* 6, no. 1 (2002): 78.

[60] It is worth mentioning that very few studies have been conducted that measure the ecological foot-printing of cohousing, but preliminary research suggests that cohousing initiatives do lean in this direction. For more information, see Matthew Daly, "Quantifying the Environmental Impact of Ecovillages and Co-housing Communities: A Systematic Literature Review." *Local Environment* 22, no. 11 (2017): 1358–77.

[61] Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing," p. 10.

[62] Ibid., p. 5. Also see 12 Cohousing Resident Population data collected by the Cohousing Research Network, and Angela Sanguinetti, "Diversifying Cohousing: The Retrofit Model," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 32, no. 1 (2015): 68–90.

[63] Boyer and Leland, "Cohousing," pp. 8–10.

people who would want it. To cohousing's benefit, researchers who have studied cohousing have determined that creating multifamily living arrangements that are inclusive have more success if they retrofit preexisting structures rather than build from the ground up.[65] Second, they must work toward removing the municipal and financial barriers that systematically exclude people from cohousing. The first concern is straightforward, and several cohousing communities deserve praise for engaging in cohousing projects that increase inclusivity.[66] A countering argument could hold that cohousing is a nascent enterprise that needs time to deal with its internal issues. Although there is some weight to that rebuttal, it does not release cohousing communities from the charge that their efforts toward sustainability fall short when it comes to its social dimension. This point is not meant to belittle their efforts toward sustainable living. On the contrary, they are developing a manner of living that makes real social and environmental progress. Yet, if they do not correct the problem, then their inactions imply that they value environmental aspects over concerns for other people.

Elsewhere, I argued that such actions are subject to the problem of moral prioritization.[67] In accordance with this argument, people who make decisions in urban affairs such as housing practices must consider the interests of vulnerable people and the public over the anthropocentrically determined interests of nonhumans.[68] Such measures are by no means absolute. There are cases wherein it would seem like one was acting for nonhumans, but such actions could actually be in the long-term interests of humankind.[69] This approach also applies to cohousing initiatives, and failing to prioritize interests in this manner opens cohousing's leaders to these complaints. However, this criticism should benefit cohousing communities, nudging them toward developing environmentally just pathways toward the progress that they are making in the world. Indeed, they do deserve praise for working to reshape the power structures over housing, but they should also justly reshape the power dynamics that guide the process. Through engaging in these actions in such a manner, cohousing can work toward increasing inclusive mainstream accessibility, ushering in a manner of living that supports environmentally just urban sustainability.

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[64] The United States Supreme Court formulated disparate impacts in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424, 91 S.Ct. 849, 28 L.Ed.2d 158 (1971).

[65] To gain insight into this condition, see Angela Sanguinetti, "Diversifying Cohousing: The Retrofit Model," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 32 no. 1 (2015): 68–90.

[66] For example, there are several cohousing communities that have made progress in this regard. See Jerome Garciano, "Affordable Cohousing: Challenges and Opportunities for Supportive Relational Networks in Mixed-Income Housing," *Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Development Law* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 169–92.

[67] For example, see Shane Epting. "On Moral Prioritization in Environmental Ethics: Weak Anthropocentrism for the City," *Environmental Ethics* 39, no. 2 (2017): 131–46.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

TOWARD A WAY FORWARD

Researchers predict that upticks in urbanization will continue, claiming that the world's cities will steadily increase their numbers.[70] Such actions will inevitably strain ecosystems and burden nonhuman species.[71] Though engaging in practices that favor the nonhuman world, we can lessen the ecological impacts of this trend. Bearing in mind that sustainability at the local level supports global efforts to combat climate change, cohousing deserves attention for its attainable ambitions and record of success. In this regard, cohousing works. Planners and financiers who stand in its way are not only blocking people's ability at self-determination for sustainable living, but they also hinder global efforts. Although cohousing has its flaws, these problems could probably disappear if given attention. If cohousing is to play a role in advancing global sustainability, then concerted efforts that involve municipalities and communities can help.

This point suggests that it is imperative that planners assist residents in creating cohousing communities. Yet, leadership in planning could go beyond acting in a way that is merely ethically defensible, but they could act in a manner that is ethically proactive, meaning that urban planners and municipalities should examine and perhaps change their motivations. Engaging in such actions could not only help cohousing initiatives, but they could also create the possibility wherein people could develop innovative solutions to problems in urban housing. These solutions, of course, should begin from a position that focuses on justice. Although this notion might seem a bit extreme, it is not completely without precedent.

Consider, for instance, that in the realm of transportation planning, Karel Martens argues that instead of planning for the future, based only on predictions, planners should base their concerns on justice.[72] Although this point might sound practical to philosophers, it challenges traditional approaches in transportation planning. It calls for a fundamental shift in how we ought to think about the reasons that underpin major decisions that will affect the quality of life for urban dwellers. If we were to apply Marten's approach to the realm of housing, aiming for justice, then such a reorientation could bolster efforts at creating the just conditions that could facilitate forms of housing that allow for alternatives such as cohousing. That is to say, cohousing could only be one possible outcome that could develop through encouraging approaches to housing that complement other forms of multifamily housing and traditional single-family homes.

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[70] Luis Bettencourt and Geoffrey West, "A Unified Theory of Urban Living," *Nature* 467, no. 7318 (2010): 912–13.

[71] To explore this issue in great detail, see Robert Kirkman, *The Ethics of Metropolitan Growth: The Future of our Built Environment* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

[72] Karel Martens, *Transport Justice: Designing Fair Transportation Systems* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[73] Julian Agyeman, *Sustainable Communities and the Challenge of Environmental Justice* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p. 2.

Through embracing an opportunity to become trendsetters rather than simply removing impediments, municipalities could work with community groups (including cohousing advocates) to help configure cities so that they support urban sustainability. Julian Agyeman points out that sustainability, as a concept, emerged from top-down governmental structures, international committees, and NGOs, while environmental justice arose from grassroots movements, mostly engaged in active battles.[73] In turn, there is a certain preexisting tension between the activists' efforts and bodies in and of power, and we could look at cohousing as an attempt to relieve it—a feat that will require genuine urban leadership.

Lewis Gordon has recently argued that citizens come before cities, and that attaining *true* citizenship requires that residents become politically engaged.[74] While it might be common to view pathways to this kind of citizenship rather narrowly, gained only at polls, political action can take numerous forms. Engaging in a longstanding battle to live unencumbered certainly meets this criterion. Although such actions do not resemble "radical" tactics, these practices warrant this description. There is nothing more fundamental than changing something at its core, its essential foundation. Housing and the manner wherein ones chooses to live—this is an intimate setting that allows a person space to dwell and to shape relations with his or her family and society. If people are willing to reshape the structures that shape them, then this is a revolution.

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[74] Lewis Gordon, "Cities and Citizenship," *Kettering Review* 34, no. 1 (2017): 43.