



7th National Housing Conference

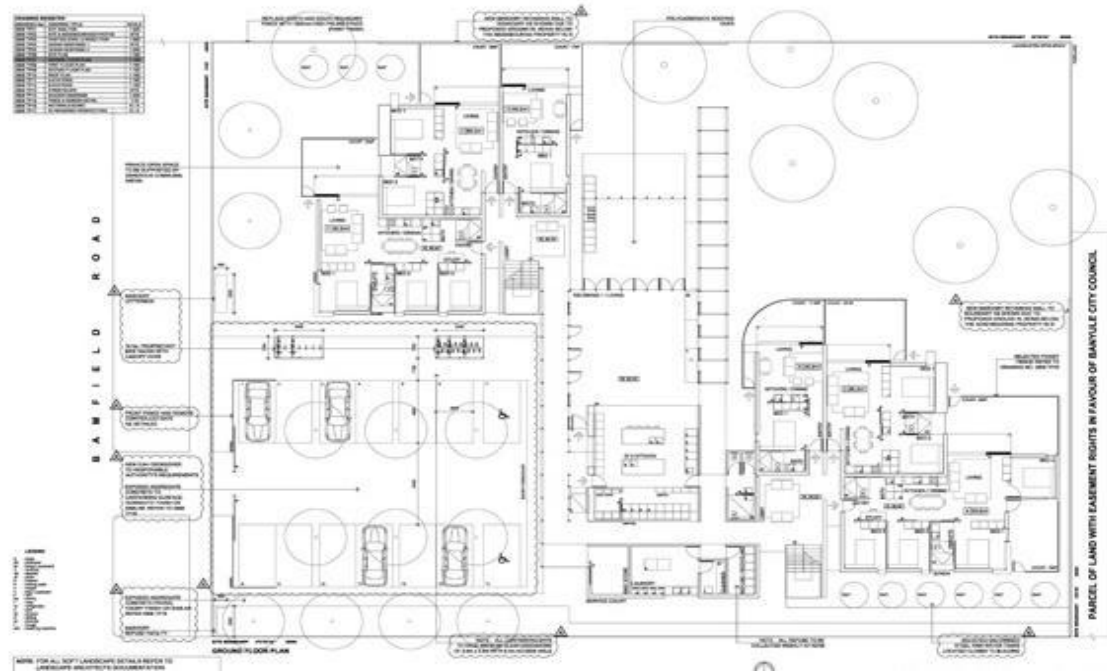
30 October to 2 November 2012

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

People — Place — Productivity



Cohousing: a sustainable and affordable housing alternative?



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Image: Daryl Pelchen Architects

Outline

- About cohousing
- Research focus: sustainability and affordability
- Case study 1: Urban Coup – characteristics and challenges
- Case study 2: Murundaka – characteristics and challenges
- Implications for sustainable and affordable housing
- Opportunities for cohousing

About cohousing

- Origins: Northern Europe 1970s, 5% housing in Denmark (Jarvis 2011); USA 1980s, 4000 households (Williams 2005a)
- Processes, physical and organisational characteristics
- Frequently regarded as more sustainable than standard housing forms (Crabtree 2005, 2006; Meltzer 2005; Williams 2005a, 2005b)
- No pooling of incomes, non-hierarchical, no ideological mandates
- 5 communities in Australian cities (6th underway)



Top, Christie Walk, in Adelaide, received several awards for best practice in sustainable design. Below, Cascade Cohousing in Hobart, Images: Cascade Cohousing and Ecopolis Architects

Research Focus

- Cohousing in the Australian context – limited empirical work undertaken previously (only Meltzer 2005; Crabtree 2005, 2006)
- How can cohousing can contribute to more sustainable and affordable housing in Australian cities?
- Case studies of two communities in Melbourne – interviews with residents/members, professionals involved in the design and development

Urban Coup

- Established 2008, 22 households, target of 30
- Private venture, private equity
- 20% social housing
- Commitment to 'sustainable lifestyle'
- Within 10 km of Melbourne CBD
- All members involved in decision making/design – fortnightly meetings
- Currently: feasibility studies, securing finance



Home is where the hearth is...



Core features and provisional dimensions

Apartments

1 bedroom: Minimum size 50m²,
not including outdoor space

2 bedroom: Minimum size 65m²,
not including outdoor space

3 bedroom: Minimum size 80m²,
not including outdoor space

Car, bike parking, storage

Private car parking: Minimum 8

Car share car parking: (e.g. FlexiCar) Minimum 2

Visitor car parking: Minimum 2

Bike parking: Minimum 80

Storage / workshop: Minimum 45m²

Common / communal space

Minimum 180m²: Kitchen, dining room

(to seat 60 people), bathroom, rumpus room.

Approximately 600m² outdoor space for vegetable gardens etc. This feature could be met through a rooftop garden.

Total space required: between 1200-2000m²



Challenges

- Managing expectations of members: regarding development and member involvement
- Trade-offs between cost, sustainability and location
- Having a 'unifying factor', timeframe

"I think the other thing which I'm seeing is the potential, at the moment, is people's ability to move at different speeds...I will struggle with them and they'll struggle with me if I want to make something happen this year. So I think that those sorts of things, just by having more people, it's complicated."

"If you get five or six people with the right minds together, I think you're probably going to get the same decisions if you have twenty people. You just get to the same decisions a lot quicker...I think sometimes it might have been better just to go down that road. Just get a core group, let's put it together, let's build it, develop it and they will come."

Murundaka



- Completed December 2011, 3000m²
- Heidelberg Heights, 13 km from CBD
- 18 households, approx. 40 residents
- Community housing: owned by CEHL, managed by Earth Co-operative, secure rental tenure
- Rainwater tanks, northerly orientation, reduced dwelling size, recycling/sharing practices
- Only 2 residents involved in design



Images Daryle Pelchen Architects (top), Sophie Jordan (middle), Common Equity Housing Limited (bottom)

Murundaka: Challenges

- “Two masters” in design process: power struggle
- Establishing processes, communication
- Expectations about resident involvement in the community

“We’re very much like a baby... We have been born, we’re six months old. We’re still facing lots of challenges. There was the pregnancy, gestation time, which would be the building time, it had its challenges. But now we’ve got another set of challenges. We’re very human, very human, yeah. It’s good to see these places as a person in some ways.”

“You’ve got the rainwater system but I don’t even think that they’re connected to anything...we could probably use it for everything. But because there hasn’t been that communication; I’m sure people would pay for a filtration system to have rainwater come to their tap and in fact I think they would really like that. So, while we’ve got 80,000 litres plus on site and yet we’re only using it for a garden we don’t water. It’s a bit of a waste of a lot energy and a lot of money.”

Sustainable? Affordable? Do-able?

- Sustainability
 - Achievements: better than standard, sharing significant
 - Challenges in balancing affordability and social/environmental features (Crabtree 2005, 2006)
- Affordability
 - No cheaper for owner-occupiers
 - Interest in the model from housing associations (Crabtree 2005)
 - Private equity with portion of social housing (Interest in the USA - Garciano 2011)
- Making it happen
 - Participation: “People are the biggest problem”
 - Community-building can occur post-occupancy (McCamant & Durrett 2011)
 - External barriers “can be overcome”



*Shared laundry at Murundaka.
Image: Sophie Jordan*

Opportunities for cohousing

- Potential for more affordable and sustainable housing through:
 - community housing sector: as a model, component of private ventures
 - implement features into other non-cohousing developments
- Murundaka as catalyst project
- Respond to shifts in demand
 - to higher density development
 - aged accommodation (Durrett 2005)
- Institutional support exists, but hidden: more obvious support from government, raising awareness



*Communal hutch at Cascade Cohousing, Hobart.
Image: Sophie Jordan*

Thank you!

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