

Overview of Woodard Lane Cohousing – March 29, 2016

Request to amend the Planned Residential Development

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“Cohousing offers promising solutions to many of today’s challenging social and environmental concerns” states a national cohousing organization. “Cohousing is a cooperative, intentional neighborhood characterized by private dwellings, common facilities, and persons consciously committed to living as community. The physical design encourages living lightly on the land and facilitates social contact. Typical common areas include a kitchen, dining area, workshop, library, laundry, guest rooms, children’s playroom, meeting space, lawn, garden, and walkways with few roads since cars are parked on the periphery of the site. Participation in group decisions, projects, chores, meals, and celebrations is the glue that strengthens the relationships.”

www.cohousing.org

Woodard Lane Cohousing is the first group to implement this vision in Olympia. We have worked together since 2004 to build Olympia’s first Cohousing community which is organized as a Condominium. We are located in NW Olympia on 2.9 acres of land. Our first members moved in after the City of Olympia approved the original 3 fourplexes and issued Certificates of Occupancy on April 29, 2010. Now we have almost completed building fourplex #4 and the permanent Common House with a duplex on top. Soon the six new homes and our old temporary Common House will house 7 families, and we will range in age from 1 to 85.

We are proud to live in a community that fulfills City of Olympia planning goals for residential density and green living within an urban area. OMC Section 18.56.020 prioritizes building to the maximum density (we will soon house approximately 36 adults and 11 children) and using a small footprint per home (for us, about 550 sq. feet) to maintain as much green space as possible. We have also saved building space by building a Common House. This is large enough to meet individuals' infrequent needs rather than equipping each home to meet these needs, such as family gatherings, overnight guests, meetings for the neighborhood as well as cohousing, doing laundry, and sharing meals. For more details, you will find at the end of this overview a list describing how we are implementing our goals for living lightly on the land, conserving energy and resources, encouraging social interaction, and respecting individual differences and privacy.

To provide the context for this application, a discussion of the physical layout of Woodard Lane Cohousing will be helpful. You can find a map in the attached brochure and elsewhere in this request. Our 2.9 acres are bounded on the east by the the residences lining Thomas Street. To our west is a steep ravine to Schneider Creek. The ravine is unbuildable and comprises .55 of our acres. We are bounded by Woodard Avenue to the south and Muirhead to the north. Both streets enter the area and dead end near the ravine.

To reach us, you would turn west off Thomas and go to the end of Woodard Avenue NW. Our entry is to the right. You first pass through the aisle between two rows of parked cars with 29 total spaces including 6 in carports and 2 handicapped. On your left is a community workshop. At the end of the parking you will walk beside the community

vegetable garden on your right. This wide paved path is also the emergency vehicle access to all homes; a fire hydrant stands at the end. Then the walkway merges with an oval sidewalk that circles the “Common Green.”

On your left is Building A, the Common House with its sweeping, wheel chair accessible entry. There are two private residences on the top floor. As you continue to your left all the way around the circle, you will pass the entrances of four 4-plexes, successively named Buildings B, C, D, and E.

The area of interest to this application is on the north edge of the circle and opposite the fire truck entry on the south side of the circle. Between Buildings D and E, a pedestrian path continues out the northeast corner of the property where it joins the west end of Muirhead Avenue’s public sidewalk. We welcome neighbors walking around our circle on their way between Muirhead and Woodard, and some bring their kids to play in our sandbox with the kids here.

As you walk along this pedestrian path, behind building D to your left is the asphalt in question. It joins our path with the bike storage under building D, which is accessed via a steep slope. It also provides a a curb-free way to load and unload vehicles, whether for wheeled walkers, wheelchairs, dollies, hand carts, or simply carrying bags of groceries without danger of tripping on a curb. Our member with ADA issues and an official handicapped designation lives in building E just adjacent to this curb-free area. The pedestrian path continues on to your right until it reaches Muirhead Street where it connects to the public paved sidewalk in the right of way.

List of Our Goals and Their Implementation

1. Live lightly on the land in a healthy, attractive living space
 - a. Park cars near the road and away from the homes
 - i. Fumes are farther away from people
 - ii. Walking is encouraged
 - iii. Less pavement
 - b. Preserve ground space. Maintain as much green as possible
 - i. Stacked units
 - ii. Foot paths rather than driveways to homes
 - iii. About 550sq' footprint per unit including the 1920 sq' Common House footprint.
 - iv. Landscaped and vegetable garden areas for all to enjoy.
 - v. A large central green yard.
 - c. Take advantage of as much natural light and solar heat as possible
 - i. Each home will have three main walls with windows
 - ii. Lower units will have 9' ceilings for more light
 - iii. The Common House is oriented with south facing windows and south sloping roofs. Units are oriented this way when possible and not shaded.
 - d. Keep natural landscaping
 - i. Keep the native trees and plants around the periphery
 - ii. Use native plants and ferns salvaged (at least 120) from house sites for landscaping.
 - iii. Provide homes for wildlife and birds.

2. Conserve energy and resources

- a. Shared walls and small units to conserve heat
- b. Homes with great insulation and little air loss
- c. Banks of solar panels on south facing roofs . Two buildings have solar water heating systems and two other buildings have electricity generating solar panels that are connected to Puget Sound Power.
- d. One lawn to mow for many to use
- e. One shop for common use
- f. Cooking for large group 1-3 times a week
- g. Shared garden space
- h. Easy, safe, accessible bicycle storage (This was written long before the accompanying request for an asphalt path to the bike storage.)
- i. Shared activity, play, laundry, and crafts rooms
- j. Shared vehicles, boats, and bikes.

3. Encourage social interaction.

- a. An inviting Common House between parking and homes
- b. Pedestrian access to homes so you come face to face with neighbors
- c. Front porches or patios on all homes for congregating
- d. Homes have a public side looking out onto the Common Green
- e. No visual barrier fences
- f. Shared play structures and areas for children (of all ages)
- g. Shared kitchen, dining, fireplace room, dance hall, activity room, laundry, library, meeting room, mail area, children's play areas, and more in the Common House.

- h. Shared outdoor areas, play structures, workshop, bike storage, field, and food garden.

4. Respect individual differences and privacy

- a. Houses will be privately owned as condominiums
- b. A private back or side space and/or decks for each home
- c. Varied and affordable homes to serve differing family needs. (We have done this with creative financing even though our building costs were higher than expected.)
- d. Small homes with larger space shared in common
- e. ADA accessible units