Social Capital in Cohousing: Understanding How One Community Builds Ties

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ABSTRACT

This study is an ethnographic, single case study that examined Blueberry Hill Cohousing (BBHC), an American cohousing community, and both the processes the community uses to foster social capital among residents, and the challenges that have arisen over time within the community. Cohousing, a little-known residential planning model in the United States, centers on creating neighborhoods with abundant social capital. Research shows social capital can be an effective means to provide many benefits to individuals as they manage their daily lives. These benefits can include expanded access to economic opportunities, a lack of loneliness, and emotional support. I undertook this study in response to the significant planning discourses, which link social capital to healthy communities.

In this study, I employed open-ended interviews, observations, and reflective memo-writing. I analyzed data through repeated data coding. Key findings showed activities were more critical than site design in fostering social capital. Living at BBHC did not lessen residents' daily life tasks, given residents' expected participation. Also, social capital is unevenly distributed amongst residents. Factors that influenced an individual's store of social capital included participation in activities and the ability to navigate community norms and processes. Many existing residents expressed satisfaction with the benefits they received, such as sharing child or elder care, socializing, and general social

support. Others cautioned that the lack of socioeconomic and racial diversity may isolate some residents. The study offers several suggestions to facilitate creating supportive communities. These include clearly defining consensus and articulating decision-making processes; incorporating homebuyers' input early in the project development phase; rethinking common area designs; and methods to foster activities that encourage resident interaction. Future research could explore interpersonal relationships in cohousing, linkages between social capital and consensus decision-making, and comparisons between American and European cohousing communities.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

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designs; and methods to foster activities that encourage resident interaction. Future research could explore interpersonal relationships in cohousing, linkages between social capital and consensus decision-making, and comparisons between American and European cohousing communities.

DEDICATION

To my husband Eric and my daughter Chloethiel. Thank you for your extraordinary support and patience. And may Chloethiel know it is never too late to chase your dreams. And in memorial to my parents, Artis and Ruth Young, thank you for teaching me it was not only good to have dreams, but an imperative to try and live them.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

"*Won't you be my neighbor?*" is the opening song title for the television show, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." It summarizes the dream of a diverse neighborhood, where a person could feel comfortable and wanted. In contrast, much of post-World War II auto-centric community designs developed into disconnected islands. Workplaces and shopping and residential neighborhoods composed of single-family homes are spatially disjointed across the landscape (Beatley, 2004; Duany et al., 2000; Meltzer, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Fishman (1987) noted that the houses and their inhabitants exist in communities designed to move vehicles efficiently and do not encourage walking where residents can casually encounter each other. Residents drive into their garages and enter directly into their homes. Backyards are fenced, and shared public space is minimal (Jackson, 1985; Lindstrom & Bartling, 2003; Register, 2006). This type of community design, combined with a hectic lifestyle common in the United States, seems to result in people having few interpersonal relationships to provide emotional and practical daily-life support.

Researchers such as Finlay and Kobayashi (2018), Hansen (2020), and Singer (2018) described many negative outcomes related to the absence of these social connections, including feelings of alienation and loneliness, lack of support to cope with financial or emotional crises, reduced access to emergency childcare, and even increased mortality (Finlay & Kobayashi, 2018; Hansen, 2020). Many communities experience changes over time, as once tightly knit neighborhoods give way to indifference among residents. Policymakers and planning theorists seek to create more socially supportive communities. Meeting the needs of the decreasing household sizes and aging baby-boom population underscores the urgency of addressing these issues (Matthews & Turnbull, 2008; Myers & Ryu, 2008).

This ethnographic, single case study examined the Blueberry Hill Cohousing (BBHC) community and processes its residents used to foster social capital among themselves, as well as the challenges that have arisen over time. The study sought to contribute additional facets of understanding to the social capital theory. Finally, this study provides several specific suggestions that could facilitate longer-term stability for both cohousing and other communities in a range of sectors related to community management, residential site development, and community stabilization.

This chapter provides an overview covering the background of the research problem, definition of terms, theoretical framework, and study's design. It then describes the study's significance.

Background

BBHC is approximately 4 miles from the center of Tysons Corner, Virginia, a busy suburb of Washington, DC, replete with high-end malls and glossy office towers and an ever-growing amount of mixed-use residential developments. BBHC sits on 5.5 acres with 19 brightly colored farmhouse-style houses and a common house building, all nestled along hilly paths next to a farm. The spatial discord between BBHC and its broader community harkens to the divide that drove the development's original developers to create their cohousing community; this included the desire to off-set the demands of daily life by living in a community with abundant social interaction among neighbors.

In 1988, two American architects, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, introduced cohousing to America through their first book, *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*. McCamant and Durrett wrote about Scandinavian communities their residents developed. The communities offered a socially interactive environment, options for

spontaneous play for children, and the ability to share economic resources through projects like community food cooperatives. McCamant and Durrett proposed cohousing as a residential community planning form to meet modern life in America. They analyzed the site design and interactive activities to foster supportive interrelationships. Drawing on historical examples, they stated that cohousing clusters houses on small pathways to maximize interaction spaces for the community. In addition, residents take part in many activities in performing all management and upkeep (Garciano, 2009; Williams, 2005). Many of the concepts in cohousing are not new; they are rooted in earlier American communitarian models that arose in times of extraordinary societal change (McCamant & Durrett, 2011; Sargisson, 2012). Cohousing communities are in contrast to the mainstream community design and offer a reimagined preindustrial community as the solution to feelings of isolation and the stress of managing daily life.

Research Problem

Since 1990, there have been fewer than 200 cohousing communities established in the United States according to the Cohousing Association of the United States (2020). Correspondingly, there is a limited amount of peer-review literature on the topic of cohousing. Several articles drew from qualitative case studies conducted over a few months and center on how cohousing can benefit individuals, with brief mentions of residents' negative experiences with cohousing. There is also scant literature exploring the unequal distribution of social capital and power among residents. Renz (2007) described residents' perceptions of estrangement after stopping or slowing a community proposal for action. Markle (2013) captured residents' senses of isolation or problems with integration due the presence of cliques or personality differences. Chitewere (2006) described the difficulty in gaining data as respondents were uneasy about describing conflict. The residents said they felt there was an "unspoken rule" against discussing

conflict.

In exploring non-peer-reviewed literature, I found many articles about conflicts and issues of power and fairness that occasionally end with members leaving cohousing communities. This underscored that peer-reviewed literature lacked more fulsome and well-rounded data on cohousing's outcomes in terms of social capital. Individuals move into communities with an expectation of what life will be like. Cohousing promises a community that is nurturing and supportive, but there is little data on what happens to those who find they cannot fit into a community, who feel isolated, or how residents seek to mitigate feeling like they do not fit in or feel isolated. No neighborhood is static and there is little data on the changes and challenges cohousing communities undergo. Few studies have examined a cohousing community for nearly 10 years. As planning theorists and policymakers look to social capital to address the needs of their citizenry, it is crucial to develop a more complete picture of social capital's benefits, challenges, and potential negative outcomes. This study contributes data on how one community uses cohousing processes to build social capital and function longer-term, especially in the face of life and spatial changes.

Research Questions

This study explored two questions. First, what processes does this cohousing community use to develop and maintain social capital? Second, what challenges do residents face regarding their social capital goals over the long term (10–20 years)?

Definition of Terms

Cohousing: A residential design model originally from Northern Europe and introduced in the United States during the early 1990s. The original residents develop their communities. Residents are expected to manage most upkeep. Key components of cohousing include

individual housing units with minimal square footage, site design incorporating copious shared facilities, regular shared activities such as meals, and the use of consensus or collaborative decision-making processes. Cohousing practitioners suggest the optimal size of a cohousing community is approximately 30 households (Chiodelli, 2015; McCamant & Durrett, 1988, 2011; Meltzer, 2005; Sandstedt et al., 2015; Williams, 2005, 2008).

<u>Social Capital</u>: A resource developed through intensive and/or regular interpersonal interactions. These interactions are expected to build trust, support, and knowledge among the individuals involved. Both individuals and communities can possess social capital (Bourdieu, 2010; Jacobs, 1993 [1961]; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

<u>Resident-Developer</u>: A resident-developer is an original resident of a cohousing community who took part in the process of developing a cohousing community.

<u>Newcomer</u>: A resident who moved into a well-established cohousing community.

<u>Interaction hub</u>: Site designed to promote residents to interact, such as community mailboxes and playgrounds (Gehl, 2011[1971]; Williams, 2005).

<u>Interaction activity</u>: Activities that promote residents to interact, such as shared community meals or community workgroups (McCamant & Durrett, 1988, 2011; McCamant et al., 1994; Meltzer, 2000).

Nature of the Study

My epistemological approach was rooted in thinking that individuals should tell their own story, and, through their stories, they can share their perceptions of lived experiences. Sandercock (2003) explained how humans have historically used stories to make sense of human history, that stories provide critical lessons and pass on knowledge. I designed this research as an ethnographic case study because these methods are well-suited to exploring small, distinct

groups (Creswell, 2012). BBHC is a small community with its own identity, origin story, and norms. I did a single case study over a period of 7 years; this permitted me to immerse myself over time in one community. During this time, I learned the unique nuances of this single group's culture and norms.

I used interviews with open-ended questions and interviewed current and past residents and other individuals involved in cohousing. The purpose was to encourage respondents to tell their own truth about their lived experiences. To help validate data, I attended meetings and participated in meals and other BBHC social gatherings. I took part in workshops, conferences, and tours of mid-Atlantic cohousing communities in suburban, urban, and rural locations. I did walks and made sketches as part of my observations to see how residents and others used the site. I took photographs to document the site and provide visual representation of layout, activities, and traditions. Finally, I wrote reflective memos to process data and document my own thoughts during my analysis.

I undertook a pilot study between 2011–2013 to determine if my research focus was appropriate to the case and to refine my questions and methods. I initially explored how cohousing residents incorporated environmental sustainability building and operation practices in both the community's development and as it currently operated. The data, however, led me to conclude that at BBHC, and perhaps more broadly in the cohousing movement, environmental sustainability is important, but secondary to the goal of fostering social capital. As a result, when I designed the 2017–2018 study, I shifted the design of my interview protocol to questions that address how residents understood the processes they used to create and manage the community. I also interviewed both current and former BBHC residents. As I gathered information, I analyzed the data. This was a process that involved repeatedly coding, categorizing, sifting, and sorting

data as I attempted to focus on themes. I also performed additional analysis of the pilot data using the codes, data, and themes developed from Phase 2. Throughout the entire project, I performed my data analysis using NVivo qualitative analysis software. I found the software facilitated my ability to run word and code-frequency searches and create word clouds to assist with analysis. I developed themes around activities, decision-making, use of the site, and feelings about cohousing and personal interaction. On an as-needed basis, I contacted respondents again for clarification.

Assumptions and Limitations

This research covered one small community of 60 adults, which is a delimitation to this study. I could not conduct formal interviews with all residents, although I interacted with many of them during different activities, such as meals and meetings. I encountered data saturation when I gathered a repetition of key data points on how residents understood the decision-making process in action. Also, like most cohousing communities, BBHC residents are majority White and middle-class professionals. This raises questions about the effect of cohousing versus shared norms in behavior, race, and class in developing social capital. Finally, individuals who move into cohousing are performing an intentional act, with a basic understanding that there are expectations and responsibilities required of residents, and those who choose to live in cohousing communities often share a negative perception of mainstream communities. As a result, their receptivity to each other and acceptance to certain norms of behavior and communications may facilitate interpersonal relationships and communication in contrast to a community with a greater amount of socioeconomic diversity.

Significance of the Study

Most communities experience change. Policymakers and planning theorists are seeking to

create more socially supportive communities with greater urgency, given demographic shifts in households (Bartling, 2010; Beatley, 2004; Garciano, 2009; Jarvis, 2011; Padilla, 1998; Williams, 2008). This study provides a nuanced understanding of social capital, recognizing that as it is not evenly dispersed among all residents, it can have negative outcomes and even isolate individuals. Finally, this study provides several specific suggestions that could facilitate longer-term stability for both cohousing and other communities in a range of sectors related to decision-making, residential development, and stabilizing communities.

Document Structure

I structured this dissertation into five chapters. The second chapter traces the origins and history. In Chapter 3, I describe the reasoning behind why I used my research methods. I also explain the development and refinement of the techniques for analysis. Chapter 4 provides data on how cohousing design, activities, and decision-making processes help residents foster social capital and the challenges that occur over time. The fifth chapter provides an interpretation of the research findings and has several suggestions to contribute to the discourse on methods to develop and enhance social capital in existing and new communities.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Review

Introduction

This study examined the processes residents of a cohousing community used to create and maintain social capital and the challenges they encounter. Planning researchers and practitioners have placed an increasing focus on the benefits of social capital (Abbott, 2009; Duany et al., 2000; Haslam et al., 2005; Healy et al., 2001; Klinenberg, 2001; Markle, 2013; Meltzer, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Positive outcomes from social capital include stabilizing communities, providing a means to create social safety nets that provide members with emotional and physical support, and a way to bolster members' economic opportunities (Hester, 2006; Putnam, 2000). The lack of social capital is blamed for a number of social ills, including social isolation and loneliness and higher mortality rates, crime rates, and perceptions of safety (Fromm, 2012; OECD, 2001). Social capital remains a contested term regarding its meaning and outcomes and to gain a more intimate understanding of cohousing and social capital contributions to individuals and groups within the community; thus, it is instructive to first explore the theories and data related to social ties, social capital, and cohousing.

In this chapter, I first explore social capital and the reasons for its growing importance in community planning. Second, I describe cohousing and its goals and precepts. I also describe how cohousing compares to other common planning approaches. Finally, I consider the research describing cohousing's outcomes for residents.

Social Capital

Social capital is an outcome of interpersonal relationships. How one generates social capital, including its operation and effects, remains contested. According to Portes (1998), in the 1970s, Bourdieu, the French sociologist, provided one of the earliest theoretical descriptions of

social capital. Bourdieu theorized that social capital was a resource individuals created and possessed. In his study of the behavior and norms of different French socioeconomic classes, Bourdieu argued that social capital is a resource like financial or cultural capital. Possessing social capital can be a means to access or use power and serve as a tool for maintaining socioeconomic class structures and power (Bourdieu, 2010; DeFilippis, 2001). For example, a well-educated child will grow up in an ecosystem of similar individuals that will prove helpful in matters of education and profession over the years.

Coleman (1988) added to Bourdieu's definition by envisioning social capital as a broadly useful resource, especially one that enforced class structures and power. He also saw it as a mechanism that provided more general benefits, including safety. Coleman described a family that moved from Detroit, Michigan to Jerusalem, Michigan, and one reason for the move was to allow their children to play outside alone. In this case, parents perceived that the social capital in Jerusalem would create situations where the neighbors knew the local children and the parents trusted the neighbors to monitor the children and ensure their safety.

This harkens back to one of the earliest users of the term social capital, Jane Jacobs, who first used the term in the early 1960s. Jacobs (1993 [1961]) described social capital as a mesh of interpersonal relationships or social ties that create social capital. One outcome she attributed to social capital was the concept of "eyes on the street." This occurred through residents' routines and often casual observations and monitoring of local activities and behavior. For this to function, community members must know, care about, and trust each other. This dovetails with Coleman's (1988) description of how social capital can function.

Nearly 40 years after Jacobs, Putnam (2000) popularized the term social capital among broader audiences. He proposed that social capital was both an individual and public good and

the result of a mesh of interpersonal ties also described as social networks (Bowles and Gintis (2002). Putnam explicitly linked the decline in American participation in civic events as indicative of a decline in American social capital (DeFilippis, 2001; Putnam, 2003; Putnam, 2000). An important issue is if individuals or persons in a group possess social capital, how social capital affects the entire group. Jacobs (1993 [1961]) suggested social capital is a community resource. Although Putnam (2000) posited individuals generate social capital, it is also a community resource. This is in contrast with Bourdieu (2010), who considered social capital as an individually held resource. Putnam (2000) also sought to measure social capital by levels of civic participation. He suggested that individuals develop social capital through their interactions in civic associations and local community groups, including neighborhood sports leagues. Similarly, Bourdieu (2010) suggested its presence reinforced social classes as it developed through social interaction.

Individuals' participation creates relationships used to build trust and concern for those within a community. Granovetter (1973) categorized social ties as weak or strong. Casual acquaintances form weak ties, whereas strong ties are created among family and close friends. Grannovetter theorized that both ties can be beneficial but operate in different ways. This dovetails with Coleman (1988), who theorized that social capital operates in a manner dependent on the social structure in which it is embedded. Strong ties denote a high level of commitment and obligation to act on the members' behalf. Family members are deeply invested in ensuring members' well-being. Parents sacrifice their own resources on behalf of their children (Coleman, 1988). Weak ties, however, require a lower commitment of members to each other. Coleman (1988) described how shopkeepers in Cairo markets will act as money changers for each other or refer customers to each other. A combination of trust, knowledge, and information is facilitated

through the merchants' social ties and these interactions are mutually beneficial, but do not require using significant resources. Coleman's (1988) description underscores Granovetter's (1983) assertion, that weak ties are critical to community cohesion. Weak ties act as bridges between the smaller clusters in a community (Granovetter, 1983).

Social capital is not an absolute positive. It can serve to enmesh or trap individuals in groups. The threat of ostracism controls members' behavior in social networks (Portes, 1998). These groups may have abundant social capital that manifests as extensive social welfare systems and significant emotional support and advice for their members. The condition for individuals obtaining this support is to be considered a devout adherent to the group's beliefs and cultural norms. The possession of social capital is conditional based on the continuance of relationships between individuals. The group can exclude or expel those who are not seen as compliant, an act that can cause being cut off not only from social and emotional support, but also from financial resources (Davidman, 2015; Portes, 2014). This act severs both weak and strong ties and in tightly formed groups represents a significant threat that ensures compliance. The Hasidim and Old Order Amish are examples of groups that practice "shunning," whereby the group completely dissociates from those considered to have violated religious or behavior norms and rules (Davidman, 2015; Hostetler, 1964).

Social capital usually exists in a bounded system, a form of a group. Although some groups can form spontaneously, many groups form around a shared purpose or interest, regardless of setting. Each group is unique given its unique makeup of individuals, and creates its own rhythms and norms of behavior (Henman, 2003). Interdependence becomes a factor in group cohesion. Andelson (2002) described this process as *sociogenesis*, the act of individuals developing multilayered relationships with each other. Through sociogenesis, ties of varying

strength develop within the group or network. As a result, having social capital in one network may not cross the boundaries into other networks, though some individuals can act as a bridge. Ryan (2016) painted a complicated picture of how social capital functioned in the network of Polish immigrants in London. Recent arrivals formed a series of strong and weak networks. The longer they resided in London, these new immigrants' strong ties to the Polish community often weakened as they further integrated into the city. They developed new ties outside the Polish émigré community as they moved into other communities. These residents still maintained at least weak ties to the Polish émigré network, and some also served as interlocutors with new arrivals. As a result, some ties they formed earliest in their arrival underwent changes in their strengths and connectivity. The immigrants who moved beyond their original network used their social capital as a bridge or ladder between their nonimmigrant and immigrant networks, presumably benefiting individuals in both groups.

The distribution of social capital and its outcomes can be unequal and may not correlate to the amount of effort an individual contributes to the relationship. Some individuals may be more adept or have a personality that allows them to gain more benefits than they provide. In Lareau's (2011) ethnographic study on the differences between poor and middle-class families in child rearing, she noted that some individuals in the poor communities relied heavily on others, usually women. Similarly, Curley's (2009) examination of the social ties of Boston public housing residents described individuals' reliance on different members of their social network for distinct needs, ranging from advice to informal babysitting to temporary loans. Not everyone contributed equally. Curley described women whose roles were primarily as supporters of their social network system. They develop a reputation as a source of assistance, even if they have very little to offer themselves. Some individuals may share significant amounts of their time,

money, and other resources to the extent that it can have a negative effect on their own well-being and household. Others in the social network gained support while offering little (Curley, 2009; Turner et al., 2009). Research indicates that rather than unreservedly considering social capital as a net positive, a more nuanced approach is needed (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Coleman, 1988; DeFilippis, 2001; Keyes, 2001; Portes, 2014).

Yet, the promise of the benefits from social capital has led planners and policymakers to identify and replicate processes that may foster social capital in communities (Gittell & Thompson, 2001; Newman & Jennings, 2008; Noguera, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Some theorists, such as Newman and Jennings (2008), Duany et al. (2000), and Williams (2005), proposed that the presence of abundant social capital could stabilize a community, socially and economically. They suggested social capital is the glue of the imagined socially sustainable community. This is a community where residents feel comfortable and safe, can do their errands easily on foot or bicycle, and have their children safely play under the eye of watchful adults.

This idealized residential neighborhood employs social capital to address deficits resulting from certain post-World War II patterns and forms in American housing. Some theorists have proposed that insufficient or inappropriate social capital in extremely impoverished urban communities is a key factor impeding residents' economic and social lives (Coleman, 1988; Curley, 2009; Lareau, 2011). Coleman (1988) suggested that a predominance of single-parent households in a population might indicate a deficit of social capital. Others point to abundant social capital that can exist in a narrow social network, effectively closing off members to broader social and economic opportunities (Curley, 2009; Davidman, 2015; "Eco-House Battle Put on Hold," 2005; Hostetler, 1964).

Social Capital Limitation in Suburban Communities

Some theorists have suggested that many post-World War II suburban community site designs hinder the development of social capital (Beatley, 2004; Choguill, 2008; Jackson, 1985). Spatial patterns of use are atomized, as residential neighborhoods, large schools, shopping centers, and office parks form islands connected by large streets and highways. People therefore spend a considerable amount of their days in cars, as all their activities are scattered across greater distances and do not interact with their neighbors. Communities with these designs often lack spaces where residents can casually encounter each other and participate in neighborhood activities. This form of design isolates individuals, hinders developing trust and knowledge of neighbors, and robs them of the casual social support neighbors offer each other, presumed to exist in earlier community forms (Al Hindi Falconer, 2001; Alexander, 1979; Barton, 2000; Duany et al., 2000; "Llewellyn Park," 1865).

Evaluating the nuances of a community's social capital has long bedeviled planning practitioners and theorists (Bramley et al., 2009; Coleman, 1988; Curley, 2009; DeFilippis, 2001). The field has acknowledged that failures in developing a precise understanding of social capital have led to a myriad of housing policies, much of it targeting the poor, and often with unintended and negative consequences. Researchers such as Briggs et al. (1987), Dempsey et al. (2009), Deitrick and Ellis (2004), and Hyra (2013) presented compelling evidence that existing social ties in poorer communities are often undervalued. They explained that policies were developed to address this perceived defect, such as the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere VI program (HOPE VI). The goal of the HOPE VI program was to deconcentrate poverty by attracting middle-class residents and reducing the number of lower-income residents (Garshick Kleit, 2010; Kelly, 2009; Turner et al., 2009). This process would encourage the

development of bridging ties across networks, attract investment, and possibly improve local schools. The mixed-income projects, however, do not automatically create cross-socio-economic ties. Hyra (2013) wrote, “living next to more affluent people, on average, does not seem to be related to increased employment levels among low-income individuals, however, and meaningful social interactions across race and class are minimal” (p.124).

In addition, the process of relocating lower-income residents discounts and disrupts existing ties for better or worse. This recalls Jacobs’ (1993 [1961]) warning on the difficulty in forming new networks: “Whenever the capital is lost, from whatever cause, the income from it disappears, never to return until and unless new capital is slowly and chancily accumulated” (p. 180). Policies rooted in creating mixed socioeconomic communities instead may make it harder for poorer individuals to access appropriate resources, such as affordable childcare, and may increase their stress from being deprived of cultural or socioeconomic ecosystems that the communities’ previous structure may have offered (Garshick Kleit, 2010; Hyra, 2013; Kelly, 2009; O’Neil, 2009).

There is, however, data that suggests those who relocate to higher-income, better resourced communities may benefit from greater safety and access to improved services, including schools for their children, and reduced sharing of their limited financial resources. Breaking ties from their previous community may benefit some individuals in several ways. Improved living conditions and opportunities that result from moving to better resourced communities can lead to adults experiencing lower degrees of stress (Boyer, 2014; Curley, 2009; Garshick Kleit, 2010; Turner et al., 2009); further, housing or better schools can be significant benefits for some individuals. This is especially true if the relocated can integrate into new social networks. Another benefit is the ties that caused an excessive draw on resources in the former

neighborhood decrease (Curley, 2009; Garshick Kleit, 2010). Nevertheless, Turner et al. (2009) highlighted data showing that the positive effect of relocating could be uneven, even within a family, noting research showing girls' emotional and educational gains are greater than boys when their family relocates. This murky mix of data underscores the complexity of how social capital and social ties function, placing policymakers at a disadvantage when developing policies that foster or rebuild social capital.

The other community setting considered by many to suffer a deficit of beneficial social capital is the modern suburb. It has been a subject of many criticisms in both theory and popular culture. Songs like Rush's *Subdivision* and the Malvina Reynold's *Little Boxes* conjure images of repetitive and unimaginative buildings that engender a sense of isolation and social alienation among their residents (Lee, 2006; Reynolds, 1962). Social capital, in this setting, is seen as lacking, especially when using Putnam's approach to measuring social capital by civic engagement. Interestingly, these popular understandings of the suburb simultaneously stress the need and expectation of conformity to affluent middle-class American norms of behavior.

In response to the perceptions of low social capital, critics have proposed new community forms based on their imaginings of undefined pre-World War II communities (Alexander, 1979; Barnett, 2003; Rees, 2003; Talen, 2006). New Urbanism (NU) is an example of this form of community design. Its proponents seek to mesh their idea of historic American housing and community design with modern American real estate development (Al Hindi Falconer, 2001; Al-Hindi & Till, 2013; Till, 2001). NU relies on design techniques such as narrower streets, placing garages in alleys behind homes, and incorporating geographic-specific building styles such as porches in the American South. NU proponents also advocate for the use of mixed-purpose buildings, higher population and building density, shared common areas, and recreation

facilities. The rationale is that communal property and overall physical design should create interaction hubs where residents can develop the strong and weak ties that ultimately form social networks and address environmental sustainability concerns such as land conservation (Duany et al., 2000; Grant & Perrott, 2009; Williams, 2005). NU is rooted in design determinism. Duany et al. (2000) wrote of how windows allow residents to observe streets and keep them safe. Eyes on the street require people to watch, but also feel invested in their community and neighbors.

Ross (1999), in his book on the storied NU development in Celebration, Florida, discussed how porches relate to social capital. Celebration's designers lauded the inclusion of porches in housing design to encourage people to sit outside. The porches are aesthetically desirable, but with the rise of central air conditioning, they do not play their historical role for escaping the heat. With its widespread use, air conditioning has eliminated the necessity, and may underscore the undesirability of porch use, especially in areas like Florida with hot, humid summers. Consequently, the social benefit assumed to result from incorporating a porch into a house design is reduced.

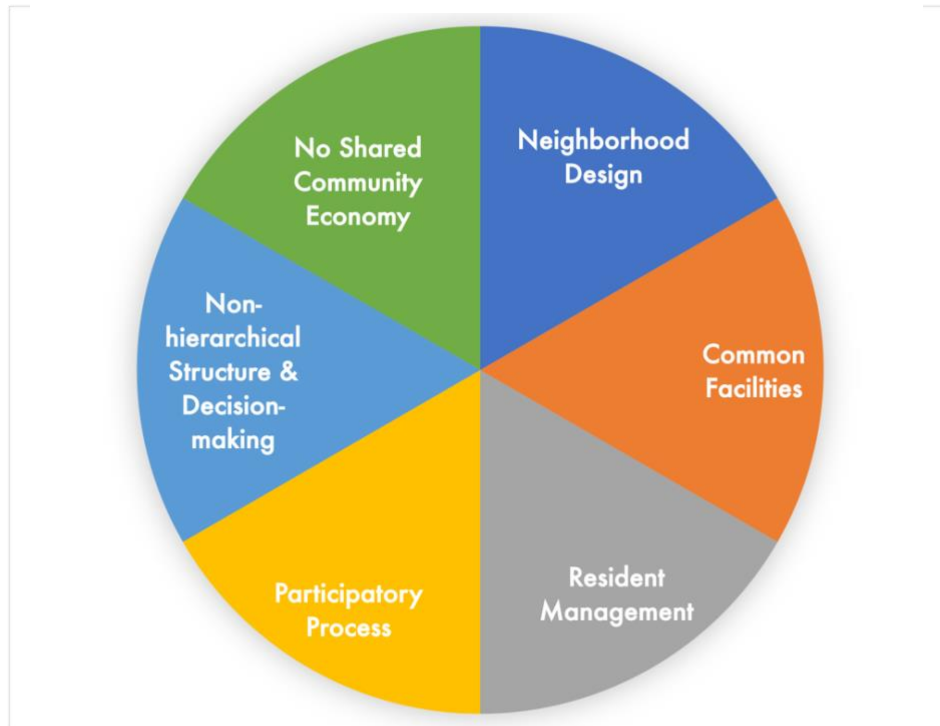
Others have noted that changes in how individuals spend time outside the community may mean that eyes on the street may be irrelevant (Cozens & Hillier, 2015). Many families' routines are more scripted with adults and children participating in playdates and travel teams that take them away from their neighborhood and limit spontaneous interaction (Cozens & Hillier, 2015). NU does not address this reality of daily life. It may be that NU precepts create aesthetically pleasing spaces, but do not automatically foster social interaction (Grant, 2006). Cohousing is a lesser-known form of community planning with the goal of fostering social capital. Unlike the proponents of NU who rely on design, cohousing enthusiasts propose a two-prong approach whereby design and residents' participation in every stage of a community's

development and operation ensure interpersonal interaction.

The Start of Cohousing

Cohousing developed in the 1960s in northern Europe. When American architects McCamant and Durrett (1988) introduced cohousing to an American audience in their book, *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Ourselves*, they included numerous sketches, diagrams, and photos of people, ostensibly neighbors, engaged in sharing meals and taking walks on loosely landscaped winding paths. Their book is designed to engage a reader who is disillusioned with traditional American neighborhoods and open to exploring alternatives, presenting cohousing to cope with modern life. Figure 1 is derived from the Cohousing Association of the United States, accessed in May 2012. It shows the six main characteristics of cohousing as described by McCamant and Durrett. Residents should develop and manage their own neighborhood, designing them to meet their own needs and desires. These communities should use a mix of site design focused on maximizing shared space for the community where

Figure 1 Characteristics of Cohousing



residents perform all management and upkeep. Decisions should be based on consensus processes and the residents regularly will share meals and other activities together.

Living in cohousing is more than moving into a home, as residents are expected to participate in managing the community's upkeep and engage in community activities. Individuals relinquish some of their independence to foster a high level of trust and social and emotional support. Cohousing's proponents are inspired to experiment with this form of community because they perceive these attributes as not available in mainstream neighborhoods (Markle, 2013; Meltzer, 2000; Miles, 2007; Williams, 2008). Similar to NU, cohousing is based on an idealized, utopian understanding of historic communities (Levitas, 1990; Sargent, 2010).

Spatial Forms

Cohousing draws on the planning theories that historic communities consisted of and land-use patterns that encouraged interaction and observation (Alexander, 1979; Meltzer, 2005; Whyte, 1980; Williams, 2005). Alexander (1979) posited that there was a historic archetype or patterns that human communities have followed for most of our existence. He described spaces where paths cross and meander, surrounding shared open spaces. Buildings, residences, and workshops mix and scatter closely about commons. Figure 2 shows a settlement in a tight cylindrical pattern consisting of a close mix of residences, shops, and workshops such as clothing tailors. This type of pattern is considered "traditional" by writers such as Abu-Ghazzeh (1999) and Alexander. If you entered the settlement, located on the edge of a Mumbai suburb, you would see narrow streets, with clusters of chairs on the edge, where shopkeepers and residents sit, chat, and observe the community's movement.

Figure 2 Village outside of Mumbai, India, 2014, (photo by author).

While cohousing is generally proposed for areas with far lower levels of population densities than this village near Mumbai, cohousing site design draws on the work of Alexander (1979), Lynch (1960), Gehl (2011[1971]), and others. Cohousing incorporates clustering houses on small pathways, reducing building footprints to maintain plentiful shared open space, and incorporating a common house and other common spaces (McCamant & Durrett, 2011). The layouts facilitate residents' abilities to look out from their homes onto pathways. These spaces are places for neighbors to interact, forming what I call interaction hubs. Abu-Ghazzeh (1999) noted, "the greater the chance of meeting one another, the greater the chance of the formation of friendships and social interaction" (p 42.). Williams (2005) termed this "the social contact principle." Gehl (2011[1971]) categorized these locations as low intensity, allowing users to meet briefly and informally. He pointed out that these locations are ideal for communicating

information with others in the neighborhood. These spaces support a range of critical interpersonal connections that promote the creation of social capital.

Residents expressed that they feel a strong sense of community connection due to the constant interaction with each other both regularly and informally on paths, by the lake, and in the common house of their community (Chitewere, 2006). Cohousing site design also serves another function, often less mentioned. It is a means of observing residents' behaviors. Residents told Chitewere (2006) that they were aware of each other's presence, and it formed a type of surveillance that could become uncomfortable. Cohousing adherents have suggested that social capital increases levels of safety, especially for families with children, compared to mainstream neighborhoods (Meltzer, 2005; OECD, 2001; Padilla, 1998; Ruiu, 2016a; Torres-Antonini, 2001; Williams, 2008). This thinking echoes Jacobs' (1993) eyes on the street concept. It is comforting, but there is no empirical evidence that it is true. Spatial design in cohousing clearly has a critical role in ensuring residents interact, even at a lower intensity level. It also enforces community norms. Both outcomes strengthen community bonds and interpersonal relationships.

Despite the importance of its spatial design, some researchers such as Ruiu (2016b), McCamant and Durrett (1988, 2011); McCamant et al. (1994), and Hanson (1996) have theorized that the cohousing precept related to residents' participation in activities may have a more critical role than spatial design in fostering social capital. These activities serve to transmit norms of behavior and ensure prolonged contact and learning about each other. Community bonds develop through the activities.

Community Activities

The expectation that residents will participate in activities, including community management and traditions, is a differentiator for cohousing compared to other forms of

communities, such as NU ones that are ostensibly designed to promote social capital. This expectation is fundamental to developing relationships between residents in cohousing communities (McCamant & Durrett, 1988, 2011; McCamant et al., 1994; Renz, 2006). Jarvis (2011) highlighted that these activities, rather than physical design, set cohousing apart from other forms of community. Sullivan (2016) described these processes as "performing community." Ruiu (2016a) and others sought to capture the measurable data on whether these activities result in higher amounts of social capital (Ergas, 2010; Markle, 2013; Meltzer, 2000, 2005).

Resident involvement and navigating group dynamics starts at the inception of the idea for the community as future residents are the developers. They must locate a site, contract a builder and architect, decide housing designs and layouts, and develop management guidelines and community principles. Future residents must develop trust and understanding with every group participant. The development phase may last several years before move-in (Boyer, 2018; Meltzer, 2005). This process filters out participants early in the process who can manage to work together successfully and those who cannot. This process has often resulted in the difference between forming groups and the creation of a community. These meetings become an intrinsic part of the community lifestyle. McCamant and Durrett suggested that communities should use nonhierarchical, participatory decision-making processes, but never clarified a specific process (1988, pp. 36-38). They instead encouraged cohousing developers to create a process that works for that community. Renz (2007) explored a community's decision-making process, as residents sought to decide on paving a driveway. Residents in this community were split over whether to pave the parking lot, and if so, with what materials. Family dynamics and interpersonal relationships added to the complexity.

Renz (2007) described how residents also had uneven knowledge about what was happening. Those who could attend all the meetings and read all the information had more information, even if they were not experts in paving parking lots. Those who missed critical emails and meetings had to rely on other residents for information and hear their viewpoints to form a decision. Delays in obtaining information led some residents to intervene late in the process, a step that most of the group did not appreciate. Finally, with a designated resident as facilitator, the group reached consensus. Emotions ran high, but residents ultimately decided to pave the driveway. Of note, the group decided to review the decision-making process, including to allow for voting in cases where decisions seemed intractable. They also pushed a principle for participants to set aside their personal views and consider the good of the community. Renz (2007) noted that 2 years later the group had never used the voting measure, but the residents also began work on consensus and ensuring all viewpoints were heard prior to making a decision.

Meltzer (2005) described how a community developed a decision-making process requiring that all community management proposals be distributed before the first meeting. A resident reported they expected residents to read it before the meeting, and unless they had a very specific objection beforehand, all residents were expected to support it. Every community develops its own process, but one feature is common: extensive meetings and informal discussions on many different management decisions. These meetings reinforce interpersonal ties, though they could alienate residents as well.

Feallock and Miller (1976) described what they considered a critical fault line for intentional community survivability: work sharing, meaning the management of household or community chores and errands. “A major problem that any experimental living arrangement

must confront is that of sharing the basic work of the community. Informal accounts suggest that contemporary communes experience a breakdown in the basic housework required by the group" (Feallock & Miller, 1976, p. 277). Torres-Antonini (2001) described how a community set the minimum hours each adult resident had to perform housework. These included tasks such as creating the community newsletter or grounds and building maintenance. She found the size of the community caused residents to feel overwhelmed by the workload and had to take on multiple roles. Fromm (2012) analyzed surveys conducted in over 24 North American cohousing communities. At one community, 59% of respondents reported they had less time to spend with family due to community obligations. Another community reported 80% had less time. Cohousing community chores, meetings, and activities seem to become additional responsibilities and cause residents to have less personal time as opposed to saving time.

Further, despite the promise of cohousing meal sharing acting to reduce families' chores, Sullivan-Catlin (2014) described how parents and children may regret the time meals take away from personal family time. "Common meals in cohousing are rife with distractions, and parents in cohousing regularly described common dinners as inhibiting family time by dividing family members' attention" (p. 47).

Data on cohousing's effect on children and child rearing is mixed. Cohousing proponents suggest cohousing offers significant benefits to parents, providing childcare, safety, and a ready supply of playmates. Padilla (1998), Meltzer (2000), and Renz (2006) have indicated that expanded childcare options improve residents' satisfaction with their community. Torres-Antonini (2001) documented how many parents with young children interacted at a cohousing community. Some parents with only one child let their child have baths with other only children to have "the opportunity to have the kind of experience usually afforded only to those who have

siblings" (Torres-Antonini, 2001, p. 122). Fromm (2000) noted that 88% felt they could safely let their children play outside but more than 50% said they did not feel that way about their previous neighborhood.

Other research has indicated that child-rearing and caregiving can be a divisive issue. Kanter et al. (1975), in their research of families and child-rearing in intentional communities, underscored the difficulties that can arise when parenting in an intentional community. Couples expressed that they encounter complications around autonomy, egalitarianism, and a loss of sovereignty. Parents also reported they had increased self-consciousness toward childcare. It is not difficult to extrapolate this to cohousing specifically. Raising children can be understood for many Americans as a personal matter and relies on the norms and structures they had growing up. There are differences among residents regarding parenting styles and children's behavior (Ergas, 2010; Poley, 2007). Parents who can navigate the group dimension in child rearing or live with like-minded adults may find cohousing supportive.

Barriers of Cohousing in America

Cohousing has been slow to disperse in the United States. Since 1990, there have been fewer than 200 communities developed in the United States (cohousing.org, 2018). This lack of dispersion suggests there are significant barriers preventing cohousing's spread. Williams (2008) explored whether cohousing is replicable on a broader scale. He examined several factors, including the demands it places on residents and its development process. Williams (2008) described cohousing as still being in the state of the niche market populated by "innovators" and "early adopters." He suggested the structure of the housing industry would require significant changes to spur increased usage (Williams, 2008).

Sullivan (2015) underscored the resource demands and their effect on cohousing

demographics. She described the required significant financial resources and time resulting in communities that lack racial, ethnic, and economic diversity. Boyer and Leland (2018) described the cohousing residents on average to be older (40–49 years old) and disproportionately female (72%), with higher household income (averaging between $100,000 and $150,000), and residents as nearly all White/Caucasian (95%).

Another barrier is the building process. Torres-Antonini (2001) researched Lake Claire Cohousing and reported that it took 4.5 years of regular meetings to develop the community. She said her findings echoed those from Fromm (2000), who described the building phase for the average cohousing community to take 4 years of planning. Fromm (2000) also described the financial resources required prior to building, giving the example of Arcadia Cohousing in North Carolina where they had to raise US$65,000 in equity "before there was any guarantee that housing would be built" (Fromm, 2000, p. 96). The barriers to cohousing are high, given the time and money required of interested households.

Cohousing and Other Forms of Residential Development

During the last 30 years, there have been an increasing number of community planning forms in place to address desires and perceived needs of residents or policymakers and theorists. These include NU communities, gated communities, and condominiums. These forms, including cohousing, employ the structure of Common Interest Developments (CIDs; (McKenzie, 2003). Owners are apportioned a share of the common spaces. They pay a monthly or annual fee to cover upkeep, maintenance, taxes, and, in some cases, utilities. Another form of residential development is the cooperative (very common in New York City, New York, but not widespread in the United States). Owners in a cooperative own a share of the entire property, usually a building. Many cooperatives have strict criteria for buyers, and, in many cases, current owners

can vote whether someone can buy into the property. In these categories, there are communal spaces that residents jointly own. The finances of CIDs can affect the type of mortgage a purchaser can obtain. The added costs of the fees, and any special criteria, can limit the residents in a development.

Ruiu (2016b) compared cohousing and gated communities. Her research showed the purposes of the two communities were significantly different. Gated communities are designed to keep others out and use a variety of technologies and designs to enforce this. Cohousing communities are less about keeping others out and instead focus on strengthening relationships among neighbors. Both communities target and attract middle-class people with financial means. Gated communities are explicitly exclusionary and extend the idea of home as a fortress to the entire community. There is little expectation for interaction among residents. Condominiums and other homeowner-association governed communities focus on external homogeneity of design to maintain home values and safety, also with little expectation that residents must be involved in management. Cohousing communities from their inception require resident participation as they are self-developed and self-managed. Moving into cohousing requires residents to be dedicated to its principles and willing to dedicate both resources and time for a promised, but still uncertain, outcome of knowing your neighbor.

Low (2001) described the popular discourse around crime and safety that has aided in the proliferation of gated communities. Safety is the singular purpose of the gated community. It does not require an obligation to interact with residents. It would be a mistake to not include safety in discussing cohousing. Some researchers have asserted that cohousing residents may feel their communities are safer than other community forms for their children and themselves (Ergas, 2010; Meltzer, 2005; Ruiu, 2016b). Their solution to safety is profoundly different from

those in gated communities. They suggest that safety comes from developing a relationship with your neighbors. This relationship with residents and their interaction is a primary differentiator with not only gated communities, but other CIDs. Residents in other communities may have shared spaces, but they do not have a mandate to use them or an expectation that they will personally maintain them. Table 1 compares the key characteristics of residential communities.

Table 1 Comparison of Housing Developments

Features			
Housing Type	Design	Financing and Management	Expected Social Interaction
Common-interest Development (CID) (Condo, Gated)	Vary, single-family, multi-unit dwellings, duplexes and townhouses	Mortgage through a bank or other housing finance institutions. In addition to mortgage there is a separate monthly community fee covering the external maintenance. Management Homeowners' Association	Desired, not expected
Cohousing (CID)	Minimize land usage, pedestrian focus, abundant common areas	Prior to development resident-developers must supply significant funds prior to the community's permitting.	High Expectation
Co-operative (CID)	Usually in the form of multi-unit dwellings	Corporation owns the community. Residents own shares in the corporation rather than a specific unit. Special financing often required as traditional mortgage does not apply.	Varied
American Suburban Single-Family No-Fee	Form is usually large lots with 1/2-1 acre lots. Each lot contains parking.	Mortgage through a bank or other housing finance institutions. Owner manages his/her property.	No expectation

Summary

Social capital is the outcome of social ties and result of interpersonal relationships. Its presence is not an unvarnished positive. It can form a closed network and deprive others of economic benefits and social support. In community planning literature, it has been largely considered beneficial to residents and a lynchpin in developing a healthy, sustainable community. Cohousing is a planning approach advocated to create communities with copious social capital. It incorporates a mix of site design and expected participation in community activities. Much of the research has provided information on how residents have used cohousing precepts to develop their communities. Cohousing precepts foster the development of social capital among its residents, but in exchange, they require residents to contribute significant time, money, and some autonomy. These demands filter out those not committed to the group ideals and community success depends on the group being able to manage conflict. Not every community will fit every individual and the cost of failure to bond can be high, both financially and emotionally, for those involved. Given how recently communities have developed and how little known cohousing is in North America, most studies have examined relatively young communities that are in operation. As a result, there is very little research on groups that failed to create a cohousing community or those people who leave communities. There is also a dearth of information on how cohousing communities function over a medium-to-longer timeframe and adapt to the changes neighborhoods naturally undergo.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This case study examined how a specific community uses cohousing practices to build social capital over the long term. This research provides data on the development and challenges to fostering social capital, even in neighborhoods designed to be socially sustainable. The research questions were as follows:

1. How is social capital created and fostered in cohousing?
2. How is this process challenged over time in the community?

This chapter provides the methods of inquiry and rationale for the research design. It then provides information on the research sample and site and describes the data-collection process and procedures for data analysis and validity checks. It concludes with an examination of the ethical considerations, limitations, and biases.

Rationale for Research Design

The research design is rooted in social constructivism. Individuals' perceptions are how they process and filter their lived experience (Creswell, 2009). I employed a qualitative approach because I explored how residents in cohousing communities create social capital, which is based on respondents' perceptions. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggested qualitative researchers approach research with the understanding that they have limited knowledge. The researcher seeks to have the respondents describe their reality to gain specific insight into the topic.

I designed the research using an ethnographic approach for the following reasons. First, the unit of analysis was a small community with a distinct culture and set of norms; thus, it was important to let the respondents describe their lives. Ethnography is well-suited toward exploring small, distinct groups (Creswell, 2007; Pelto, 2013). American cohousing residents highlight the

importance of the works from McCamant and Durrett (1988, 2011); McCamant et al. (1994) and in developing and managing their community. Additionally, over time, residents have established precepts, jargon, and beliefs vis-à-vis broader society (Hanson, 1996; Meltzer, 2000; Williams, 2008). Within the broader culture of cohousing are subgroups comprising individual residential communities. BBHC is very distinct with its own creation myths, traditions, processes, and culture. In ethnography, the researcher seeks to learn the nuances of the group's culture. Finally, I chose ethnography with the expectation of understanding cohousing's success in developing social capital. There were critical nuances of social capital missed in the literature, such as how these communities progressed over time and the question of how all residents in a community are integrated, especially if they came into the community later. By using an ethnographic research design, I sought to understand how residents experienced social capital development and its effect on their lives.

Site Selection and Sample

BBHC has 60 residents. These include adults and children who live in a community of 19 single-family homes. Some of these houses contain basement apartments. Located in a suburb of Washington, DC, BBHC is in a car-dependent area near Tysons Corner, a city in an affluent section of the prosperous Fairfax County, VA. The county's median household income was US$124,831 according to the 2019 5-year American Community Survey (ACS). At the time of the research, BBHC residents ranged in age from infants to senior citizens of over 70 years old.

Most residents were college-educated, and most of the adult homeowners had adult children. Most residents (over 90%) were White, and there were residents whose ethnicity was indeterminate, Asian, or African American. This closely mirrors the population of the broader

geographic area surrounding BBHC. The official 2010 census data for the BBHC zip code stated that 74% of residents were Caucasian, 18% were Asian, and 3% were African American. In 2019, the 5-year ACS showed the median household income of the census tract that includes BBHC was US$226,776, reflecting the overall wealth of the area where BBHC is located. Homes in BBHC, however, are significantly lower in value than neighboring homes. The 2020 tax records for Fairfax County, VA Department of Administration showed the average value of a BBHC was US$620,518, whereas the 2020 median single-family house price in the census tract is US$854,000.

Research Procedure

I conducted the research and analysis in two phases: a pilot and the main study. I refined the research questions using a pilot study in 2011–2012. Yin (2009) suggested that a pilot study should be broader than the primary stage of research to ensure a stronger foundation upon which to craft the research design for the main stage of the project. I used the pilot to determine if my research focus was appropriate for the case and refine my questions and methods. My goal during the pilot was to better understand how cohousing residents incorporated environmental sustainability building and operation practices in both the community's development and current operations.

The pilot data led me to conclude that environmental sustainability is important at BBHC, but secondary to the goal of fostering social capital. As a result, I shifted the design of my interview protocol to questions that would provide data on how residents understood or valued social interaction with their neighbors and how they saw the decision-making process functioning. I also narrowed my interviews to current and former residents of BBHC. Some

interviews were informal and took place during dinners and other gatherings.

My expectation at the beginning of the 2017–2018 fieldwork stage had involved examining six questions on how residents perceived social capital affected their daily lives, how the decision-making process worked, and if cohousing was a form of intentional community. As I spent time in the field during 2017–2018, I recognized that over 7 years, I had collected data that documented significant change in this community. In this period, the community's broader environment has changed spatially. For example, there was a newly completed residential development comprising three neighborhoods of large executive mansions bordering BBHC. Also, BBHC residents had experienced significant life changes and experiences. Many original residents had been raising young children during the community's early years. Now many, if not most of those children, had left home and their parents were approaching professional retirement. There was also the usual ebb and flow of residents moving in and out of the community. My early findings uncovered challenges to fostering long-term social capital in a community. Although the literature discussed the difficulties of consensus decision-making, it did not discuss how the process might alienate residents. It also did not address what happened in the community if a resident found a cohousing community a poor fit. Over time, my original questions seemed less appropriate. I reviewed the pilot data and my analysis to inform my research design and formulated the interview protocol based on this review and additional literature review.

Data Collection Methods and Fieldwork Description

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants to do interviews and follow-up with me throughout both phases. For the main phase, I started by reaching out to individuals still living in

the community who had acted as key informants during the 2010–2013 pilot. Many residents in cohousing communities welcome visitors, and my prior association with the community and ongoing membership in a cohousing research and writers' group facilitated my ease in entering the community. I clearly stated I wanted to take part in community activities. I had a notification sent out through the community listserv via key informants to alert the community to my presence and work. I also gave a brief introduction to my pending research at a community management meeting. Through these methods, I sought to ensure participants were well-informed and could express any concerns to the key informants if they deemed my presence disruptive.

Emerson (2001); Emerson et al. (1995), Sandercock (2003), and Weiss (1994) all argued that communities and individuals define themselves and their history with their stories. Kvale (1996) described interviews as the means for respondents to provide their understanding of their "lived-world." I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews that included both current and past residents. I did not use video or audio recording devices. I returned multiple times to gather data until I reached saturation, not uncovering new data, or encountering repeating information. I took notes during the interviews, meals, and meetings to capture the setting and participants' mannerisms, vocal tone, and facial expressions. I also captured in notes how others reacted to the participant if others were present.

To aid in understanding the community, I participated in community activities such as meals, meetings, and celebrations. I also wanted to spend time observing BBHC and the adjacent community, Maymount. One must drive through it to reach BBHC and it is strikingly different, consisting of executive homes averaging 7,500 square feet with two- to three-car garages

compared to the 1,600 square feet homes of BBHC and its two parking lots. I wanted to see if there were differences in how residents used the outside communal spaces of their respective neighborhoods. I captured the observational data through a mix of notetaking, sketches, and photographs. I also captured on film any items that residents might focus on in explaining the community. These were datapoints in exploring how residents build a shared identity and culture (Rose, 2007). I took pictures to capture data quickly during walks through the sites to analyze and enrich descriptions and details. Finally, I drafted reflective memos to capture impressions, understandings, and interactions immediately following each observation or interview.

Data Analysis: Coding and Thematic Mapping

Saldaña (2009) suggested a minimum of two stages of coding and emphasized that coding is an iterative process. Throughout the data-gathering phase I transcribed interviews and began coding to see what early themes emerged. I prepared a coding book with rough themes based on the literature and some of the data from the pilot stage. I also planned to conduct a robust analysis of the pilot study after I analyzed the main stage. The goal was to synthesize and analyze all the data on the site together. I conducted line-by-line coding of all the data, and repeatedly sifted and reorganized codes. I then sorted and created subcodes linked below to the five most-referenced thematic codes. Next, I used the codes to generate word clouds. I also created word frequency queries, comparisons, and a framework for managing participant-specific data. This allowed me to attribute demographic data and link individuals to all texts directly related to them.

In preparation for data analysis, I created a project database in the qualitative software, NVivo, a robust qualitative analysis software that facilitates coding to identify themes in the

interviews and observations. I used NVivo to code all data, including photos and literature, and to write and keep track of my data analysis journals. I also employed specific techniques, such as cross-tabulation of participant cases to include all files, interviews, and demographic data with parent-level thematic codes.

Reliability of Data

Validity of data gathered is a critical aspect of the research. I took numerous steps to ensure and assess data validity, such as focusing on the existing research on cohousing communities and intentional communities. I focused on gathering thick descriptions through observations, interviews, and focus groups. It was important to interview individuals who entered the community at different times, as well as to speak with those who had left the community to capture differences and consistencies. This was another means to triangulate the data (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Throughout the process I wrote detailed reflective memos, specifically in the research data analysis journal that I started on June 4, 2018, to record my steps in the analysis process.

Other Ethical Considerations

Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) described three specific areas of ethical guidelines and handling research data: informed consent, confidentiality, and consequences. I attempted from the outset to ensure my research protocol addressed these and received approval from the Institutional Review Board for the pilot and a waiver for the main stage. First, to ensure informed consent, I had an introduction posted at the common house. The community also posted this introduction on the community listserv, and at the first general meeting I attended I made a general announcement as to the scope of my presence within their community. I also provided

each participant with a consent form that also contained an overview of the purpose of study and both my contact information and that of my committee chair, Ralph Buehler, with research oversight contacts. My goal was to ensure residents were comfortable with me being there as well as comfortable asking me to leave.

Second, I followed standard protocol on confidentiality, including masking the respondents' identities, securing written and soft-copy files, and conducting private interviews. One area of concern that arose during the research is that participants told me things in confidence about their feelings about the community, its processes, and how they perceived its successes and failures. The small sample size represented a challenge to presenting data in a way that maintained participant anonymity. Data reported from research in a small community could prove disruptive both personally and community-wide. Although I attempted to ensure confidentiality and limit negative consequences for respondents, there was still a significant chance that residents' identities could be ascertained. I discussed this possibility with participants, and although they expressed relatively little concern, I still attempted to obscure identifying information where possible.

Limitations, Biases, Boundaries

I chose to conduct this single case study of a suburban cohousing community because I wanted to explore issues related to social capital, cohousing, and suburban spaces. The community design also allowed me to examine single-family housing, which is less common among cohousing sites, but typical of post-World War II suburban communities. Most cohousing communities are usually a mix of housing forms, especially when they are not in an urban in-fill setting. Each cohousing community is very different, and this places a limitation on the

applicability of the data to other cohousing communities. Similarly, the intentional characteristics of cohousing limit any cohousing community's generalizability to other mainstream communities.

I conducted a single case study so I could explore in greater depth how one specific community functioned. I wanted to explore its unique norms and culture and be able to explore some changes that occurred over time in one distinct neighborhood. An additional draw to the community was how it was a distinct island, not because of its grassroots development but also in terms of site design and property value. I conducted observations on Maymount because it surrounds BBHC and is also visually jarring in that it is a traditional residential development with homes approximately five times the size of those in BBHC.

Although I have long been interested in intentional communities, I did not live at BBHC. During my research, I remained an outsider. This was especially true as I am an African American woman, observing a small, predominately White, suburban community. I could capture data through observation and interviews, but not the full nuance that comes from full immersion into the intimate dance of life in a community. I was always a guest. Also, at the outset of my research, I was predisposed to think that a cohousing community would help manage life commitments. To minimize this bias, I spoke often with scholars and colleagues to ensure that I consistently delved deeply into the data, focusing on capturing issues connected to conflict, power, and exclusion instead of just the beneficial and negative features of cohousing.

Chapter 4 Results and Analysis

Introduction

BBHC, built in 1991, is one of the first cohousing communities in the United States. Its early residents, whom I call resident-developers, were largely White, middle-class young families seeking to create a community where everyone knows their neighbor. Many residents had preexisting ties to one another as either family or friends. It was envisioned that this knowledge or network of interpersonal ties would provide support for residents in managing their daily life and in limiting isolation, resulting in a community with abundant social capital. For example, the composition of the BBHC and its surroundings have evolved since its inception. Residents with young children have become empty nesters, some residents have retired, some have died, and others have moved away. The surrounding environs have transformed from greenspace with farms and nurseries into a bustling, densely packed area of office towers, expensive condo high-rises, and mega mansions, complete with a corresponding increase in traffic. The internal and external changes have posed unforeseen challenges to the original goals of the community's resident-developers. In this chapter, I present the results of this single case study that explored the following research questions:

1. How is social capital created and fostered in cohousing?
2. How is this process challenged over time in the community?

I divided this chapter into four sections. In the first, I present the data-collection and analysis processes. In the second, I introduce BBHC. Third, I examine the linkages between the physical layout and its role in fostering social capital. Fourth, I describe how community culture developed. Fifth, I focus on the changes and challenges the community has encountered.

I used ethnographic methods to capture and analyze data on residents' perceptions of living in a cohousing community. I collected data during fieldwork carried out in two periods between 2011–2013 and 2018. I took part in community activities to gain detailed insight on the housing development. I also participated in multiple community meals and observed two general committee meetings. During the meetings and meals, I had spontaneous discussions that I captured in memos. The meals usually included informal group interviews. Much of the pilot study data addressed the research questions, therefore I have included those data in this project. I interviewed the same four individuals in both the pilot and primary fieldwork stages. Some respondents had moved, though they took part in the research during the main phase of the project. In the time that lapsed between the pilot and main study, some had experiences that altered their views on living in the community, and others expressed the same commitment and appreciation in interviews over time. I conducted multiple observations at the common house (a specific cohousing form of a community center) and on the community grounds. I also did observations in the neighboring development, Maymount. I did observations in this neighborhood because it is contiguous to BBHC and you must drive through Maymount to enter BBHC.

I also sketched and took photos at BBHC and Maymount. I focused on documenting elements that residents highlighted as meaningful. For example, I took photos of the hand-painted tiles created by residents' children that created the kitchen backsplash. I photographed other important documents posted, such as the calendar, as a sample of the community's management processes. I obtained the current and new proposed by-laws for the community and its welcome kit. Specific to the pilot phase, I also attended workshops, conferences, and tours of

mid-Atlantic cohousing communities in suburban, urban, and rural locations.

Data Analysis

I performed my analysis in the main stage of my research, concurrent to interviewing. I transcribed the interviews and crafted reflective memos. During this stage, I also started a coding book. After I completed all the interviews, I continued coding the interviews and memos, creating and refining codes through sifting. I conducted many rounds of coding and sifting through themes. I then replicated this process using pilot research data. I ultimately created a set of 11 parent codes and approximately 100 subcodes. The codes covered a mix of attitudes about certain activities or participants, forms of communication, processes for community management, community culture, and daily life activities. Table 2 demonstrates the linkages between parent codes and related subordinate codes, titled "Child Codes." This coding structure was used to connect issues and develop themes.

Table 2 Coding Book Excerpt

Sample parent and Child Codes	
Parent Codes	**Child Codes**
Cohousing Writ-Large	Advice, Cohousing Experience, Why Cohousing
Community Culture	Commitment, Diversity, Storytelling, Values, Integration, Change, Arts, sharing
Intentional Activities	Meeting Structures, Resident Involvement, Micropolitics Power, Decision-Making, Consensus Building, Integration, Alienation, Equity

Intentional Spaces	Accessibility, Common Area Usage, Site Planning,
Why BBHC	Resident’s understanding of BBHC, why they stay or go, what they value of the community

I used NVivo link codes to individuals for comparison. For example, Persons A, B, C, D, and E discussed how they managed conflict, and I linked them to the issue. I also sorted by individual to see what they discussed. I also examined a code to see if different participants’ views may have overlapped. Sometimes I sorted and resorted the data based on commonly raised themes, which generated more data points. Using NVivo, I also recorded additional memos on insights and maintained an analysis journal where I noted by date and occasionally time what actions I had taken. Eventually, I captured patterns in the data and merged codes into specific themes. The themes included creation stories, physical layout and usage of space, placemaking, managing community and daily life, integration and alienation, and decision-making and micropolitics.

Secondary Data

To inform the research data, I examined the 2010 census, 2015 and 2019 ACSs, and Fairfax County Virginia tax and deed records. This information was used to capture socioeconomic, demographic, and housing data for BBHC and the neighboring communities. I also incorporated information from the official manual the community uses on decision-making, as well as the community’s welcome kit and by-laws. In 2016, at the time of BBHC’s 15th anniversary, the residents conducted their own survey to understand how residents felt about living in the community. The community shared this data with me. It served as background, but I

did not perform a coding analysis of it.

Reflections on Site and Participants

The participants included residents, also called resident-developers, as well as individuals who moved during the research, and former residents who did not live there at any time of the research. The majority (70%) were above the age of 50. White participants comprised more than 99% of total participants. Most residents, especially the resident-developers, were connected by family or friendship. A significant number of households were connected prior to developing BBHC. Taken together, 31% of the households are encapsulated in this network. According to the Welcome Packet:

> Most of us are not related to each other, but there are a few households who are. There are four households related to the Newcombs (by blood or marriage), who own the farm next door and started the community, and two households related to the Brock family.

The number of families connected to the Newcombs increases to four if including a childhood friend and her household. I cannot determine how unusual this is for a cohousing community, but in discussing resident relationships, I think this relatedness may be higher than typical. How significant these familial relationships are is uncertain. Almost no participants mentioned a specific effect of exclusivity relating specifically to the kinship group. The research data suggest that strong social ties developed in the developer phase, which is the most significant factor in the degree of social capital an individual possesses.

Intentional Creation of Communal Space

The original residents, mostly young families, developed BBHC to create a community to help alleviate the demands of daily life. They were dedicated to the idea of living in a community

that promised mutual support through intimate knowledge of each other rather than just having an atomized life in a neighborhood. One theme that arose is that the residents already had an interest in living in a more communal manner. They either had experience in cooperatives, group living arrangements, or were seeking close supportive relationships in which they were regularly embedded.

Foundations for Communal Living

The history of BBHC, like that of many suburban communities, begins with a farm. Potomac Vegetable Farm (PVF) East is located 10 minutes from Tysons Corner, a “boomburb” in Northern Virginia. The Newcomb family has owned and operated it since the early 1960s and it was on their land that they initiated the development of BBHC. The family had a long-standing interest in and supported ideas around land, community, and cooperation. Mariette, the matriarch, is Chinese American and grew up in Hawaii in the 1930s and 1940s. She and her late husband, Anthony “Tony” Newcomb, met at Oberlin College where they first encountered the idea of cooperatives. Throughout their early years in Washington, the couple lived as apartment tenants. Later, in the early 1960s, while Tony worked for the federal government, they purchased a home in Washington, D.C., and they rented the extra rooms in their home to friends and students. Around the same time, they started renting farmland in Northern Virginia to try their hand at farming. In an early interview with Hana, Mariette’s daughter, she said her parents had never been farmers, but wanted to build community in a utopian way and believed that agriculture was the basis for community. Eventually, Mariette and Tony purchased a parcel of farmland in the Tysons Corner area, which is the current location of the PVF. In 1970, Tony and Mariette moved to the farm and brought with them their four children, Hana, Anna, Lani, and

Charles.

The Newcombs hired and housed college students to assist on the farm. Mariette suggested that growing up with this type of informal community helped accustom the Newcomb children to a communal life, a life broader than their nuclear family. Over time, the Newcombs purchased more land to expand their business until it was a patchwork across three Maryland and Virginia counties. Tony passed away in 1984. After his passing, Mariette, along with her daughters, who had become active managers in the business, consolidated and reduced the parcels into two single farms. One comprised the original farm in Fairfax where BBHC would be built, and the other was farmland in Loudoun County. The daughters were struggling to manage work and child rearing. Two of the daughters, Anna and Hana, lived about 4.5 miles apart. Anna, a petite woman with salt-and-pepper hair, described, "My sister and I thought we were duplicating efforts in child-rearing. We wanted a more of a sense of community. The communal nature of the farm meant that cohousing wasn't foreign."

Various members of the family read *Cohousing, A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* (McCamant & Durrett, 1988), and attended one of the authors' presentations in the Washington, D.C. area. The sisters decided that cohousing would be the development model for a small community where they could live close to each other but have their own homes. The communal nature of their upbringing seemed to have facilitated their acceptance of a community-based solution to address some of the stresses the sisters faced in managing their daily life. Anna also credited her experience with cooperatives. In addition to their upbringing, Anna also credited the time she spent at Oberlin for her confidence and interest in creating a close-knit and cooperative community. She stated:

> I went to Oberlin and was involved in the cooperative programs and so had an inflated sense of capacity as 18 or to 20 years old... we managed to regularly feed a 100 or more, so, we should be able to build a community.

Other respondents said they had lived in isolated work camps, spent time in the military and base housing or working in cooperatives, and had come to greatly appreciate the ideas of teamwork and collaboration in daily life. Previous positive life experiences with community endeavors seemed to be a major reason why they were attracted to cohousing. A few respondents suggested that personal life changes, such as the death of a spouse, and desire to be closer to family, remarriage, single parenthood, and career uncertainties made them crave living a different type of life.

An early resident (resident-developer) described her introduction to cohousing through her first meeting group developing the BBHC:

> He [sic: another future resident] asked if he could hold the baby. Meanwhile, this was a contentious meeting. The project had become too expensive for a few families and there was no way for the community to give the money back unless someone came and bought their shares, but people were still passing around the baby. I wanted to live somewhere unique, and everyone was immediately caring.

Another respondent said, "I was going through a layoff . . . and felt I was missing something. I had heard about cohousing and started exploring new potential start-up groups in Maryland and Virginia."

Many respondents were seeking a solution that would support them as they balanced multiple and conflicting aspects of their daily life. At the opening of their book, McCamant and

Durrett (1988) wrote, “Often, we would come home from work exhausted and hungry, only to find the refrigerator empty. Between our jobs and housekeeping, where would we find the time to spend with our kids” (McCamant & Durrett, 1988, p. 11).

The authors sought to connect with readers on an emotional level, how cohousing could provide a practical response to the stresses of daily life. Cohousing BBHC resident-developers responded to this message, seeing cohousing as a way to address the challenges of balancing the disparate elements of modern life, including parenting, caring for parents, social activities, and chores. It was this promise of the supportive small community where daily stresses could be shared, and a sympathetic ear or a helpful hand could be available. They felt these elements were missing in their lives and, based on either previous experience or imagined ideas, they thought that creating a cohousing community would give them the opportunity to have more supported and socially enriched lives.

Tools of Building Social Capital – The Creation Story

Cohousing is explicit in its focus on both design and activity to build strong interpersonal relationships. It was in the process of developing the community that acted as the first stage of developing the foundations for social capital. The findings from this study indicate that a significant amount of social equity forms through the development of a cohousing community. It is usually a 5–7-year process. One resident-developer said, “If I had known how difficult it would be I might not have done it.” Speaking with multiple resident-developers, they all recounted what I came to call the BBHC creation story. In this sense, I am drawing from Sandercock (2003) definition of a story, which, in the context of planning, is a narrative capturing the intangible elements of a city, village, or neighborhood. BBHC’s creation story, as

in most creation myths, transmits the narrator's perception of the actual steps taken to develop the community and seeks to convey the emotional dimension. In its telling, the story illuminates what the narrator values about the community and its inception. The following story is drawn from different interviews conducted with nine resident-developers recounting BBHC's creation.

The initial group of developers met weekly on Sunday over 6 years. One of the first steps was to locate and hire an architect comfortable with a group of self-funded developers using a new community-development approach. There was a small group of real estate professionals, including architects in northern Virginia, interested in cohousing. The BBHC development group received a referral to an architect, Jack, who had attended architecture school and was friends with American cohousing founder, Charles Durrett. At this period, Jack was working on residential in-fill projects. Given his work experience, he was deeply knowledgeable about zoning regulations and codes in Fairfax, Virginia. This background proved to be critical in the early stages of development. Jack was drawn to the project and joined the group as a resident-developer and still resides in the community today.

BBHC's developers faced significant planning and zoning challenges specific to designing a community grounded in cohousing precepts in an American suburb. Many of the county zoning regulations at the time conflicted with cohousing design tenets. The site is in the wealthy northern Virginia county of Fairfax, outside of Washington D.C. Comprising 395 square miles, in the past 50 years, the federal government and later the defense sector anchored much of the area's development. Although older sections of Fairfax developed in the immediate aftermath of World War II had smaller residential lots, as small as a half-acre, later county zoning ordinances mandated 1-acre lots for all single-family dwelling units ("Fairfax County Zoning

Ordinance," 1978). The site plan for BBHC used single-family dwelling units. Jack described,

> BBHC faced the classic barriers as a cohousing product. It was about casting Blueberry Hill Cohousing into the existing county planning and zoning model. There is a zoning plan and if you cannot fit into this existing process, well, it's a two-year process for rezoning and land permitting in this jurisdiction. I thought we could fit this place into the existing zoning code and would have to show existing zoning applied to the site. So, there was a long gestational period.

Another sticking point was the community’s plans to incorporate the cohousing precept of de-emphasizing automobiles on the site. The cohousing model suggests parking should be located only in the community's periphery. Resident-developers planned BBHC to incorporate two peripheral parking bays. There would be no street parking, garages, or individual driveways. This would require the county to provide exemptions for the design. An unexpected challenge came from neighboring communities. BBHC resident-developers encountered community resistance to the project once neighbors heard that a cohousing community was being developed. Cohousing conjures up images of alternative intentional communities from 1960–1970. Grassroots community development is often perceived in broader American society as a “hippy” endeavor that could only have a negative effect on neighbors’ property values and quality of life. This perception posed a challenge for BBHC resident-developers in pursuit of gaining approval from the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. A local official suggested the resident-developers reach out to the local homeowner associations (HOAs) in the area to clarify the project and win over support. In interviews, two original residents noted they downplayed the concept of cohousing to not alarm officials or neighboring residents. For example, they renamed the

common house, which is a typical communal space in a cohousing community, a clubhouse. Other original residents stated that neighbors complained about the site planning and suggested the smaller sized homes would reduce property values. A local HOA sent a letter of opposition to the Board of Supervisors and a local resident protested during a zoning hearing that these houses would be smaller than his garage. Fortunately, county officials became sympathetic to the design and permitted the community development.

Besides tailoring the cohousing precepts to fit into existing zoning regulations, financing was an early and significant challenge. The original residents created an LLC for the development to meet county requirements, and one of the first acts the LLC had to do legally was to come to an agreement on financing the property. To meet county requirements, the Newcombs allocated 11 acres from their farm so that new development had the equivalent of 1 acre per house. When this land was pulled from cultivation, it lost its agriculture district designation and tax deferral. For 3 years, the Blueberry Hill LLC reimbursed the farm for the difference in property taxes between the land's previous designation and the new one. Mariette did not specify the amount, but indicated it was considerable. After 3 years, the farm was once again designated as an agricultural district. I was uncertain why the agreement only had to be for 3 years. Another financing issue was that the LLC had to show it had US$20,000 per homestead prior to the final zoning hearing. Many early residents were young families with limited financial means. One resident-developer relayed:

> People dropped out at the last minute before closing because of financial considerations. The LLC had to go in front of the zoning board, and we needed all the funds before the board decided. It was two or three years once we started, before move-in, and prices

climbed.

Early residents described contentious meetings as the cost increased. People wanted their funds returned, but the LLC could not do that unless another potential resident-developer took on the cost and bought them out and a new family joined. Another resident described this experience to illustrate the level of trust and camaraderie that had developed by this point: "So, we went on a tour, in February, before the houses were built, and the baby couldn't keep her socks up. NAME had an idea about how to keep the socks up."

In 2001, construction of the homes was completed and move-in began. Nearly 1 year later, the community built the common house. The resident-developers recounted a story that underscores the emotional toll, financial demands, and interpersonal connections used to develop the BBHC community. It also meant the earliest residents had over 6 years of shared intentions, as well as constant and deep interpersonal interactions that developed a considerable amount of social capital. During this period, weak to nonexistent social ties transformed into stronger ones, and the community's initial norms of behavior and expectations coalesced. Finally, the development process, or sociogenesis, acted to winnow out those who could not or would not be able to commit long term to the project. BBHC formed an intentional community prior to the first residents to move into the neighborhood.

The Spatial Aspect of Creating Community

Cohousing proponents suggest that a cohousing community should consist of approximately 30 households. The site should maximize pedestrian usage and cars should be limited to the community's periphery. Each household should have its own dwelling, but compact footprints are preferred with the idea that common areas should form extensions of the

dwellings. In reviewing BBHC, the resident-developers seemed to be very conscientious in incorporating cohousing site-design principles.

The overall site was carved from the hilly and wooded back lot of the PVF farm using minimal clearing and grading. Homes form a horseshoe shape, curving up and down the site's hills. A small footpath passes through the development, and open areas around the footpath serve as community open space and shared lawns. The pathway is a surveyed municipal road. It is a "green street" built using a foundation of permeable mesh strong enough to bear the weight of and permit easy access for emergency vehicles. Its design, however, gives the illusion of a narrow pathway. In the middle of the horseshoe sits a 2,500 square-foot common house. At each end of the horseshoe-shaped path are two small community parking lots. Fences are discouraged to foster a sense of community ownership of all the land, not just one's lot.

In terms of house size, according to Fairfax County records, usable square footage in BBHC residential houses ranges from 1,036 to 1,680 square feet; although porches on each home and the occasional deck expand the available square footage, these homes are smaller than the national average of 2,400 square feet. These homes stand out in this affluent area of the county for their size. The development, Maymount, surrounds BBHC and consists of three neighborhoods made up of executive homes with an average size of 8,000 square feet. One must drive through Maymount to enter BBHC. In Figure 3, the photo on the left shows a Maymount home at the corner of the street going into the BBHC. The photo on the right provides a view upon entering BBHC.

Figure 3 Maymount (left) and BBHC (right) photo by author.

All BBHC buildings are farmhouse style, as an acknowledgment of the neighboring farm and its main house. The resident-developers based the floor plan after deliberating on how they used their own kitchens, including deliberations on how both homeowners and guests tended to congregate in them. They developed two house models, Model A and Model B. The A models are smaller and mostly single-story, and the B model is two-stories with greater square footage. Also, Model B homes have smaller kitchens with no islands. In both models, the kitchens are at the front of the houses at the entrance and face the greenway. The resident-developers felt that because most people spend a lot of time in their kitchen, people should be able to look out onto the community paths and green space, allowing individuals to observe the community casually throughout the day. It also could facilitate contact through chance encounters on the paths.

There is an architectural design review board that maintains loose guidelines. If someone wants to change their home's exterior, the BBHC process requires the person to contact their neighbors and talk through their plans. As a result, the owners have personalized their houses to varying degrees and they do vary in color from standard pale yellow to an eye-catching mauve

with deep purple trim, like a gingerbread house. A resident told me with obvious affection that residents call it the “Disney®” house. Most of the houses have unique outdoor decorations, such as small statues of a cow or a horse, antique farming equipment, or flags. The lack of uniformity and the casual signs of everyday life, such as gardening tools and children’s toys spilling out onto the greenway, suggests that residents support self-expression and embrace the idea that homelife happens beyond the house.

During the warm weather, I watched children play on the playground, including some children from the neighboring residential community. I also took part in a barbecue on the greens in front of the common house. A resident-developer told me a story of the early days after they had all moved in. It was a Friday, and she had experienced a terrible day at work. She came home and saw a big sheet spread out between her house and her neighbor’s house. Outside, the neighbors were setting up a movie and had happy-hour drinks. She felt herself relax and thought about how this scenario was why she chose to live in cohousing. She indicated that this type of camaraderie was not likely in other neighborhoods. Another resident also described the fun of the community happy hours on the commons. During one meeting, residents mentioned the onset of spring as a good time to think about getting the happy hours outside started.

I investigated how mainstream communities such as Maymount used some of their common areas in comparison to BBHC and cohousing ideals. To do this, I conducted observations of Maymount and researched how other planned communities used their common

areas.

As seen in Figure 4, the section of Maymount closest to BBHC has an expansive, very

Figure 4 Maymount green space, (photo by author).

manicured green area with a white gazebo at the end. Although both communities have greenspace common areas as amenities, in mainstream communities such as Maymount, spontaneous usage did not seem to be envisioned. I searched Google.com® to find a list of communities' regulations and guidelines for using their respective gazebos[1]. The guidelines are

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1Accessed 6:15 pm May 4, 2014 Google.com. Search Terms: "Homeowners Association gazebo and common ground usage" --1.5 million hits; "Homeowners Association gazebo and common ground use" --1.79 million hits; "Homeowners Association gazebo and common ground regulations" --651,000 hits; and "Homeowners Association gazebo reservation" --351,000 hits.

quite extensive. The common area in Maymount is an attractive backdrop that developers have used to market an upmarket, mainstream community. This green space is a means to transmit the neighborhood's sense of order and wealth. In contrast, the people who use the common areas at BBHC designed it. These spaces are amenities for everyday casual usage. They serve as interaction hubs for building community ties. Abu-Ghazzeh (1999) and Whyte (1980) noted that common areas seem to attract greater use if there is already some activity occurring. During my observations I did not see any neighbors using the Maymount space. In contrast, at BBHC, I saw both its residents and others walking on the paths (BBHC residents quickly identified non-BBHC residents to me). Also, the common areas instill a sense of place. Beatley (2004) described common areas as “different” places that evoke a range of memories and stories; they strengthen residents’ regard and concern for their neighborhood and its members' overall well-being. In this way, the common areas at BBHC help foster a sense of place. The difference between common spaces in mainstream residential communities and cohousing communities is based on who is designing the common space and how its end-use is visualized.

BBHC also has a memorial space. It contains a small cemetery where the Newcomb family members and another long-time resident are buried. A bench and tree commemorate another former long-time resident. This site serves as a spatial anchor linking the past of the community with its present, reminding the inhabitants that this is farmland owned by a family and stressing the importance of the original resident-developers to the land. Cohousing designs eschew garages and fences. BBHC adheres to this principle. The common house sits at one end of the horseshoe, near one of the parking lots. Residents indicated that nonresidents unfamiliar with cohousing find it startling that the homes have no dedicated parking space on the lot; this

feature can have a negative effect on resale values. Visitors and prospective buyers occasionally ask, “How do you bring in their groceries if it is raining?” Other respondents, even in other communities, repeated similar experiences. In single-family home communities, the expected norm is that parking is on a house lot. For BBHC residents, the parking lots represent a potential interaction hub and is the location most often stated as a place to meet neighbors, followed by the mailbox area. These interaction hubs are a no-effort means of maintaining ties, checking on the well-being of neighbors, and exchanging news and gossip. As residents walk between their home and the parking lot, they can observe the community, see if things need to be fixed, or if there are other concerns they notice. Figure 5 lists the most common responses to the question of where

Figure 5 Responses to the interview question.

Most Common Responses:

Parking Lots

Mailboxes

Common house

Meals and Meetings

residents are most likely to meet each other. `The third most common area for these interactions is at the common house. Cohousing stresses the centrality of the common house to develop and foster relationships, and at BBHC, the common house functions as intended, physically, socially, and psychologically. As seen in Figure 6, the mailboxes are located on the common house porch at the entrance, creating an important interaction hub. The common house at BBHC is a large,

low, white farmhouse-style building approximately at the center of the site. The interior of the common house is spacious.

Figure 6 Mailboxes at the common house entrance (photo by author)

There is a room at the immediate right of the entryway. It is set up with comfortable furniture and a piano. Originally, BBHC children and locals used it for music lessons. Over time, the number of children has dramatically dropped off in the community. Residents are trying to determine what to do with the room now and if they should still offer the use to non-BBHC children's music lessons. I interviewed residents in this room during both stages of research. It

feels like a communal living room. Down the hall, the space opens into the dining room and kitchen area. There is a display board on the wall in the hallway that holds community notices.

The dining room is spacious, with two areas that can separate. The dining room is seen in Figure 7 on the left. There are long wooden farmhouse-style tables that residents can combine to

Figure 7 Living/Music Room (left) and Dining Room (right), (photo by author).

make larger tables and sturdy chairs. In addition to meetings, this space serves to hold meetings, celebrate birthdays, and put on talent shows. The community also rents the space if people want to have a smaller, invitation-only event. During my first visit, a band was practicing in the front area. One of the original residents explained that there has been extensive discussion as to whether they should install a television. Some suggested it would be good for displaying PowerPoint presentations at meetings. In response, one resident built a special wooden sideboard. Seen in Figure 8, it conceals a flat screen television. Residents expressed appreciation as they described this item. As they described it to me, the story was used to convey how individuals contribute to the community.

Figure 8 Resident-made sideboard (photo by author).

Another piece of communal art helps visually transmit the community's history. In the dining room is a large textile wall hanging. Designed from pieces of cloth on a burlap type

Figure 9 Resident-made textile map of BBHC, (photo by author).

backing, it is a map of the community and features each building carefully laid out along the pathways. Numbered hooks representing each home are at the bottom of the piece. Attached to each hook is a keychain representing a family that has lived in the home. Most hooks, as can be seen on Figure 9, have multiple keychains. Different residents pointed out the piece with pride, explaining how they worked together from the conceptual phase to completion.

The dining room opens into a commercial kitchen. It houses two refrigerators, two dishwashers, stoves, sinks, and a large pantry. It is big enough for multiple people to work together at stations. There is also a chalkboard for community announcements. I saw notes on the chalkboard, one announcing the memorial service for a resident and another announcing a common meal to celebrate a birthday.

On the lower level of the common house is an arts-and-crafts work room and a laundry facility used for communal items from shared dinners or for use by residents if their own units are broken. There is also a games room, with game tables like foosball. On the wall is a large fantastical painting that was created when the common house was completed. The painting was created by a resident who, at the time, helped the community children design and paint it. Many of those children are grown up now and have moved away, but resident-developers reminisce proudly about the project's creation.

The common house is also where the community mowing and landscaping equipment is stored. Sharing the outdoor landscaping equipment and arts-and-crafts workroom is supposed to reduce individual storage needs at home, enable smaller house footprints, and lower household outlays using shared goods. In cohousing, the common house should be the center of community activity (Garciano, 2009). Residents frequently use the common house for the community meals

that occur about twice a week, community meetings, and celebrations. It is also a place that people casually visit over the course of the day. I observed the casual usage of the common house over several afternoons and evenings, and even during meetings. Different residents come by to check on the house, find or drop off items, grab a drink out of the refrigerator, or just meet up with a few other residents. A respondent who grew up at BBHC said, “The best memories are in the common house.”

The common house, with its mailboxes, workrooms, kitchen, and playrooms, provides several interaction hubs. Residents envisioned their design and incorporation to facilitate residents’ life management. For example, if a music teacher can come to the common house to give piano and guitar lessons to multiple children, then parents no longer need to transport children individually to lessons. Living in this contact-intense designed community, however, has an unexpected outcome. Because constant observation and interaction have become ordinary, residents may need to make specific requests for privacy. BBHC residents report that they are more comfortable telling neighbors when they need to be alone or do not have time for a chat than when they lived in noncohousing communities. There also seems to be a perception that other residents do not take offense at these requests. These observations suggest that living in cohousing might require a change in how an individual defines their space. The home is not a fortress, but merely one abode among others and residents must self-demarcate their boundaries.

Building Ties Through Living Together: Birth, Death, and the In-Between

A fundamental component of the cohousing model is its use of community-wide activities to build and foster social relationships. BBHC resident-developers and other residents said living in a community "where you know your neighbors" (formerly a line on the BBHC

website) was the chief appeal for them to choose this living environment. One interviewee said, "We liked . . . how everyone knew each other. We thought it was a good choice." Another said, "The community interaction was an attraction." When asked how they describe community and strong social ties as exemplified at BBHC, an interviewee said, "I appreciate the people who you don't speak to often, but you know them and know they are around. Not coming home to anonymity." Another explained, "You know who your neighbors are, and you support everyone." Two different interviewees said residents understood “how to do” life, death, and birth. During my fieldwork, I witnessed residents’ activities related to all three situations. A family welcomed a new child into their home. There also was the illness and death of a long-time resident, whom I had interviewed during the pilot research.

Community Norms and Expectations: Participatory Management/Workdays

BBHC’s site planning is based on cohousing precepts to maximize the opportunity for residents to have chance encounters. It is likely that cohousing’s focus on community self-management, including physical upkeep, is the key to fostering deep interpersonal connections among residents. BBHC resident-developers incorporated this cohousing principle into their community. They developed processes for operating the community, including developing committee structures and rules regarding site use and management. They also stated the expectation for residents’ participation. The resident-developers told me they intentionally limited the use of formal written regulations and chose to not implement a system of penalties and incentives. They also wanted to ensure that all residents, both residents and tenants, would be incorporated into all aspects of the community. All residents, owners, and tenants are encouraged to join and take part in all community activities, including management. Tenants,

however, are not involved in any financial decisions.

At the beginning of each year, these committees prioritize the needs in their area of responsibility and organize workdays when all members participate. Residents' friends and family from outside the community also come to help on workdays. The listserv is used to announce workdays. As an example of the process, a resident explained how mowing the lawn is managed. There is a sign posted listing the annual responsibilities for mowing. Each year, a household, if physically capable, takes responsibility for mowing certain sections of the property. The indoor committee will schedule workdays for cleaning the common house. These are posted on a calendar in the hall of the common house and on the listserv. Residents indicated that the meetings and workdays are a common way to interact with other residents. One BBHC female resident explained,

> Committee outdoor workdays are a favorite. We pay people to clean our house and do our own yard, but we always participate in community workdays. I remember one weekend. . . we cleaned out the grates, and people told stories about this place. It's less of a chore and it forces us to be together.

A more recent resident, and parent to young children, described that although their daily schedule rarely allows them to join the common meals, they can participate in the workdays because they usually fall on the weekend. Another described how sometimes she would rather not participate on a workday. What motivates her is she finds that when she attends, she can catch up with residents with whom she rarely interacts. Another long-term resident said she did feel that workdays could be considered a chore, but then "you have fun, and it reminds you to be open." A resident-developer described how a recent workday reminded him of the early

development meetings. There were children and adults all around in a bit of chaos and they said that was "how you create community." Workdays are time-consuming, but BBHC residents said they found them beneficial to the community and personally enjoyable. Workdays are a fundamental tool for building community identity and strengthening interpersonal relationships. They also create a space and time during which residents can share with each other the community's history and values. They also serve to reinforce emotional linkages between place and residents.

Group Activities/Traditions

Group activities, rituals, and traditions are a means of defining community identity, transmitting community values, and ensuring interaction among members. In the first 10 to 15 years of the community, when a child or grandchild was born, the family planted a blueberry bush in the BBHC blueberry patch. This celebratory act connected residents by linking the significant human event to the environment and its historical usage as a farm. Although this activity no longer occurs, other traditions remain or have been started. These include community potlucks on federal holidays such as Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. They also sell Christmas trees with proceeds benefiting local charities, and many spoke with great fondness for the annual New Year's Eve progressive dinner. Together, these group traditions and activities create a sense of shared community identity and connection to their physical environment (Borrup, 2006). As one resident described, "I think it is vital to keep the tradition of community events, including especially common meals, going strong." In response to the question of how she would feel if there were fewer or no activities, one resident said, "I would feel anxious from the belief that we have something precious here. We don't want to lose it." Many residents see

the activities planned and unplanned as part of the community's identity.

Meals

Cohousing calls for including a regularly scheduled shared meal (Ergas, 2010; Hechter, 1990; Williams, 2005). BBHC residents invite friends and neighbors to participate in these meals. When I attended meals, occasionally former residents were also there helping to cook. The meals serve multiple purposes: they provide an opportunity for residents to interact intimately, and they can provide an affordable “night out” for families. Mealtimes also strengthen community identity in and around the common house. At BBHC, meals take place usually twice a month and are organized with “team cooks” (one person acts as the executive chef, and others are sous chefs). In the early years, they had many potlucks, but now they find the “team cook” approach to be better. Residents schedule the meal in advance on a large calendar in the hallway of the common house. People sign up and pay $5 for an adult, $3 for children, and $2 for leftovers. Each team cook gets a credit to be used for meals based on the receipts they submit to the community. An email goes out for volunteers to assist the cooks. The same people often volunteer so they build up a surplus of credits for meals, and every so often there is a cash-out to those households.

Meals play an important role in the BBHC community. Residents repeatedly mentioned that they prioritize taking part or attending the common meals because they are crucial to building a sense of community.

> The table is a social machinery as complicated as it is effective: it makes one talk, one “lays everything on the table” to confess what wanted to quit, one gets “grilled” by a skillful neighbor, one yields to a monetary excitement, a bit of vanity, to the velvet

smoothness of a red wine, and one hears oneself tell all about what one had sworn the day before to hide everyone. (Giard, 1998, p. 197)

Although common meals can be a tool to reinforce internal cohesion, they can also be a source of contention. While eating as a group, the social norms and rituals around eating create and reinforce visible community norms of behavior among most residents. In her description of the meal program at an Atlanta Georgia Hindu Temple, McClymond (2006) described the ways food and meals create and reinforce community identity through forming boundaries, creating taboos, and creating community norms. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish kosher foods have foundational rules (no mixing of meat and cheese, no shellfish), whereas ultra-Orthodox sects create boundaries separating themselves through additional rules on which foodstuffs are acceptable as kosher (Davidman, 1991, 2015). Other traditions, such as who is allowed to cook or serve meals, who eats first, and acceptable table manners, form other norms.

During a meal, I watched adults correct children's behavior or demeanor, regardless of if they were the parents of the children. In interviews and during meetings, some parents expressed relief to share childrearing with a broader community. Others expressed they perceived their parenting, or their children, were unfairly criticized. Parents have different methods of child rearing and mealtimes can be ripe for incidents that can leave hurt feelings among residents. Some adult residents who grew up in the community expressed how they had to develop "a thicker skin" in managing criticism from residents outside their family. Naturally, extrafamilial critiques on behavior come during public settings such as meals; therefore, meals are where parenting styles can come into conflict. The literature indicates that mealtime in other communities can be a source of strife, to the extent that participation drops and common meals

are eliminated (Chitewere, 2006; Ergas, 2010; Kanter et al., 1975; Padilla, 1998). During my research, I did not witness parents openly upset at others correcting their children, but later residents did say that expressing thoughts on other residents' children was difficult, and another resident said she felt that all children may not be treated equally.

Caregiving

In the nearly 20 years of its existence, BBHC residents have experienced the full range of life experiences. There have been births, job losses and changes, illnesses, and deaths, including a well-publicized murder-suicide (Wu & Castaneda, 2011). A resident recounted falling gravely ill and being housebound. He explained how people would come and visit and just watch television with him. From his tone, it was clear how much this simple act meant so much to him. He chose this story to explain the care and concern he perceives as existing in the community. The community has a formal structure in place for caregiving managed by the wellness or "people's committee." Its members coordinate support for residents in need of a variety of help and they form a welfare check, including on residents rarely visible. Among their tasks, they coordinate providing meals for families with newborns, and those who are sick and their caregivers. During a meeting, members discussed options for babysitting and spending time with older siblings in a family with a newborn. This would give the parents a well-needed break and ensure the older siblings had attention and support. The wellness committee members act as a single point of contact for residents to describe their needs, be it for meals, visits, or to alert others that a family wants privacy. The committee relays these messages to the community at large.

I observed this caregiving process during community management meetings. During my

prior visits in 2011, I met a spry retired teacher. She made an impression on me for her intellectual curiosity and welcoming nature. When I returned in 2018, the residents were focused on her and her family, as she was in home hospice. The wellness committee reported out on her condition and the needs of her family providing care. Meals and visits were coordinated, but also, the residents could discuss the difficult and sensitive questions about whether visits were welcome and timing, how she was doing, and how the family was coping. She passed away during my fieldwork and the common house was a place for the community to gather and remember her. The wellness committee, in coordination with her family, also started planning what the community would or should do in her honor. Witnessing the community during a deeply emotional and personal event underscored the effect that abundant social capital can have on residents' daily lives. It was intimate support and acknowledgement of a person's life and their role in the community. The dedication of a volunteer committee in charge of wellness serves to limit some of the isolation individuals may experience.

General Assistance

Residents use email and the community listserv for routine requests such as a ride to the airport, lost and found, or specific requests or needs. It is an important means of communication for reminders on community workday, notifications on meals, and to arrange things. Multiple residents highlighted these forms of requests, which help as key benefits in facilitating life. Residents mentioned that living in BBHC afforded the opportunity to both learn or teach different skills, including repairing cars and items in their home. Last-minute needs, the proverbial borrowing a cup of sugar or gathering last minute supplies for children's school projects, can save residents significant time and reduce stress.

Residents indicated they had to know each other for this process to work. They described how knowing a neighbor meant understanding what individuals could and would do, and how much you can trust a person in different scenarios. Some residents emphasized that trust and knowledge do not mean automatic reliance or approval. For example, Resident A is great for babysitting, but Resident B is not overly fond of young children. Resident C is capable and willing to help fix your dishwasher, and Resident D is usually willing to pick up your children if there is an emergency. Residents come to know and understand which residents may be willing and most skilled in managing certain tasks. They also know who will not participate in any undertaking. All the residents interviewed expressed that they would aid any resident regardless of how they perceived the person's contribution to the community. This statement underscores how residents perceive their contributions to the community are being noted by others.

This study also sought to gain data on residents who did not participate in any activities. There is no penalty for not participating in management activities, in contrast to other cohousing communities. One resident-developer expressed surprise that some cohousing communities that seemed more "liberal" had elaborate penalty systems. She said they just had not thought about it during the development period. Another resident explained, "The folks who don't participate, they don't give much, but they don't use anything — you know of the community resources. We never mandated anything. It would take the fun out."

Written and Unspoken — Navigating community norms and rules

The data suggests the fault lines in social solidarity are most visible in governing and management processes. Cohousing proponents advocate communities use some form of nonhierarchical decision-making and resident-developers' first critical choice is developing the

decision-making process and solidifying community norms and practices. When the resident-developers were establishing BBHC, there was limited guidance from the cohousing movement. Several developers suggested the use of committees as a tool, but did not specify or recommend any specific forms of decision-making (McCamant & Durrett, 1988; McCamant et al., 1994). They based their by-laws on a mix of the state of Virginia and County of Fairfax requirements for CID, but the process was supplemented by Butler and Rothstein's (1987) book on consensus decision-making. The resident-developers also hired Butler for a consulting session. At the time of this project, the community by-laws consisted of seven pages covering membership and meetings; directors and officers; conduct of business; committees; books, records, budget, and membership ledgers; dispute resolution; and amendment of bylaws. According to the by-laws, there are three directors, an association treasurer, and association secretary.

BBHC management is unlike typical CIDs where residents elect a board to perform oversight in conjunction with a management services firm. Following cohousing precepts, BBHC residents are expected to participate in the management and upkeep. Also, the BBHC decision-making process is governed by a consensus process. Finally, from the outset, the resident-developers sought to limit rules and avoid implementing punitive punishments or incentives for participation. Participation is subject to residents' goodwill or unspoken censure. Initially, the process evolved through initial winnowing during development. The earliest residents had social cohesion and created the initial community norms for behavior. The outcome of this process is that future residents are left to intuit the process. The stories that bound the initial residents and social capital generated through the existing ties pose a barrier that is penetrable but requires time and effort.

In recognition of the challenges newcomers may face, the community created a handbook to facilitate integration and minimize missteps. The 30-page Welcome Packet for New Residents explains the community's history, many of its practices and norms, and includes suggestions. The specific sections are the history of the community and farm, a description of cohousing, an overview of the BBHC management processes, information on community activities, the use of community spaces, and local amenities in the broader area. The Welcome Packet states:

> Our large decisions are made by consensus by the entire community. In most cases, a committee or task force introduces a proposal, and the community engages in dialogue, raises questions, and voices concerns. The committee works to resolve these concerns, often by revising the proposal. In subsequent meetings, the proposal is re-worked to address concerns until the community agrees there are no unresolved community concerns. A quorum of homeowners (13 households) must be present or represented when consensus is reached.

This reads like a straight-forward process, but residents indicated that the decision-making process involves significant behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Also, decisions for minor changes like kitchen countertops can take months to complete, incurring emotional exchanges and testing residents' relationships and goodwill with each other. One resident explained that "you have to negotiate, politic, compromise, especially as you live with these people, and some you like and others you don't."

Decision-making in Action: Playgrounds and Yards

Multiple residents mentioned one challenging decision: the replacement of the playground equipment. Seen in Figure 10, it sits on the edge of the largest part of a green field in the community.

Figure 10 Playground at BBHC

The community recognized the need to replace the playground equipment due to age. A group of residents thought this would be an ideal location to install a bigger playground set for the benefit of the broader community and as an amenity to attract residents with young children. Residents also thought that perhaps families from the neighboring community, Maymount, would bring their children to the playground. At this time, BBHC had very few residents with children who would use it. A larger playground set, however, would have to be on a greater portion of the field than the current set. Another group of residents wanted to move the current playground set or buy a replica of the existing set so that the field would be closer to a regulation-size soccer field. This latter option created controversy, as some residents were

worried that alternative placement of a playground set would pose a security risk to the children. One respondent said:

> It is not ideal as a soccer field as it slopes down. I remember being yelled at about the edge of the field. I was concerned about the swing set being next to the parking lot, and that I couldn't see the playground. Someone could have come and taken a child.

It took approximately 1 year for the residents to come to a compromise. The community purchased a replacement playset, similar in dimensions to the previous one. It was installed in the existing set’s location. Another resident said, "Everyone got their angst out and there was a slight change in May when we expected to install. It went to August and September, and we had a big party and we celebrated." This brief description sums up the decision, though the situation has become a type of touchstone. During a meeting exploring navigating difficult issues, a few residents referenced the playground process as proof that residents can successfully work through difficult issues.

Several interviewees described a complex dance prior to tabling a proposal or issue for decision. Before raising an issue for community decision, an individual will discuss it among like-minded individuals to build a supportive coalition for the idea to have the support of as many decision-influencers as possible. This requires having a detailed understanding of what motivates and concerns fellow residents and a level of trust and knowledge (social capital) that is built up over time and through previous management processes. One BBGC resident noted:

> In 2015, the walkways were redone. There was a high cost and [Name redacted] is strong opinioned, but people were very trusting of [sic] their expertise. The community doesn’t follow the [sic: decision] process, hearing concerns, but not hearing opinions. Using the

rules to dampen dissent saying, “not in the proper time.” So, there is passing a decision rather than as a community group.

Many interviewees described that there are a few residents who, for a variety of reasons, are the ones I call “decision-influencers.” There are several others who tend to acquiesce. Finally, there are a small group of residents who do not participate. A few terms that have arisen are “founders,” who represent long-time and usually resident-developers and their families, and “newcomers,” who are residents who moved in later. The decision-influencers tend to be among the resident-developer group, but this is not absolute. A specific individuals' skill set, such as knowledge of construction, types of equipment, or landscaping, may shift an individual to a decision-influencer for a specific issue. Willingness to participate and be a team player can expedite integration into the community.

Change and Challenges

The findings listed earlier in this chapter described the BBHC’s inception process and mechanisms and site choices made to foster abundant social capital among residents. It has been over 20 years since the inception of BBHC. There has been turnover in residents and households with young children have transformed into retirees and empty nesters. This section discusses residents’ perceptions and outlooks for the community’s future. When asked about what challenges residents foresaw facing their community, they mostly mentioned being concerned about losing their community’s identity. Respondents articulated the root causes for their concern as stemming from the effect of rising property values in the area, turnover in residents and integration of newcomers, managing demographic differences, maintaining or increasing resident participation, and aging-in-place and accessibility issues. Change is inevitable in all

communities, but at BBHC, a sense of place is rooted in the interpersonal relationships and expectations for companionship and camaraderie. Residents indicated that newcomers do not realize how much work and time this requires.

Prices and Compromises

BBHC homes are at a significantly lower price point relative to the average cost in the area. Fairfax County, VA Department of Administration tax records in 2020 showed that the average value of a BBHC was $620,518, whereas the 2020 median single-family house price in the census tract is $854,000. The BBHC size and design correspond to the pricing differentials as they are significantly smaller and offer fewer amenities, such as garages, than neighboring homes. The community sits in a cluster of very good public schools, in a county school district highly regarded in the region. Besides being surrounded by expensive homes, it also sits in a suburb with tremendous growth in population. Despite the lack of size and amenities, BBHC homes represent a significant bargain for those willing to compromise on certain amenities like dedicated parking or smaller square footage. As a result, residents indicated that their greatest concern was that BBHC will draw residents more interested in the location than cohousing. I asked, "In 10-15 years from now, what do you think would be the biggest challenges that the community might face?" One resident responded, "I am very concerned that new people who move in will not be interested in cohousing but will just purchase a house because it is affordable."

Another resident said, "Continually reinventing ourselves as a cohousing community rather than just a nice, pretty, safe, quiet neighborhood."

In interviews and discussions, residents' thoughts about noncohousing communities

seemed most clear when they described how and why BBHC was a different type of neighborhood. They indicated that their stories, interlocking, well-known, and often recounted, formed a significant foundation for their community's identity and interpersonal relationships. One resident stated, "It means knowing more of their stories and sharing them repeatedly. We could all sit down to tell who was on the Halloween hayride. It means knowing their illnesses and interests."

Residents indicated that the interconnected mesh of relationships made their community different and better. Another resident said, "the place is close to the 'perfect storm' of inconvenience given the location of services and traffic. There is now much more, for example, the growth of Reston, and the expansion of Tysons Corner." Many residents reported that they travel 4 miles to reach grocery stores. It may seem like a short distance but can take 30 minutes of dense traffic or more to reach areas for grocery stores or the library. Residents stressed that living in a broader area was difficult, but it was the benefit of living in the BBHC with the camaraderie among residents that made its location bearable. Another resident indicated that these social networks were the most critical in making her and her household want to live there, not the broader location. Most interestingly, she suggested that existing neighborhoods could undertake developing similar activities to build a cohousing-like community. She suggested that existing cohousing communities could be a "model for cooperative engagement," presumably in other neighborhoods. Residents worry about BBHC losing what they think is special, the interpersonal ties, that if people come attracted solely by price, and are not willing to participate, the community in its present form will fail.

Communication Styles and Integration

During my fieldwork, residents began discussing options for reviewing and revising their vision statement. Prior to entering the field, I noted the website had been redone, and an earlier vision statement had been removed. During a meeting, residents were asked to send vision statement drafts to a point person. A resident responded to the request: “Maybe we don’t need a vision statement. Do we need it, as it can come across as excluding rather than inclusive?” A different resident responded, “Never agreed we would definitely have one,” whereas one more person then asked, “why?” During the meeting there was no resolution on the issue. The discussion seemed to illustrate a long-standing point of tension in the community: how to explain the community with its rules and norms in writing. The resident-developers put in place a system that valued the oral over the written, and written rules were considered restrictive. Notably, many individuals have a desire for written guidance, as it is a norm in American society.

As a result of the emphasis on oral communication, during my fieldwork, residents were embarking on developing a process or tools to facilitate “challenging discussions.” The topics included community participation levels; pets; tenants; short-term rentals; residents’ children and residents’ guests’ children breaking things; managing meals, as the community now includes a greater number of different diets than when the community started; and the means used to communicate. During the first discussion at a meeting, a resident said the community norm is “conflict avoidance.” Another said that fear of conflict has suppressed conversations. Multiple residents expressed a desire for a third-party facilitator. This shows residents’ interest in addressing communication issues, but it does not mean they recognize the imbalance of power and influences within the community or its causes.

Healey (2006) described the inherent complexity of local political culture. She stated that "reading local political culture means going beyond the surface of both formal politics and informal power games, into the embedded cultural practices which structure routines and styles, and flow knowledge and value around the political networks" (p. 240). Most Americans move into a home without thinking about the need to navigate political culture. Newcomers to a cohousing community may feel blindsided when they must confront this reality. There is the dream of cohousing where everyone knows each other, an old-fashioned community where each person designs that dream to their imagined community. The reality that cohousing demands residents to be active participants in the community and work collectively means they must navigate a system of politics regardless of interest or ability. The interplay between groups bound by strong and weak ties is most clearly demonstrated in the decision-making process. This dance between groups is most clearly seen in the decision-making process and how newcomers struggle to understand it.

In various discussions with residents, the terms "founders" and "newcomers" developed contested meanings among residents. Many longer-term residents indicated that the term "founders" was divisive and negative in how some residents used it. For some residents, it indicated the original resident-developers who, based on their longevity and early efforts, possessed what some thought was unequal power and influence in the community. Others indicated it was simply a description for the early residents. The early residents, understanding the intent of their decisions' and with the benefit of social capital developed during their time in the community, were most able to navigate the management process. These members created and socialized early in the community's history, thus establishing norms of behavior. They also had

the social capital and ties to enforce those norms.

Cohousing residents from both BBHC and other cohousing communities described the interpersonal relationships cultivated in a cohousing community as like those in families. You know each other well, but there are varying degrees to which you get along. As in families, members have different levels of knowing one another. A resident explained, "we can expect the reactions of others [sic: with regards] to their needs, and potential conflicts. Even those not regularly involved, we know how they respond to issues of money or children." Once the coalition coalesces, the role of nonparticipants combined with those who "go along," as one interviewee described, limits the number of individuals who may raise objections. A former resident noted that there are individuals who ". . . are not heard and may keep repeating their concerns to be heard versus not being connected to everyone."

During my fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered situations where a few residents seemed to be outsiders. On a surface level, residents were professional and polite, but there was a clear level of underlying discord that ranged from quiet frustration to outright hostility that would erupt during meals and meetings. Residents spoke openly about the interpersonal relationships and conflict during my interviews. Most participants indicated that there were residents who had difficulty interacting with others in the community, though different reasons were given. Also, residents were very clear that there were a few households that did not participate in any activities and seemed uncertain why.

The findings showed that interpersonal conflict did negatively affect participation, but there were other reasons. One resident suggested that there were likely socioeconomic or ethnic issues that contributed to the lack of participation, that the community norms are undergirded by

unrecognized White, middle-class norms. Others stressed the range of diversity in viewpoints, despite the lack of diversity among residents' socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Still, others highlighted that some disruptions due to conflict were impeding participation.

The community has had a long-standing concern around participation, conflict, and overall satisfaction levels. At the time of BBHC's 15th anniversary, the residents undertook a self-assessment consisting of four-question qualitative interviews to understand why residents remain in the community and what they perceive are benefits and challenges. According to the assessment report, the community at the time had 63 residents, including children under 18. The report also stated that though all residents were invited to participate, only 30 were interviewed. I could not obtain information on the precise research protocol, but the report did describe that the interviews were done by seven interviewers, presumably fellow residents. The BBHC assessment addressed the challenges of communication and conflict:

> Many residents identified communication as a challenge, including the over-use of group email leading to unnecessary drama as well as disengagement. . . When individuals dominate the group discussion, either over email or in person, and when this dominating behavior is challenging to others; we falter in our commitment to maintain civility in our discourse.

Since the self-assessment, residents indicated that the communication issue is yet to be addressed satisfactorily.

In BBHC, a community norm is, if there is a disagreement, individuals should communicate directly with each other and the people's committee to resolve the disagreement. The Welcome Packet describes this process as follows:

The people's committee can often be helpful when people are experiencing a conflict with someone in the community that they could not resolve. As a community, we have a strong commitment to be kind and constructive with each other. Skilled listening can help.

Residents in cohousing communities suggest that there is a reluctance to involve the legal system to resolve issues, and that this is an added benefit, in contrast to living in noncohousing communities. For isolated individuals, it is not clear how this process works. They will perceive the situation as not being heard or that the community is nonresponsive. One example of this involved an internal disagreement between two households. The neighbors disagreed over the usage and storage in the porch areas of the individual homes. This is a common reason for discord between neighbors. In a cohousing situation, an added dimension is that these neighbors must work together on community management and are expected to participate in community activities. These activities can become venues where interpersonal conflicts are expressed, or residents may withdraw and choose not to participate. I watched very clear power struggles, some related to the storage conflict, as well as other issues, occur during the meeting. Groups of residents would dismiss specific individuals' concerns. As a resident noted, rules are reshaped with tacit approval of a significant block of residents. One said, "I asked questions, and everyone gave a different answer on rules or policies. You never get the same answer, or they didn't match the bylaws depending on who was asked." Research showed there are residents who are not integrated into the community. Original residents say they have heard that integration can be difficult and admit they have difficulty understanding this. One resident said,

I was surprised when I heard that others feel that they can't fit in. And it's still slightly a

> mystery two to three have never participated and what's the critical threshold of participation, I don't know what to do with that. It takes an active role and not everyone sees the benefit to get that. To get out what you need, you need to put in the time.

Another resident said the concept [cohousing] works well when there is “trust.” There could be two issues. Original residents are among those with the greatest power as influencers. They should explain the process because they best understand how conflict resolution functions in practice. The imbalance in the distribution of power and influence, including in communitarian-based intentional communities, is to be expected.

Zablocki (1980) examined the factors that affect the distribution of power and influence. In communitarian organizations, he found that although members could more easily diminish the effect of socioeconomic background, it was harder to reduce the effect of “seniority, age, skill and personal influence.” He also stated that many intentional communities put significant emphasis “on the value of the accumulated experiences of those who have been members for a longer time than most,” (p. 305). He suggested such groups must address this disparity in power if they want to equalize the role experience has in the decision-making process. The findings indicate that residents are very aware of the challenges facing newcomers and have tried to address it with the handbook and through informal mentoring of new residents. Despite these efforts, the community seemed unwilling to address the issue of unequal distributions of power and influence.

Accessibility over time

Another challenge facing the residents and community is aging-in-place. A considerable number of original residents were young families when they embarked on creating the

community. BBHC is a hilly site with parking at a distance from the houses. Golf carts can be borrowed from the farm to facilitate movement around the site for those in need, but the site poses challenges to those with physical limitations. The Welcome Packet notes:

> We do not have specific designations for individuals with vehicles with disability tags, but anyone requiring such accommodations for themselves, or visitors will be given them generously. It would be helpful to alert the entire community of this need ahead of time to ensure it will be met expediently.

Finally, the homes are two stories with basements. Both the site and house designs pose barriers to those with physical challenges. As a recognition of the difficulties that residents are encountering as they age, a few residents purchased neighboring property, hoping to build an addendum to BBHC, which would be a small senior cohousing community consisting of small units. The site, however, is physically attached to BBHC, and its development would require current BBHC residents' consent for egress. This has not proven to be a simple discussion. Although this topic was never raised in the meetings I attended, some older residents mentioned it during meals, meetings, and interviews and noted that it was a contentious topic.

In addition to aging-in-place, most residents expressed a desire for a multigenerational community. Yet some activities, such as meals, are often scheduled for the majority of residents, many of whom are middle aged or older, and this can pose difficulties for families with young children. Still, some of the features, such as the babysitting cooperative, made the community in the early years, an amenity geared to families with young children, over time as the demographics have shifted to older residents, these activities have diminished. Residents spoke about how it existed in the past. Although the community seems to be quietly grappling with

how to attract a diversity of age groups, the lack of ethnic and racial diversity was seldom raised. Rather, residents mentioned the diversity of opinions and attitudes that existing residents had. As one said, “There is a lot of variation and difference, a diversity that's not apparent at first sight.” Another suggested that, “There is a normative way of acting, middle-class and White, if you don’t act that way you can be . . .” isolated, which the resident implied through the remainder of the sentence.

Balancing Commitments

Many residents I spoke with at BBHC expressed satisfaction with their community. They acknowledged its imperfections and the demands on time. Many respondents expressed they wish they could take part in the community more. For the original residents, creating their community was a long and hard process. It required serious dedication to the principles of cohousing to reap what they perceived to be its results. The entire process also demanded an enormous number of resources, including financial and time. It also meant surrendering personal wants to achieve a group's decision. The initial process of creating the community forged strong ties between resident-developers, but it can also serve as a block to integration. As mentioned earlier, these residents seemed rather reluctant or unable to understand the difficulty later residents had in integrating into the community. A resident said: “To perpetuate the good things, what is needed has to be clearly articulated, and it’s not so. There is a fair amount of the grey areas.” An ongoing challenge to the community is addressing the effect that the absence of clear written guidance has on later residents. Some seemed unaware that resident-developers have a store of equity in the community and newcomers must try to catch up. All the respondents expressed their frustration with the lack of time they had to commit to the community and other

competing priorities.

At BBHC, residents have drawn on cohousing (self-management) but also use other methods, such as actively creating traditions and using the arts, to continue fostering strong relationships. I saw residents sharing resources and providing support, such as carpooling and other forms of transportation, and providing caregiving to residents and companionship. It was these actions that residents spoke the most highly about and said they made living in their community worthwhile. They understood social capital in their community as when there is a reservoir of trust, concern, and intimate knowledge of each other. A good number of residents felt these benefits of living in their communities overcame issues of location and siting realities. Several people thought my research might help clarify some issues that the community began to discuss, such as how to talk about "difficult topics." Participants seemed to want to understand their community's shortcomings and its future. In conducting my research, many participants expressed hope that my research could help them in that process.

Chapter 5 Summary and Suggestions

This ethnographic, single case study explored how the residents of BBHC, a residential community, tried to create a neighborhood where residents forged ties and developed abundant social capital. The theory suggests social capital develops through individuals' interactions. These interactions create ties through knowledge and trust in each other and the group. Urban planning discourses have come to focus intensely on the possibilities of social capital to address a variety of issues from social isolation, job networking, to improving health indicators (Campbell, 2016; Choguill, 2008; Finlay & Kobayashi, 2018; Lang & Hornburg, 1998). This chapter provides a discussion on the characteristics of cohousing in practice at BBHC. It also describes the challenges and changes residents have navigated in its 20 years of existence (BBHC is one of the oldest cohousing communities in the United States). Finally, this chapter includes a discussion of possible polices and planning tools linked to social capital that could create neighborhoods (both cohousing and mainstream communities) more responsive to and supportive of daily life.

This project sought to address the following questions:

- How is social capital created and fostered in cohousing?
- How is this process challenged over time in the community?

Cohousing has been developed as a planning precept to develop and foster social capital using a mix of spatial design and activities that ensure regular contact among residents and encourage strong and weak ties. Although spatial planning is unusual—with its focus on smaller-than-average housing units, incorporating abundant shared space, and de-emphasizing automobiles—the expectation that all residents will be active participants in managing the

community and participating in community activities makes the cohousing planning approach very different from mainstream communities.

Summary of Findings

Both early and later BBHC residents described that their overall goal has been to live in a community with strong social connections and abundant social capital. Residents felt these qualities made their community special, lowering isolation and providing significant social and emotional support in times of need, such as during illness or childrearing. It is hard to overstate the dedication required to create a cohousing community, the process and its challenges filter out less dedicated or resourced individuals. Meltzer (2005) described how cohousing developers commit, on average, to spending 4 years and over US$150,000 to a process with uncertain outcomes to build their community. BBHC resident-developers repeatedly told stories of the financial resources and time commitment required to develop their neighborhood. Through their stories it became clear that the process required a deep emotional investment to create BBHC. As a result, the early planning process engenders significant ties among the early resident-developers and ensures the community starts with a reservoir of social capital that residents can draw from as they operationalize their community. BBHC residents also indicated that continuing to dedicate time and other resources to the community is the means to maintaining the community.

The community's design incorporates interaction hubs, spaces that serve to host regular casual interactions. For example, houses are sited so that the most used rooms face the pathways, ensuring visibility both in the home and walkways. Parking is centralized, serving as an interaction hub where residents informally encounter each other. The common house and

mailboxes are also interaction hubs. Design at BBHC provides routine opportunity for residents to interact and develop ties with their neighbors that are less likely when residents can drive into the garage attached to their home.

Yet, although design contributes to fostering social interaction and thereby contributes to the development of social capital, the findings in this study suggest that it is ongoing activities such as workdays, management meetings and meals, along with community-wide celebrations that likely contribute the most to developing strong ties among residents. Respondents indicated they participate because such activities are seen as key toward maintaining the community's social nature. These activities, however, constitute another time consuming "to-do." Small decisions such as countertops in the kitchen entail months-long series of meetings. Although proponents suggest that cohousing lessens daily chores, residents indicated that participating in community activities adds a new category of tasks to be prioritized.

Also, despite expectations, community participation is not universal, nor are punitive measures for nonparticipation. This is in keeping with the community's lack of specific written rules. Self-management of the community requires residents to embrace the policies. Resident-developers did craft the basic structure of the process as written, but the community operates using critical unwritten norms. Those individuals with the longest history or connections to BBHC or who can successfully navigate the unspoken community norms have the greatest amount of influence in community decisions. The inability to conform can lead to isolation. This isolation is not absolute and is rather passive, but for some it is palpable and troubling. Many of the longest tenured residents expressed concern about understanding the difficulties of integration. Others voiced uneasiness about the narrow socioeconomic and ethnic/racial

backgrounds contribute to lower participation. Others suggested that individuals who are not able and willing to actively engage in the micropolitics are also at risk of marginalization. The lack of recognition of disparities in individuals' influence and power, especially by the longest residents, combined with a lack of comprehensive written guidelines and rules to which members adhere, undermine the community's goals for consensus building and robust community-wide participation.

Also, after 20 years, the community is undergoing stress from two factors, aging of existing residents and the pressure from a rapidly growing area with correspondingly high real estate prices. The homes were designed when most of the resident-developers were in a different life stage, younger with young children. Residents are recognizing that the site's design and layout, combined with the homes' designs, may hinder the ability for some of the residents to age in place. Also, there were concerns that the community would not be multigenerational. Finally, residents expressed concern that the community would attract those not dedicated to the ideals of cohousing but instead were interested in the lower price-point relative to the overall area.

Interpretation of Findings

Why Cohousing and Why BBHC

This study found that the first residents were attracted to cohousing because it focused on addressing the shortcomings in their living situations that they were trying to resolve. They wanted to live in homes that were near family and friends. Many residents expressed that they had concerns about isolation when living in their previous communities, and were feeling stressed by the time, energy, and mental demands they incurred as they sought to meet competing or consecutive obligations. They desired to live in a community that would offer

strong interpersonal connections and support that would provide their children a close support network of adults and children. Some respondents described how they came out of backgrounds that involved close communities like university housing cooperatives and work environments where success depended on teamwork and collaboration, such as military service. These respondents appreciated the support and communal nature of those work or living situations.

In contrast to how they viewed cohousing, residents perceived noncohousing communities as having, even in the best circumstances, neighbors who have only a superficial acquaintanceship with each other. Respondents told me they did not think noncohousing community residents could repeatedly "share stories," that is, build memories that bond them to each other and the site. These stories served as way to transmit and share their values, knowledge, and experiences with each other. BBHC residents indicated that the high degree of knowledge and trust among each other differentiated their community from noncohousing neighborhoods. BBHC residents did not share that they all have strong ties with each other. Not all participate in community activities, a critical way to build relationships and create ties, thereby gaining social capital. At minimum, the residents have at least weak ties to other, and many have ties that vary between strong and weak depending on the level of shared interest and amount residents participate in the community.

Creation of an Intentionally Communal Space

Cohousing design precepts play a role in providing spaces in which to develop ties and foster social capital. Cohousing's emphasis on the incorporation of abundant common space ensures that community design will give these areas prominence. They form interaction hubs, spaces for neighbors to interact. Further, as they are designed by the residents, these spaces are

geared toward how residents desire to use them rather than as community decoration. BBHC has many informal spaces both outdoors and in the common house. I observed residents dropping by the common house to have a drink, pick up some items, work on laptop computers, or practice music. Neighbors from the community next door regularly take walks around the BBHC common areas, but not their own. Its outdoor common areas comprise walking paths that go up and down the hilly landscape. A deep berm separates the property from the farm. Young adults who had been children at BBHC described playing throughout the grounds with minimal adult supervision. In contrast, Maymount, the neighboring residential development's house lot, has a conventional upscale residential neighborhood design consisting of broad asphalt roads and a decorative open space that includes a broad, very manicured green lawn with a stately gazebo, a very geometric and formal structure that does not invite usage. Francis et al. (2012) described how pathways interspersed with more naturalistic spaces are related to developing a sense of community.

Other interaction hubs include the mailboxes by the common house, ensuring residents make regular trips to the common house. As Abu-Ghazzeh (1999) described how public interaction points serve to encourage passive contact in the inhabitants of Abu-Nuseir, the findings from this study showed how common areas facilitate interaction in a similar manner. BBHC residents reported that they most often encountered neighbors at the mailboxes and parking lot throughout the year, and in warmer months, pathways gain greater importance for interaction. Further, the common house is not a residential development club house, but more like an extension of residents' homes. Although this can reduce the need for large home footprints, highly trafficked common areas and high-use items can act as a source of friction.

Some residents expressed frustration with some misuse of shared facilities such as the laundry room. A few residents suggested the lack of clarity around community usage was bothersome. Several residents in a meeting mentioned differing standards on appropriate common area usage was a contentious issue. Finally, the findings suggested that, though important, the physical layout has less effect on creating and strengthening social capital among residents than interaction activities, such as shared meals and community self-management. These regular events encourage residents to build relationships and know about each other with greater depth and understanding. In turn, this level of knowledge strengthens the community's long-term stability and facilitates the benefits of social capital throughout the residents' daily experiences (Abu-Ghazzeh, 1999; Garciano, 2009; Newman & Jennings, 2008).

BBHC Activities – the "Glue of the Community"

The findings indicate that activities seem to be the greatest means for facilitating strong ties. A resident described the meals and regular management and upkeep activities as the "glue" holding the community together. Many noted how social engagements, both planned and spontaneous, build social capital and relationships and begets active participation in the community. Respondents stressed the importance of stories, collective memories, in creating a sense of community and strengthening ties between residents and the community. These stories develop through participation in activities. Residents said that sharing abundant experiences allowed them to gain intimate knowledge of how neighbors behave, think, and feel. This resulted in residents developing expectations about how fellow residents would react to different issues, such as finances. It also influenced how residents socialize proposals for community discussion. In addition, residents described trust in knowing which neighbors could or would assist others

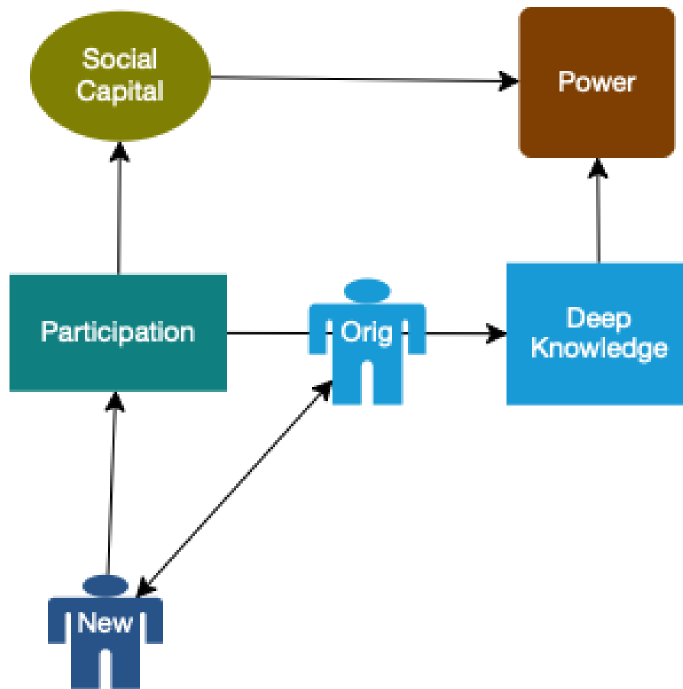
for certain tasks. During my fieldwork, I observed members organizing meals to give to families with newborns or sick family members, providing emotional and physical caregiving for the dying and their family. This suggests that living at BBHC provides important social, physical, and emotional support for its residents, but in exchange, residents must devote significant time and energy to gain these benefits.

Although regular activities or traditions, such as the progressive dinners on New Year's Eve, talk-like-a-pirate day, or the annual community show, are community touchstones, it is the routine occurrences such as meals and meetings related to management and upkeep that form a process that continually reinforces ties among community members. Residents most often cited common meals as must-keep activities. Other high-value events were the progressive dinners and unscheduled random gatherings. Many seemed to think there were enough activities, though they often expressed a desire to be more involved. One outcome from the activities that I did not expect is the challenge of balancing community activities and meetings with other demands. Families with young children mentioned time conflicts coordinating common dinners with bedtime schedules. Cohousing does not reduce regular chores. In fact, the community's demands can easily become additional chores. A resident said, "cohousing is hard work. Getting to know your neighbors is not easy. You have to ask if the benefits for an individual outweigh the effort – mental, emotional, timewise, and fiscally." In some cases, residents decide to limit their participations. The community seemed to spend considerable time, including with the 15th anniversary survey, trying to parse out the reasons. There does not seem to be one specific reason for the lack of participation, though residents suggested reasons such as competing commitments and interpersonal dynamics.

The issue of participation seemed linked to an unexpected outcome resulting from two cohousing precepts: nonhierarchical decision-making and community self-management. As discussed previously, the activities are important to foster ties among residents. These activities can result in alienating some residents. Without ensuring that all residents feel they have an equal voice in the community's operation and seeks to limit unequal power distribution. From a public-facing standpoint, proponents of cohousing explicitly naming nonhierarchical decision-making aimed to address an early concern around cohousing being confused with a commune or cults. Yet, in the early years of BBHC, there were limited examples or guidance on how to create these processes. BBHC resident-developers opted to limit written guidance. BBHC resident-developers had to make up the process as they went along. They developed structures early in the winnowing process that occurred in the community's inception. Consensus decision-making, however, is unusual for most Americans, and unsurprisingly, conflicted with the reality of navigating personalities and interests, differences in upbringing, expectations, and backgrounds. As a result, a complex, behind-the-scenes process ensued, consisting of coalition building. Some respondents who moved into the community after its founding expressed surprise of the extent of informal rules that govern the decision-making process. In the absence of clear written guidelines, those who developed or have lived the longest in BBHC often seem to have the greatest amount of both social capital and power in the decision-making process and therefore the community. Evidence showed resident-developers' participation in creating a cohousing community provides them with a surplus of social capital, and newer residents are likely to move in with a deficit. Possession of social capital leads to power and influence in community decision-making. In addition to length of residency, findings indicated that the amount of time

participating affects the degree of their social capital and influence, so that those who are more

Figure 11 Pathways to accumulating social capital



engaged can develop their individual holdings of social capital. Figure 11 illustrate the differences between residents-developers (shown as Orig in light blue) and newcomers (shown as New in dark blue), in terms of their access to knowledge about community norms and processes. Resident-developers had an abundance of both social capital and power in community decision-making based on their early and lengthy involvement. To earn social capital, newcomers' participation was important. Newcomers also had to rely on resident-developers to gain sufficient knowledge of community practices and norms. This knowledge was important to access power. This integration process, however, was tempered by how well individuals could merge their behavior and interests with existing community norms.

Active participation did not ensure integration, power, and influence, if there were interpersonal differences. That said, many residents were clear that they would assist any of their community, but it was clear that the benefits the isolated individuals reaped were considerably less, though still present. Community structures, such as the people's committee, combined with the regular encounters due to community design, help residents keep an eye out for neighbors, including those who do not participate.

Despite these community norms, for those who feel alienated, the emotional toll manifests in deeply profound ways, both on a communal level and personally in a cohousing community, compared to in mainstream communities. If isolated, a resident's significant financial investment, a home, is linked to a whole community in a very emotional manner. Respondents expressed unease at marketing their property when they feel alienated. Feelings of dishonesty were mentioned. As some explained to me, it is hard to sell the benefits of cohousing when you are also trying to leave it. Respondents expressed regret and disappointment that the living experience did not work out for them. For the community, residents can express sadness and frustration that others in the community are isolated. The resultant friction seemed to cause other residents to decrease their participation. BBHC showed signs of struggling with this process of ongoing integration, despite the indications that longer-time residents may not realize the significant disadvantage a newcomer may face in gaining social capital.

Another unexpected finding came from the BBHC Welcome Packet. The community developed the packet to provide guidance for newcomers. The Welcome Packet attempts to codify how existing residents understand how their community functions and its culture, among the most noteworthy contained in the packet is the explicit expectations for behavior, including

that residents should exchange greetings. The guidance seems to be a response to situations that have occurred in the past and that they want to avoid and clarify as not being acceptable. Existing residents explained that they spent time clarifying the reality of living in a cohousing community with the idea of cohousing. As a respondent said, they may be “expecting utopia,” overlaying their imaginings of neighborhood camaraderie, without fully understanding the amount and nature of participation the community expects. The Welcome Packet guidance is unusual for noncohousing communities. It also has a very different focus from the restrictive housing covenants permitted before the 1970s that largely focused on ethnicity, race, and current HOA regulations regarding home colors and what is permitted on lawns and in yards. The BBHC packet, while containing guidance on moving in and common-area usage, also aims to guide human interaction. It underscores what is important to BBHC residents, not on design aesthetics, but on interpersonal relationships, and is a critical difference from the driving force behind the rise of CIDs such as gated communities and condominiums, where HOA rules center on ensuring design uniformity, order, and perceptions of cleanliness in service to maintaining property values (O’Toole, 2012; Walks, 2014). Additionally, residents in gated communities think of their neighborhoods as fortresses against the broader environment and the perception of criminality. Researchers such as Low (2001) and Ruiu (2014) suggested that gated communities, for example, are centered on providing security and safety by keeping out the “other.” In interviews with BBHC residents, some indicated that the value in their community rests in its social capital and social ties. Others suggested the community seemed to hold a promise of social interaction and support that it did not provide. Some reasons given for this included middle-class social class homogeneity and power imbalances stemming from disparities in social capital equity.

Newcomers must work hard to understand processes and norms. For some, they feel the amount of work required to reach this level is difficult. Others find the level of micropolitics to be distasteful or incompatible to their personalities and wishes.

BBHC in the Future, Challenges and Changes

The findings indicate that BBHC residents, especially resident-developers, are concerned about the community's long-term continuance. The declining participation, especially from new residents, was expressed as a main concern. Another issue is how to address the possible influx of new residents attracted to the community for socioeconomic reasons rather than the principles of cohousing. BBHC's location and cost make it an attractive neighborhood at a lower-than-average price point. Residents who do not value goals and processes of cohousing may accelerate the decline in participation in community activities. A long-time resident clearly defined BBHC as an intentional community and identified a possible loss of this characteristic as a hazard to the long-term health of the neighborhood as a cohousing community.

Another challenge the community is facing is aging-in-place. BBHC homes are multistory, and the site is hilly. Although residents may be able to borrow any available golf carts from the farm, activities such as going to the common house or carrying packages and groceries from the parking lot can become physically challenging over time as residents age. Also, like many suburban single-family neighborhoods, running errands such as going to the doctor or library require driving. Carpooling and car sharing can help facilitate but likely will not eliminate the issue. It also presumes the community has a diversity of able-bodied individuals to share those tasks. Residents at BBHC are very aware of this challenge. During my research residents explained a nascent discussion about options to develop senior housing adjacent to the

BBHC. The concept seemed to also raise issues beyond those related to traffic management and parking to include how the nature or essence of BBHC would change if there were an adjacent senior cohousing community.

Despite the concerns of participation and community longevity, BBHC residents work proactively to track community members' well-being, reducing the chances that any resident could be completely isolated. I witnessed the work of the people's committee as they conducted wellness checks on residents who did not take part in the community regularly. Data suggest that cohousing as a planning model offers techniques for developing social networks, community identity, and a sense of place within a larger home context. A key component of cohousing is its intentionality. Without residents' desire to build and live in cohousing, the other pieces cannot be achieved. Cohousing has concepts that could assist in planning socially sustainable communities, especially to address issues like isolation and loneliness. This is especially an issue with the increasing percentage of seniors in the American population. According to Finlay and Kobayashi (2018), one-third of seniors aged 60 and over report being lonely and approximately 25% of Americans over the age of 65 live alone. Singer (2018) stated men who are socially isolated are at a "90% increased risk of cardiovascular death and more than double the risk of death from an accident or suicide" (p.2). Findings from this research project contribute evidence that cohousing communities may provide emotional and psychological support for residents that could address social isolation. This outcome is likely the result of both the intentionality of the individuals attracted to cohousing combined with the design and activities.

Cohousing communities require a great deal of time commitment from planning through ongoing management that many Americans likely are not going to provide. They also are a

challenge for many Americans to afford. My analysis of the findings led to two points of further consideration. First, what elements of cohousing design and activities are transferable to typical existing or future American residential developments? Second, what would be the challenges of implementing these elements piecemeal? In the next section, I provide suggestions based on the data from this research. The suggestions are divided into two sections. The first section focuses on recommendations related to cohousing communities concerned about addressing equitable consensus processes. The second section is related to cohousing precepts that could be applied to develop sustainable residential communities.

Suggestions

Cohousing Related

Thoughts on Consensus decision-making

1. *Define or create a community definition for consensus. Consider consulting with communication and/or a consensus decision-making facilitator early in the community design process when forming the decision-making process.*

Self-management and using nonhierarchical decision-making are considered key components of cohousing. There are several factors challenging these two elements. In this study, individuals came into BBHC with their own understanding of consensus decision-making. Also, as residents pointed out to me in interviews, similarities in socioeconomic status do not mean everyone will have the same viewpoint or communication style. This dovetails with Reich and Wood (2003) observation that differences are not opposites, but are tempered by personality and experiences. These differences in understanding and approach represent real challenges to the consensus decision-making process. Cohousing proponents acknowledge there will be

conflicts, and there must be mechanisms to overcome them. McCamant and Durrett (2011) suggested that early in the community-forming state, developers should engage a process consultant or facilitator. The key objectives would be to determine group dynamics, discuss forms of communication, and encourage inclusive language usage. This consultant could provide options for transmitting processes to newcomers. The community should consider engaging a professional after a few years, much as building or site managers have shared mechanical or structural units in the community evaluated.

2. *Ensure community guidelines and regulations beyond the HOA documents are clearly drafted.*

BBHC resident-developers opted to limit the amount of regulation. In the context of a pioneering cohousing community with few models, limiting written regulations allowed participants to make changes as needed. An unfortunate long-term effect is that many details and cultural norms are left to be orally transmitted, which lends greater power to residents with longer tenure. The welcome packet does outline community expectations, norms, and practices for common amenity usage in plain English; however, the booklet does not describe the decision-making process as it actually happens. This discrepancy between the written and actual process must harmonize and be documented in writing. Newer residents expressed some frustration with having to rely on verbal guidance and the unequal application of some written guidance. A real assessment of the decision-making process could be a critical step in maintaining the BBHC's goals and mission and make it more palatable for newcomers.

3. *After 1 year and at regular intervals, engage in a survey and/or a special meeting to discuss best practices.*

This could ensure a formal process to determine what residents are finding difficult or not working well. Findings at BBHC indicate the processes will have to be changed and revised to address needs.

Replicability or Making Space for Cohousing Life

In the United States, there has long been a strand of thought stressing the primacy of the individual. This has culminated in planning and residential housing architecture's long-standing "devotion" to the single-family home, as Hirt (2013) described in her examination of American zoning. There is, however, a deep current of alternative communitarian thought in America, combined now with a growing discourse on the need to develop a greater sense of community. American cohousing is an attempt to bridge these two competing viewpoints. BBHC provides an example of how a single-family housing development could mesh with the traditional pattern of suburban residential development. The intensive self-management processes and activities could also be compatible with existing American residential development. Over the past 30 years in the United States, there has been an increasing use of the CID model. This model includes condominiums, cooperatives, and HOAs. Cohousing communities are legally structured CIDs. McKenzie (2005) named them "privatized utopia" and stated that nearly 18.5% of the American population resided in a form of CID. This rate is proliferating.

The CID model, like cohousing, spans the American desire for independence with setting communal norms, both legal and unwritten. They permit a residential community to place restrictions of land-use and units upon owners far beyond those allowed by local, state, and federal governments. Despite their high degree of regulation (that can include the color of window curtains), these communities have proliferated, forming what McKenzie (2003) called

"privatized utopia." CID regulations assure residents that their house investment will be maintained through the requirements that ensure order and design regularity. The demands of cohousing may not be so different from CIDs, and therefore compatible for a broader swathe of population. The HOAs that form the CID management are volunteer run. As BBHC showed, not every household participated, and a core group volunteered to handle different tasks. This does not recognize the intangible but crucial feature of cohousing, intentionality. This concurs with Ruiu (2014), who wrote that gated communities are not intentional, and that is a core element of cohousing. She described the difference as buying a home in a gated community as "an admission card," whereas cohousing residents "create their own club." These are subtle differences; therefore, I think cohousing is not inherently incompatible with American residential development. Also, BBHC showed the ability of cohousing to be a tool for planners to address loneliness and provide social support for residents in a more systematic means. The demands of resources and barriers to development, such as land-use and financing, limit the ability for cohousing to expand. The time requirement is also lacking. If the goal becomes a system able to foster stronger community, but not to the extent that cohousing promises, perhaps the model could be more broadly used. It would require an adjustment in how the model is applied and to examine steps to accommodate or encourage its use for those who desire it. Below are four suggestions for consideration.

<u>Broader Development-Related</u>

1. *Residential developers should incorporate the use of future-resident focus groups in the design stage. Local governments could provide incentives to developers for this process.*

American homeowners seeking a new construction home choose the model and

modifications they want. As an incentive, developers could incorporate future residents into focus groups. This could be offered as an amenity to attract buyers. McCamant and Durrett (2011) highlighted the need of focus groups in cohousing. Developers have a depth of experience with targeting prequalified buyers, gathering market data, and occasionally using focus groups. By incorporating early focus groups from committed buyers, developers can create forceful advocates for the project. Findings from this study indicate that grassroots groups face significant difficulty getting support from local government. Even wealthy residents can have difficulty navigating financing outside the normal channels of American housing financing for a cohousing project. A developer who can market a cohousing community and facilitate financing issues, as well as shorten the development timeframe, in turn could gather access to this pool of motivated buyers and market insights that can be transferred to other developments. The benefit to fostering the use of focus groups may lead to citizens having greater satisfaction with their community and longer residency.

2. *Land-use regulations, especially zoning, can be a significant roadblock to innovative residential development.*

Local planning regulations such as those requiring 1-acre lots or single-family homes limit developers' abilities to implement novel building and land-use practices. Counties and localities must examine ways to encourage the development of communities with homes that are smaller and can fit into pockets of land in the suburbs, while also conserving open spaces. Seniors and smaller families may not desire large homes, though they may not want to move too far out of their existing community or from their jobs (Khater et al., 2021). There is an unmet need for housing, especially smaller sized housing, that is, entry-level homes measuring 1,400 square feet

or smaller. "How Many Starter Homes Are Being Built in Your State?" 2021) reported that in 2019, these homes constituted only 7% of all new homes constructed. Cohousing and other alternative forms of residential development could address the desire for living in some suburbs, but not in a townhome or very large single-family house. Encouraging future or potential residents' participation in focus groups may provide a boost to innovation in the real estate development sector and meet unmet housing needs.

3. Rethink common areas.

McKenzie (2003) detailed the benefits to common areas as amenities for developers. Greater usage can enhance the value of amenities. Local governments also have requirements for open space use in residential developments. This is an opportunity to create spaces conducive for use and residents' interaction. Design should include less structured pathways with more casual parklike spaces and areas that encourage residents to gather. Instead of "grand spaces," focus on creating lower-maintenance pocket parks connected by paths or trails. Developers and planners should ask if the space encourages residents to interact. Would residents want to use the space to rest, play, or read? Can they include other contact areas in the design, such as secure community mail centers?

4. Establish a community committee or expert community builder to coordinate activities.

As mentioned previously, findings indicate that residents often require support intermittently. Residents indicated that community support was often in the form of ride shares to the airport or a metro station, transportation for errands, or intermittent childcare, which were valuable. Activities formed a core means of building relationships, especially if they were seen as relaxing and enjoyable. These included community barbecues and meals, spontaneous happy

hours, or holiday celebrations. Residents could pay extra fees to receive a sliding scale of services as basic as wellness checks, arranging transportation, managing mail service if a resident is not at home, or coordinating meal delivery. Seniors, for example, can feel isolated and in need of assistance with chores and transportation. Seniors may feel very uneasy using ride-sharing systems that younger people may take for granted. Garciano (2009), in his research on low-income affordable housing and cohousing, suggested that residents may have negative feelings toward housing management because of previous unpleasant experiences, and the inclusive approach of cohousing can mitigate these feelings. Families could more easily create babysitting cooperatives.

Summary

These are a few suggestions related to design, development, and management. Cohousing's broader applicability to community planning could provide policymakers, planning practitioners, and residential developers additional tools to create successful and supportive communities for American 21st century life. Cohousing research can also provide opportunities to explore small-group consensus decision-making, especially related to community management.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewee:

Opening Statement:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I have a consent form that must be completed. As you know, I am a PhD student at Virginia Tech. My dissertation research project centers on exploring the effect of social capital on residents of a cohousing community located in the suburbs. The goal of the interview is to explore how residents understand the importance of social relationships and how they think they affect their life.

I. Resident's Impression of Immediate Community

A. Why did you choose to live in your community?

B. Approximately how many years have you lived in cohousing?

C. What three characteristics sum up your view of your community?

D. What were some of your concerns before you moved to Blueberry Hill?

E. On the BBHC website there is a quote: "*back the old-fashioned values of neighborhood and community*." What does this mean to you?

F. Was there anything that surprised you after you moved to BBHC?

G. What do you think when you hear "know my neighbors?"

H. In general, how has living in cohousing affected your satisfaction with life?

I. Does the community have enough activities for your interests and time?

1. What type?
2. Which ones do you participate in?
3. Who organizes them?
4. Please indicate the major reason why you participate in these activities.

J. If there were fewer or no activities, how would you feel?

II. Community Management

A. How would you describe the community management process?

B. The BBHC website says that the community uses a "*modified consensus process*."

1. How would you describe this process?
2. Can you describe an issue recently decided through this process?

III. Community Layout and Ties

A. Where do you usually run into your neighbors?

B. How do you stay in touch with your neighbors?

C. Do you and your neighbors help each other? If so, how?

D. Can you explain a typical weekday for you in Blueberry Hill (Mon-Friday)?

E. Can you explain a typical weekend for you in Blueberry Hill (Saturday-Sunday)?

IV. Resident's View of Broader Community

A. What do you think about the broader municipality (e.g., Vienna, VA or Fairfax)?

B. What comes to mind when you think about other neighborhoods near Blueberry Hill?

C. What are the major differences and similarities between this community and the surrounding neighborhoods?

V. Logistics

A. Do you own a vehicle?

B. About how many miles per week do you travel by motor vehicle?

C. Where do you shop, work, or go to school, and how do you get there? Do you use a car to run errands, go to work, volunteer or school?

D. How to do you travel to go to places for entertainment or recreation?

E. How much do you typically spend on traveling to work (including regular volunteer or school per week?

VI. Resident's Background

A. What is the total size of your household? (only include people who regularly stay there, not visitors or less than half-time residents)

B. How many children age 17 or younger live in your household?

C. How would you describe your employment status?

D. Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married?

E. With which ethnic/racial category do you most closely identify yourself?

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