

Big Idea Application 2019

Title: Intergenerational Sustainable Cohousing Communities for Oak Park

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1. What is your Big Idea? (1 paragraph)

Creating a jointly owned and managed intergenerational cohousing project for 25 to 30 households. Oak Park citizens created policies and institutions to racially integrate public and private sector dwellings. Our proposal merges cohousing with this local tradition of social integration. The Oak Park cohousing project we propose integrates older and younger households using common spaces and shared social provision to enhance affordability and sustainability. Cohousing has a track record in Europe and increasingly in communities across the United States. The national association provides general background information <https://www.cohousing.org/>. We have a website that describes our project <https://hochchas.wixsite.com/oakparkcohousing>.

2. How will your idea transform the community, and why is that important?

Oak Park's success as an integrated community with excellent public services and schools has attracted investment and newcomers. The prosperity has also meant increased property taxes; increases that can encourage elderly household residents to leave even as many want to stay. Many young households want to move to Oak Park for the schools but cannot find affordable housing options. Publicly subsidized housing helps the poor, but not young and old middle-income households. The multigenerational cohousing project creates an innovative residential model, but one that requires more time and effort to create than conventional housing choices.

3. Make the case for grant investment by addressing the following:

a) Key Activities:

The Arbor West Neighbors first explored shared housing options in a November 2017 conference. Participants in this event started the current Oak Park intergenerational cohousing effort in early January 2018. Arbor West sponsored monthly meetings throughout the year. In April ten households, most from Oak Park, joined the organizing group making a \$200 nonrefundable contribution. Three teams were formed to work on membership, governance and development. Cohousing projects have three phases: community building & design, financing & construction and community launch as residents move in.

b) Beneficiaries: Who/what will be your target beneficiaries?

Direct: The future residents of the cohousing dwellings would benefit. We currently estimate a feasible project will need 25 households with between 60 and 70 total residents sharing the same facility. The current mailing list includes 80 interested households. About 15 households have expressed some interest with 10 making a commitment to work together. We continue to pursue new members, especially younger minority households with children.

Indirect: The Oak Park community would benefit hosting an alternative prototype for developing intergenerational housing. Instead of pitting aging old timers against young newcomers across the property tax divide, this model literally offers common ground for joint residential benefit. Showing people that it can be done will overcome skepticism and passivity. Additionally, this sort of household mixing can prove to be a stigma buster. Old people have value helping share in routine social provision that belies the image of isolation and uselessness. Cohousing candidates can find common ground across income, age and racial divides if they take the time and effort to learn about each other as they plan for shared living.

c) Key Partners: Who will you work with?

Cohousing households provide the core social collaboration and funding for the housing community they design and build together. As we reach and surpass a 15 member household threshold we expect to incorporate as an Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) that would be the organizational vehicle for financing and constructing the project. The potential partners would include an experienced architecture firm, a nonprofit housing developer and a community focused lending institution. These would be selected using an open process of solicitation, presentation and review. We would work meet with the Oak Park Residence Corporation and Public Housing Authority to discuss how we might structure the cohousing project to include willing and eligible moderate and low-income households. We want to explore locations that allow for adaptive reuse, beautiful design, pedestrian access and affordability. We want the cohousing project to provide a prototype for mixed income intergenerational housing development going forward.

d) Your background: What is in yours or your partners' backgrounds that has prepared you for your key activities?

We are not experienced housing developers. Our members include people with housing development experience and other useful professional skills. Our strength centers in our joint commitment to founding and funding a community focused residential project together. Learning about each other and discussing the details of shared living has prepared us for the challenges of designing common spaces (group dining room, play room, guest rooms), negotiating the details of living together (aka privacy, pets, noise, food and more), governing (decisions by consensus, resident management work assignments), possession (own or rent) and funding. We have spent a year creating a group of neighbors who will build their dwelling space together. Social coordination and collaboration offer a powerful resource. A group of committed households willing and able to make their own living space greatly reduces development and lending risk. The big idea is to make this type of collaboration more popular in Oak Park.

e) Value propositions: What will differentiate you from other, existing organizations that are addressing similar needs?

Housing development is mostly done by private firms and public authorities. The cohousing model adopts a kind of social approach to private housing development. Households pool their equity at the front end of the development process sharing economic risk to design and build shared residential space. The LLC will select and work with a developer and lender that recognize the social and economic value of this project. Our proposal allows for the involvement across public and private sector agencies. We hope our development will demonstrate the feasibility of continuing a niche social market for home grown affordable intergenerational housing development. The up-front social involvement and commitment means that this model will not challenge conventional development, but it could offer an innovative option that combines private, public and nonprofit resources to create a kind of residential community that conventional developers cannot provide.

f) Buy-in Support: From whom will you need to get buy-in and support? How will you get it?

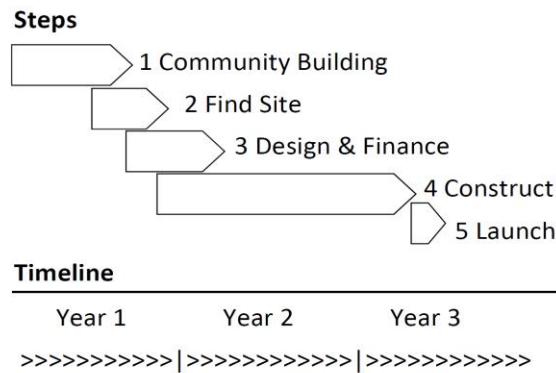
Cohousing success relies crucially on the commitment of the core households willing to put their time and money into the project. This core group of social entrepreneurs will need to identify and select a designer and developer to create a feasible, affordable and beautiful facility fit for Oak Park. This effort could benefit from involvement from the Oak Park Residence Corporation, the Oak Park Housing Authority and planning and community development staff from the Village of Oak Park.

The officers of the Cohousing LLC will conduct interviews and host meetings to discuss the development details including location, design, financing and construction for the project. The Village has a history of using public resources and power to leverage racially integrated housing development. Our cohousing project offers an opportunity to use some of these resources and power to leverage mixed income intergenerational housing development. Like any development project the final building proposal will require financing approval from the lender(s) and the Village of Oak Park (planning commission and building regulations).

g) Launch: What will deployment look like? What is the timeline?

We cannot provide a precise time line. The cohousing development process does go through phases. We are nearing the end of our first phase of community building and institutional design: how we expect to live together and the rules we expect to follow making decisions. These efforts continue as we incorporate them into our ongoing interaction and committee work. We are just starting to focus on site selection. We expect to form an LLC and start design and finance deliberations in Fall 2019.

Cohousing Steps & Timeline



h) Mission Achievements: What will be your metrics for success? What impacts will you have?

The visible accomplishment will be 25 to 30 beautifully designed residential units organized as a shared residential community on a parcel in Oak Park. The immediate impact will be the creation of private affordable dwellings for 60 to 70 cohousing residents and the creation of common spaces for an interactive resident managed community. The long-term resident impact will be the solidarity, security, efficiency and sustainability of shared living. The project will continue for decades as residents depart and new ones arrive to join the community. Finally, the development community and public officials will use this project as an example of a viable option for intergenerational living – one that will be copied and improved upon in the Village and elsewhere.

i) Budget: How will you use the \$50,000 award?

The estimated development cost for a 25 unit project would be about \$10 million. The \$50,000 award would be used to subsidize project ‘soft’ cost. The LLC would purchase the time and talent of architects, lawyers, engineers and developers with experience doing affordable housing development. This might include the comparison and assessment of different potential sites: including preliminary designs for adaptive reuse of an existing structure, the innovative design of a mixed-use building on a commercial lot or a creative residential mid-rise design in an infill setting. Once a location is chosen we expect to work closely with an architectural firm to work with us to design common spaces and down sized private dwellings that also meet ADA and energy sustainability requirements. It might also offset some of the costs for legal review of the LLC by laws and development contracts related to land purchase and construction. We expect that some of these costs might be offset by *pro bono* professional contributions, but we cannot rely upon this for the full range of crucial professional advice and involvement. The details of land development are complex and require competent professional engagement to assure quality outcomes.