



The Green Door

July/August 2005



The Green Door is a monthly newsletter of sustainable living and real estate geared to present and future homeowners.

Our children may save us if they are taught to care properly for the planet; but if not, it may be back to the Ice Age or the caves from which we first emerged. Then we'll have to view the universe from a cold, dark place. No more jet skis, nuclear weapons, plastic crap, broken cell phones, drugs, cars, waffle irons, or television. Come to think of it, that might not be a bad idea. ~ Jimmy Buffet

EcoVillages & Sustainable Communities

The "Ecovillage" - whether urban or rural - holds the most promising vision for a sustainable future. The ecovillage model is a conscious response to the complex problem of how to transform our human settlements, whether they be villages, towns or cities, into full-featured sustainable communities, harmoniously and harmlessly integrated into the natural environment. The motivation for ecovillages is the choice and commitment to reverse the gradual disintegration of supportive social/cultural structures and the upsurge of destructive environmental practices on our planet. In 1998, ecovillages were first officially named among the United Nations' top 100 listing of Best Practices, as excellent models of sustainable living.

The ecovillage movement, although still in its embryonic stage, is a global phenomenon responding to global issues. Instead of protesting anti-globalism with demonstrations in the streets, consumer boycotts and single issue movements, ecovillagers are quietly building small, sustainable communities. Many people label ecovillagers as "idealists", and dismiss them as irrelevant. The reality is that ecovillagers are the "realists", taking seriously the threats to the planet and our way of life and taking personal responsibility for these problems. It is the traditional way of thinking that is sidestepping the real issues. The almost religious belief in unending economic growth as the solution to our problems is simply delaying the time when serious action will have to be taken. With little or no support from the broader community, ecovillagers are laying the foundation of a new culture which society will eventually embrace, partly through necessity, but also because ecovillage living simply offers far more satisfying life conditions than today's dominant Western model. An ecovillage is, ideally speaking, a microcosm of the macrocosm. It represents, in a very small area, all the elements and all the problems present in the greater society while presenting visible solutions to these problems. How to define an ecovillage and its size is part of the ongoing development process. When people speak of a village they are typically including the residences, the shops, the streets, the parks, workplaces, schools and the people, everything they need to function day to day. But, in this day and age, not even the biggest city is self-sufficient or isolated from its surroundings. Travel, trade and communication networks are essential for the economic and social wellbeing of any large or small village. So could a city subcenter be an ecovillage? The Los Angeles Eco Village (LAEV), which was started in 1993, answers this question quite easily.

"We are a two block neighborhood, spanning over approximately 11 acres. We work to reduce our environmental impacts while raising the quality of neighborhood life. We are a public demonstration of sustainable community development sharing our processes, strategies and techniques with others through tours, talks, workshops, conferences, public advocacy and the media. LAEV is sponsored by CRSP, a nonprofit 501.c.3 community development organization founded in 1980. CRSP's Ecological Revolving Loan Fund (ELF), a community development loan fund, is the source of funds for residential acquisitions. ELF provides loans to those interested in socially and environmentally responsible investments. ELF monies are also being used for basic rehabilitation and ecological retrofitting of the buildings. Approximately 35 neighbors from diverse backgrounds and income levels have moved to the neighborhood intentionally to learn, share their knowledge and to demonstrate Eco-Village processes. Many attend regular community potluck dinners, community meetings, workshops on permaculture approaches to sustainable urban living, community work parties, and provide a variety of public services to the neighborhood and the city at large on a broad range of sustainability areas. About one-half no longer own cars, and a few are starting small ecological cooperative neighborhood based businesses. There is a balance among economic, social and ecological activities and there are many connections among the different activities. A visitor will not see all this activity going on, but one who stays a while will get a feeling for the processes that go into creating a healthy neighborhood."

If we look at the reasons why many of the existing ecovillages were formed we see that they fall into three categories: social, ecological and spiritual. Most ecovillages are initially dominated by just one of these goals, but integrate the other two as they grow. This is a natural evolution as these three aspects of life cannot operate independently.

Many little people, in many little places, doing many little things, are transforming the world." ~ Unknown

The Findhorn Ecovillage, for example, was originally a spiritually based community, but now places significant importance on ecological building. Our own Jackson Place in South Seattle was created for affordable housing, but has evolved into an intentional community for social and sustainable living purposes. Historically, the most common motivation for ecovillages has been the social aspect, exemplified by the co-housing movement which started in Denmark in the 1960's. Co-housing is now a variant of city based ecovillage living worldwide. Today's trends show that the ecological aspect of ecovillages is immersing as their driving force. **Can we wait for governments** to legislate solutions? **Should we wait for corporations** to bring solutions to market? Aren't we still educating leaders to dig deeper and faster into the world's resources? It's up to us to reverse this trend. We need leaders in the community and government who know how to build durable economies and sustainable communities. Ecovillages are dynamic social experiments that are developing and integrating new forms of economic, environmental, and social development. These include: **Appropriate technologies and renewable energy systems ~ Sustainable agriculture and community-based food systems ~ Habitat restoration and stewardship ~ Communication skills, conflict resolution and mediation ~ Group facilitation, consensus decision making, community organizing ~ Mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga ~ Ecological design, green building, and community development ~ Social Responsibility, environmental education and activism ~ Cross-cultural awareness ~ Holistic health, nutrition, and alternative medicine ~ Program and institutional development ~ Sustainable Economics.**

There are hundreds if not thousands of ecovillages around the world and no two are alike. Some have fewer than 15 members; others more than 2,000. Some are intentionally created; some are indigenous villages. Some are predominantly comprised of natives; others have more than 40 nationalities represented. Some are secular; some are religious, most are more "spiritual," with residents following their own unique paths. Check out these websites for some great examples: **Phinney EcoVillage Project** in Seattle www.phinneyecovillage.net/, **The Findhorn Ecovillage** in Scotland www.ecovillagefindhorn.com/, **WindSong Cohousing Community** in Langley, B.C. www.cohousing.ca/cohsng4/windsong/, In Missouri, the **Dancing Rabbit EcoVillage** is getting lots of attention from having been the focus of FX cable network channel's TV series, "30 Days," done by Morgan Spurlock, the "Supersize Me" guy. You can still catch the show on FX, which is Channel 53 on Comcast in Seattle. It's worth a look, quite entertaining but also informative. <http://www.dancingrabbit.org/>, **EcoVillage at Ithaca**, in New York <http://www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us/>.

For More Information on Ecovillages and Ecovillage training please visit these websites:

<http://gen.ecovillage.org/> Global Ecovillage Network, <http://www.villagedesign.org/> Village Design Institute in Washington, <http://www.livingroutes.org/> Living Routes "Study Abroad in Ecovillages", <http://peopleinaction.info/> People In Action, <http://ena.ecovillage.org/> Ecovillage Network of the Americas.

City Repair Action in Seattle City Repair was formed in Portland, Oregon in 1996 by citizen activists who wanted a more **community-oriented and ecologically sustainable society**. In 1785, the Continental Congress passed the National Land Ordinance, which laid a Roman colonial grid over all lands west of the Ohio River. This included all future cities and towns. Public spaces and piazzas occur naturally at the intersection of pathways when communities are allowed to grow organically. The National Land Ordinance both pre-empted the natural development of such places and neglected to provide for them within the mandated grid. In cities based on the grid plan, it is much easier for people to feel isolated and not know their own neighbors. The neighborhood places for communication and gathering that develop naturally in non-grid cities must be specifically planned for in grid cities. The City Repair Project was established to return these important places of communication and participation to our neighborhoods. At City Repair, we see that sustainable communities are built when people work together for mutual benefit. We create and facilitate prototype gathering spaces that can inspire any community to create their own places of gathering. Born out of a successful grassroots neighborhood initiative that converted a residential street intersection into a neighborhood public square, City Repair began its work with the idea that **localization** (of culture, of economy, of decision-making) is a necessary foundation of sustainability. By reclaiming urban spaces to create **community-oriented places**, we plant the seeds for greater neighborhood communication, empower our communities and nurture our local culture. - **PCR** Seattle City Repair is still in its early stages and needs your help. Visit their website and check out the projects page for ways you can get involved. <http://www.cityrepair.info/> Portland City Repair www.cityrepair.org/

The Green Door is brought to you by Cally Fulton and Danielle Johnson, both Real Estate Associates with GreenWorks Realty, Seattle and is written by JR Fulton, Architect and LEED Accredited Professional. To save trees and expand the opportunity to share information, please provide us with your e-mail address and the address of others interested in making their homes more sustainable. If you or someone you know would appreciate our real estate services please call- **Cally Fulton(206)786-5061** or **Danielle Johnson(206)679-0185**
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