

## The Design Process:

### *notes on Predesign and Programming*

*Note: This handout was created for a cohousing design workshop presented by Design Coalition in 1992*

1. When I say “programming” I’m talking about design programming. This is a subset of a full development program. I’m referring to a process of specific planning for something that will be designed and built. It’s an essential part of the design process, the first one, the step before drawing something. So, it’s primarily verbal and written.
2. Here’s the 6 phases of the building process. If you work with an architect, they’ll likely use these words:

Pre-design/Programming = <i>problem-seeking</i>	↓ Increasing level of detail Increasing quality of construction information Increasing cost to do
Schematic Design = <i>problem-solving</i>	
Design Development = <i>detailing solutions</i>	
Documents = “ <i>blueprints</i> ”	
Bidding/Negotiation = <i>hiring a builder</i>	
Construction = <i>getting the project built</i>	

3. The group uses the programming process to arrive at and record it’s consensus on just how they will build. The designer uses the program as a handbook, and attempts to faithfully interpret it’s instructions into drawings of built things. The program is everyone’s common point of reference.
4. A **written program** document is a comprehensive description of the physical cohousing project and a record of agreements made. It typically includes:
  - **Lists** of spaces and features required, including sizes
  - **Characteristics** of spaces, materials, systems
  - **Criteria** upon which the design will be evaluated, whether functional, aesthetic, cost-related, operational etc.

5. Levels of pre-design programming:

#### **Level 1/Preliminary program** = *Pre-site selection*.

Geared to help you establish criteria for site search and budgeting purposes. Presents the broad outlines, not the details.

#### **Level 2/Working program** = *After site control*

Begins when you have a core group, a specific site, and some form of development budget. Can become quite specific and detailed.

Predesign programming is really a loop; like the larger development process, you periodically return to your assumptions and examine them in relation to your latest information on budget, site and group expectations.

A program is not like an income tax rulebook—that’s too rigid. It’s not like a diary—that’s too open ended and personal. It’s more like a book being written by a group; you make changes, add or insert chapters, but eventually it settles down and you have to send it off to the publisher.

6. It's important to date program documents. As you go thru the budget-setting process, and as members enter and leave the group, you make changes in the design program. Since the program is both a comprehensive description of your project and a record of your agreements, keeping written track is the only realistic way to avoid misunderstandings or forgetting something.

7. **Values:** some thoughts on dwelling units...

a. Limit the number of variations you will offer, in size, type and interior layout and detailing. Resist the temptation to give everyone everything they can think of. All the groups who have done so have regretted it, because of the extra cost, and time and hassle to discuss, design, build and manage all the differences.

b. Make interior flexibility an important value. Dwellings that can adapt easily and inexpensively will be lived in longer, as life-stage and family needs change.

8. **Values:** some thoughts on common areas...

a. The common house is the heart of the community. It deserves lots of attention in programming and design. Make it big enough. People in cohousing invariably complain more often that the common house is too small than that the dwelling units are too small.

b. A simple and reliable site layout is best. No need to reinvent the wheel. The basic scheme of parking on the periphery, then common house in a central location, then dwellings arranged along pedestrian paths just works best. Endless variations are possible on this basic, proven theme.