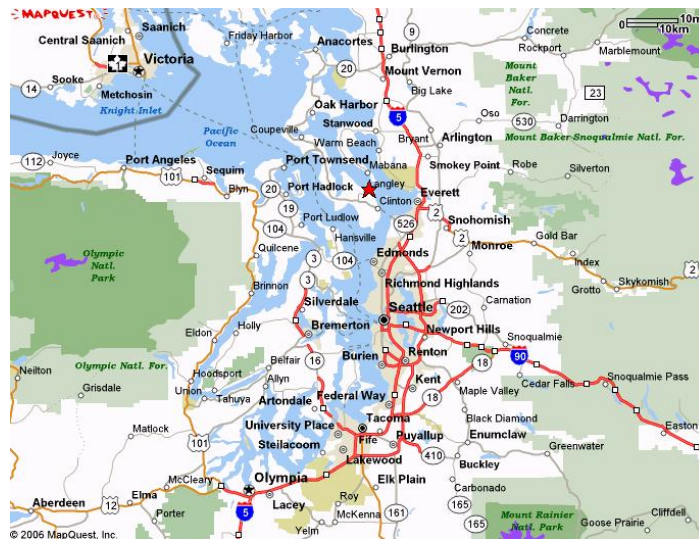


Third Street Cottages and Dome Village: Smart Solutions for High-Density Housing

Although different in many ways, Third Street Cottages, in Langley, Washington, and Dome Village, in Los Angeles, California, are both good examples of developments utilizing sustainable design principles. Both projects were constructed in the 1990's as small-scale solutions integrating high-density housing on small parcels of land, promoting community involvement between residents. Yet these smart growth communities vary greatly from each other, from their building materials and environmental settings, to the residents and their respective communities at large.

Third Street Cottages were created in anticipation of the sprawl that is already starting to overflow nearby cities of Seattle and Everett, Washington. The 1,000 person city of Langley is situated on Whidbey Island, a one hour commute from downtown Seattle, forty-five minutes from Everett. As the cities' overcrowding continues more and more urbanites will be seeking calmer refuge in the surrounding areas.

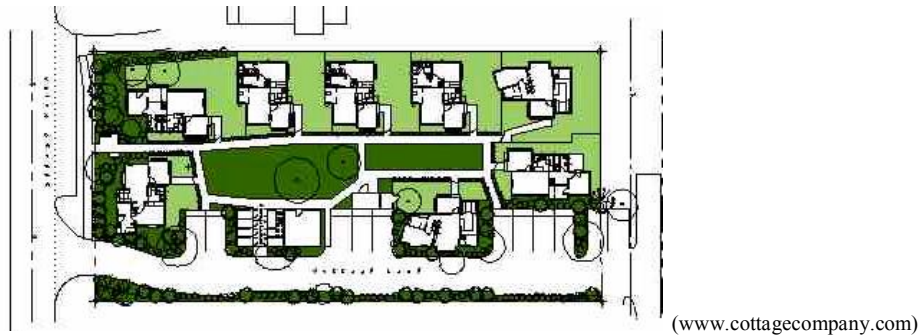


(www.mapquest.com)

The Cottage Company designer, Jim Soules, and architect Ross Chapin, set out to create a high-density development which would preserve the beauty of the green areas of Langley, yet still maintain a spatial openness within the high density quarters.

Third Street is made up of 8 detached cottages built on four standard single family plots of 7200 square feet, totaling about two-thirds of an acre. Utilizing the city's new innovative Cottage Housing Development (CHD) zoning code, the developers were able to construct up to twice the number of detached homes on the same-sized piece of land

(from 7.5 homes per acre up to 15 per acre). The zoning code calls for all cottages to be built at a size of 975 ft² or less, with the ground floor not occupying more than 650 ft². Their result is a community of detached single bedroom and loft-style cottages with a substantial common green area and little development impact on the surrounding area (www.cottagecompany.com).



The eight cottages surround the common green area, with walking paths connecting the houses to the green, each other and the shared workshop and mail kiosk. Parking lots are hidden behind the sides of two cottages to keep the natural feel of the development and to promote walking across or around the green and by the other cottages or shared mail kiosk- what the designers call ‘entry transition’ from car to home; (www.cottagecompany.com). Although the development is less than an acre this ingenious layout gives the residents a spacious feeling. Furthermore, at each cottage, personal garden space (most around 200 ft²), front porches, and flowerboxes extend the feelings of space and nature while softly delineating private boundaries and individual tastes.

The cottages themselves are also cleverly and sustainably designed. 28 exterior colors are present in the eight buildings, giving them each personality and creating a vibrant visual feeling in the development as a whole. The windows of each cottage are strategically placed to give residents the most indoor privacy from one another. The ceilings are at least 9 feet tall in all of the cottages and storage space is ample and out of sight in walk-in closets and attic spaces. Nooks, alcoves, deep sills and lofts cleverly use all possible space to continue that feel of openness indoors. The construction of the cottages was also done with consideration for the environment. No drywall was used in cottage walls, and the wall paneling was made from re-claimed spruce trees. The cottages have Medite floors: a material composed of wood fiber board, and the ceilings

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are composed of plywood and batten (www.weyerhaeuser-europe.com). No old growth wood was used in this development.

With such smart design practices both inside and out it is no wonder that this award winning development immediately sold out. The Cottage Company has been developing a similar smart housing community in Washington State nearly every year since 1998. Unfortunately, their popularity and the increased flight from the surrounding cities have driven their latest development's prices out of reach for many citizens. Their new Conover Commons Homes will feature twelve 3+ bedroom homes bordering a five acre protected piece of land; prices start at a whopping \$700,000.

Even at Third Street's moderate pricing of \$140,000-150,000, the homes (first sold as condominiums) weren't affordable to the many citizens living below the average incomes of Seattle or Everett, nor were they easily accessible to larger families, or persons employed in either city without automobiles. What then are some different options for creating housing opportunities that still foster community involvement, that are detached from one another, and that utilize a minimal amount of space and impact on the surrounding area? Justiceville's Dome Village opened my eyes to another unique housing development in downtown Los Angeles that fulfilled the same goals in an extremely different fashion.

Dome Village was developed in 1993 and had successfully and continuously operated until last month. The Dome Village community was started by Justiceville USA, a 501c3 non-profit organization which advocates for the rights of homeless and for the government to recognize and take responsibility for the country's homelessness problem. Justiceville was started in 1985 by Ted Hayes, a homeless activist, in trying to develop a successful model for dealing with our nation's homelessness problem. In 1993, the average homeless population on a given day in Los Angeles was 82,096 people (www.weingart.org). Hayes had previously established two temporary "tent city" shelters Central City East, Los Angeles and had created positive relationships between the homeless community and the city, including businesses and the city government (www.domevillage.org).



(www.domevillage.org)

In 1993, Justiceville received a lead grant of \$250,000 from the ARCO Oil Company (7th largest U.S. petroleum company). The money was used to purchase temporary housing quarters to be built on the 1.25 acre lot of the shanty-town. With the grant money, 20 geodesic domes were purchased and constructed on the land. The Omni-sphere fiberglass geodesic domes were chosen for their low cost, building ease, light weight and structural integrity. The domes are also extremely durable; while not biodegradable they are definitely re-usable (all but three of the domes have been re-sold on e-bay as of last week). The Omni-spheres were designed by Craig Chamberlain a student of dome inventor Buckminster Fuller's (Geodesic Archives, 1993). The omni-spheres each cost \$9,000 new in 1993, and they remain relatively low in cost today (\$10,000 will buy a newer more eco-friendly, better-insulated version) (www.lekshelters.com). The domes were delivered to the lot ready to assemble in about four hours with just a ladder, screwdriver and a wrench. The initial residents of dome village built their own home and community domes (www.ft.com).

Residential domes were the smallest, with a 10 foot radius and 12 foot maximum ceiling height. At about 315 square feet, a residential dome was shared by a couple or family, or partitioned for two individuals. Up to 35 individuals could reside at dome village (as of May 2006, there were 29 residents). Two domes were hooked up to plumbing and divided into eight bathrooms, with two handicap accessible. A kitchen dome and laundry dome were also outfitted with plumbing. Two office domes, a cyber-dome, and a community dome rounded out the village. With all of the shelters built in several weeks, Dome Village was soon ready to create an empowered, self-governed community of once homeless citizens.

The community dome was used almost constantly by various residential groups and outsiders. Meetings, classes, workshops, and lectures were held here. The community dome was also used for group dining and also housed TV, video and computers. In the two office domes, residents had access to equipment and space for their various community and personal businesses. One office dome was used for case management services, where residents could get counseling and help transitioning to the next point in their lives.

What is really sustainable about dome village goes beyond the structure, it is the community. Residents were invited to live in the community for up to two years while they underwent job training and education in the village. Since 1993, 412 residents have lived at the village, with 47% of all residents moving on to permanent housing! Dome village fostered important social involvement for single people, couples and families. Residents took turns offering cooperative childcare, and enabled parents to take care of other concerns, seek jobs or find housing. Numerous educational and support services were offered, including: jobseeker workshops, computer education, parent training classes, health and nutrition education, legal workshops, social work and case management services (www.domevillage.org).

The residents of dome village also created community organizations. They started an Urban Farm and Orchard business in the city, fielded two cricket teams, held art and music performances, cultural events, and organized field trips. The dome village community also developed a great deal of partnerships with the L.A. community at large. More than 10 colleges volunteered at the village over the years and offered tutoring and other educational opportunities to the residents. Health care, education, and transportation services were extended to Dome Village Residents by city providers. The village established positive relationships with local business, police, and the city council.

The one thing Dome Village did not do was own their land. After thirteen prosperous years of redevelopment in the surrounding area, including the nearby Staples' Center Arena and high-rise buildings, the property value has increased twenty-fold. The landlord has decided to raise Dome Village's rent to market value, an increase of 700%. And so Dome village must collapse (www.eopath.org). It is speculated that this rent increase came suddenly after the land owner learned of Village founder Ted Hayes'

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political affiliations, but regardless the village is closing (www.tedhayes.net). On the bright side, or bright-green side, Hayes has begun plan to set up a new Dome Village in a more affordable part of the city. The ecological footprint left on the lot is no greater than that cast by the original shantytown on the abandoned brownfield before it. The community and garden attention in the village most likely improved the land. The village materials could have been re-used for the next village, though due to a lack of storage space most have been sold for re-use by others (www.freerepublic.com).

Both Third Street Cottages and Dome Village present unique ways of housing a large number of people on a small piece of land. They both foster community within their residences, with minimal negative impact on their surroundings. Both, in fact, seemed to have quite a positive impact: The Cottage Company has sold-out every development since, and as a result of their developments, kept more natural land intact both on and off site. Through temporary housing and community support services, Dome Village re-integrated residents back into the community at large, grew vitally needed urban plants and local produce, and offered the country a successful model of dealing with our nation's homelessness problem.

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