



Cohousing: not business as usual

Orangevale's "Save Our Neighborhood" organization opposes a proposed cohousing project on Illinois Ave. because they believe that, like most sprawl developments, cohousing will reduce the value of their neighborhood, bringing them more traffic, more noise, and less privacy. Given the dismal record of conventional sprawl developments in producing those unfavorable impacts and more, who can blame them?

But is cohousing really just more of the same? Typically, sprawl design requires most trips be in a car. Cohousing, on the other hand, is a mini-village -- you know, like the one it takes to raise a child -- and many destinations are within a walk, on the property. These can include live/work space (home offices), day care, meals, meetings and social events. Cohousing therefore produces far fewer auto trips than standard sprawl designs.

Developments like Cohousing reduce congestion permanently, too -- as opposed to road widening which offers only temporary relief. Even the proponents of the Hazel Ave. widening, for example, say congestion will return to current levels in a decade. But we'll be more than \$40 million poorer, then. Wouldn't it be more sensible to build mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods like cohousing instead? Cohousing has lower impacts than sprawl.

Another unspoken objection to more compact development like the proposed cohousing project are worries about its impacts on neighborhood safety. Building a sprawl apartment complex -- and bringing in a lot of strangers -- in the middle of a suburban neighborhood would worry any sensible person. But cohousing is just the opposite of the anonymous condo or rental project, by design. Neighbors get to know each other well enough to design the project and invest together in cohousing even before it's built. CoHousers keep an eye on each other, and their neighborhood, far better than sprawl neighbors. Cohousing is safer than sprawl.

But what about the value of the neighbor's properties? The market says that when people have a choice, they pay premiums for pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhoods, cohousing or otherwise. The most valuable properties in the region (per square foot) are in McKinley Park--a 70-year-old pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, mixed-density development near 30th and H streets. Overall, McKinley Park has about nine dwellings to the acre, but around the park itself, it's much more compact, so not even "high" density lowers a neighborhood's value when it's not sprawl. Other cohousing neighborhoods in the region held their value much better than conventional sprawl

even in previous real estate downturns, so the worry about value might be sensible if what was proposed wasn't cohousing. The market has spoken: Cohousing is more valuable than sprawl.

A less compact sprawl project (perhaps "Save Our Neighborhood's" preferred alternative) would maximize auto trips, minimize safety, and would add no value beyond "more of the same." The recent Regional Blueprint project demonstrates that continuing to build low-density sprawl development will consume all rural land between Sacramento and Shingle Springs, and between Roseville and Auburn in the foreseeable future. Unless we build more compactly, supporting alternative mobility options like walking or

transit we will continue to cast worse health, more traffic, and more foreign oil dependence in the concrete of our infrastructure. In truth, compact projects like the proposed cohousing are the only way to keep more land rural.

The cohousing project's opponents might think twice if they considered the real costs and benefits of this proposal. It is **not** business as usual. Perhaps they would reconsider their opposition in light of the real benefits of cohousing.

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