



Architect Chuck Durrett, left, describes the amenities of Fair Oaks EcoHousing, a cohousing community that recently broke ground along Fair Oaks Boulevard. Cohousing allows community members to buy individual units within a village-like community. Marty Maskall has been working to make the project a reality for more than a decade.

*Photo by Louise Mitchell*

#### BUSINESS & REAL ESTATE

## They've spent years building their ideal community. Now they just need the homes constructed

By Ed Fletcher [efletcher@sacbee.com](mailto:efletcher@sacbee.com) November 15, 2017

More than two dozen people converged on a grassy field in Fair Oaks this month to symbolically dig into the ground beneath their future neighborhood.

Unlike most groundbreaking ceremonies, they didn't have matching hard hats emblazoned with a corporate logo. The shovels were a bring-your-own hodgepodge, and only one politician showed up. After posing for the requisite pictures, participants went to a nearby restaurant to celebrate and break bread.

They'd better get used to sitting across from each other.



The future residents of Fair Oaks Eco-Housing will live in a "cohousing" or intentional community of private homes clustered around [some common buildings](#), amenities and a shared ethos.

"This will be more like a village where we all know each other," said Pat McVicar, a retired state aging administrator who bought one of the 30 units.

There are 148 cohousing communities across the country, most in the eastern and western United States, according to a directory maintained by the Fellowship of Intentional Communities. Six already operate in the Sacramento region; the planned community in Fair Oaks and another in West Sacramento would bring the local total to eight.

In addition to the residential units, the Fair Oaks Eco-Housing complex will include a 3,800-square-foot clubhouse, shared pool, vegetable gardens and an orchard. The project, on 3.7 acres bordered by Fair Oaks Boulevard and New York Avenue, has an estimated completion date of early 2019.

The private residences include 12 flats and 18 townhouses, with units ranging in size from 934-square-foot, two-bedroom, one-bath flats to 1,726-square-foot town houses with four bedrooms and two baths. Three units remain unsold. Bardis Homes, which recently built The Mill at Broadway project, is developing the project.

“Although individual homes have all the traditional amenities including private kitchens, residents may share meals in the common house several times a week,” future resident Mary Claus wrote in one of several posts on the [community website](#). Claus worked in newspapers and for the state before retiring in 2004.

Perhaps the most jubilant during the Nov. 3 groundbreaking was Marty Maskall. A longtime community activist, Maskall went public with her “Sacramento Suburban Cohousing” plan in 2005. Along the way, Orangevale residents rebuffed one location and some buyers have come and gone.

Slowly, she cobbled together a community. Then came the tall order of getting financing for the project. Maskall said they contacted 50 banks before getting to yes.

Maskall wasn’t alone for the ride.

Katie McCamant, a national cohousing consultant, author and resident of the 34-unit Nevada City cohousing community, served as the project’s consultant. Her husband, Chuck Durrett, was the architect.

More importantly, as additional future residents put down deposits, they joined in the effort to get Fair Oaks Eco-Housing built and establish a community along the way. The group met monthly to plan activities and hash out the rules of the community.

“Pet policy, that was a big one. It took three meetings,” McVicar said.

McCamant said cohousing reverses the long American progression toward larger homes and less connected neighborhoods.

“For the last 50 years, that is what we’ve seen. Houses just get bigger and bigger,” McCamant said.

While not necessarily diverse racially, the future residents come from a wide swath of professional backgrounds, according to their profiles on the community website. Among them are Al Lampell, a retired engineer who volunteers as a mediator; Gina Massey, nurse and owner of an assisted living facility; and Chris Haviland, a computer engineer.

Some plan to move from across town. Others are selling homes across the country to join the community and be closer to family.

Tai chi instructors Jan Szostek and her husband, John, an actor, are moving from Evanston, Ill. They looked across the country for an intentional community that was a good fit until they found Fair Oaks Eco-Housing.

After 20 years as a biotech recruiter, Joy Reichard got a master’s degree in women’s spirituality and a certificate in hypnotherapy. She has begun practicing as a reiki master, a practitioner of alternative medicine.

“I will know my neighbors,” Reichard said. “I will have neighbors that I can support and will support me.”

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## COHOUSING IN THE SACRAMENTO REGION

- Muir Commons, 2222 Muir Woods, Davis: Built in 1991, Muir Commons was the first community built in U.S. to follow the cohousing model.
- Southside Park Cohousing, 434 T Street, Sacramento: 25-unit community built in 1993 is highly walkable.
- N Street Cohousing, Davis: N Street was a standard subdivision until neighbors began connecting yards in 1986. Community is now 19 homes.
- Glacier Circle, 2358 Glacier Place, Davis: Built in 2006, this senior community has 8 units.
- Nevada City Cohousing, 200 Redbud Way: 34-unit community was built in 2005. Six of 10 acre parcel is open space.
- Wolf Creek Lodge, 800 Freeman Lane, Grass Valley: 30-unit senior cohousing community on 8 acres.
- [Washington House](#): Community planned at Fourth and G streets in West Sacramento.
- Fair Oaks Eco-Housing: Community planned at New York Avenue and Fair Oaks Boulevard.

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