

# **LIBERTY VILLAGE**

## **New Member Handbook**

April, 2006

# **Table of Contents**

## Liberty Village Cohousing: General Information

- Vision and Mission Statement
- People

## Communal Life at Liberty Village:

- Rules
- Community Meals
- Community Room
- Business Meeting
- Decision Making
- Conflict Resolution
- Getting the Work Done
- Teams
- Pod Dinners
- Social Activities
- Mail
- Communication

## Liberty Village Property:

- Land
- Equipment
- Parking
- Pedestrian Pathway
- Landscape & Gardening
- The DRT
- Who cuts the Grass?
- Snow Removal
- Recycling & Composting
- The Chickens

## Membership:

- Early History
- Future Development
- LCP, LLP
- LVCA
- The White Notebook

# **Liberty Village Cohousing**

# **General Information**

## **Vision & Mission Statement**

### **Our Vision:**

Liberty Village is a cohousing community in a beautiful country setting, where neighbors are friends. We balance privacy with neighborliness to support and extend each family. We play and work together with respect, honor, trust, and caring, using our differences to find new solutions and new ways to grow together.

### **Our Mission is:**

To have a community of people which fosters a sense of belonging and community participation.

To encourage both casual social contact and planned activities.

To respect the environment while providing comfortable housing.

To create an aesthetically pleasing place to live, enjoying the beauty of nature, green space, attractive homes and pedestrian pathways.

To make our decisions by consensus, recognizing our diversity as a benefit to our community, so that the wisdom generated is a true reflection of the group's thinking, growing out of the contributions of individual opinion.

To create a safe place to live where neighbors are concerned for neighbors.

To respect everyone, including children and elders, for the wisdom they bring to the community.

To foster individual responsibility, balancing the rights of each person with the good of the community while being sensitive to special needs.

To respect each other's property and privacy.

To enjoy healthful home cooking together and the fellowship that comes with it.

To encourage personal growth through gracious listening and courageous speaking.

To have a common house filled with the sights and sounds of an active, caring community.

To celebrate Life!

### **The People:**

Currently, Liberty Village is a community of 18 individual households. Our members range in age from 70's to newborns. We are a mixture of individuals, young families, single parents, couples, empty nesters, and retirees. Our diversity crosses cultural backgrounds, religious and spiritual orientations as well as educational and occupational backgrounds.

The majority of adult residents work in the surrounding Frederick, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore areas. Most of the children attend local Frederick County Public schools, and a few are home-schooled.

## **Communal Life at Liberty Village**

### **Rules:**

Communal life at Liberty Village is based on trust. We trust that each member will act responsibly toward other members as well as toward the property and equipment at Liberty Village. Because of this trust, we enact minimal rules and instead rely upon open communication and the spirit of cooperation to ensure that we treat each other and the community fairly, respectfully and safely.

### **Community Meals:**

Community meals are an active and social time at Liberty Village. They provide a chance to socialize with neighbors as well as exchange thoughts and feelings on current issues in the community.

Community meals occur regularly at Liberty Village, usually about 6 times a month. They take place in our community room during the winter months and are held outside on our picnic tables during the warmer months, weather permitting. A calendar of meals is prepared for a 4-month period and sent out on email to the membership. Every adult usually cooks once a month in conjunction with 3 other adults in the community. The 4 adults responsible for a meal will plan, shop, prepare, serve and clean up for that meal. The rest of the month they are welcome to come to meals free of charge and free of responsibility. The first person listed for each meal is asked to be the initiator for meal planning with the other 3 members as well as to post a notice of the meal and time on our email list. The cost of the meal is shared informally among the four cooks.

Since there are several vegetarians at Liberty Village, it is preferred to have a vegetarian options at our meals, however this is not required. Those members in the community that work during the week have asked to have weekday meals at 6:30pm. Weekend meals vary, depending on the cooks' preference. Our meals during the week are referred to as KISS dinners. This stands for Keep It Simple, Sweetie.

## **Community Room:**

The Common House in Liberty Village has not yet been built. In order to have space for community gatherings, the LVCA rents the basement in John Beutler and Emily Daniel's house as the community room. The basement is a large, finished space located in the center of the community. Community meals, business meetings, team meetings as well as social gatherings are held there. Community members take responsibility for cleaning and maintaining this space. There is a monthly sign-up sheet posted for volunteers to sign-up to clean the community room.

## **Business Meetings:**

At Liberty Village we have two legal entities: I) Libertytown Cohousing Partnership, LLP, or the LLP for short, which is the development entity of Liberty Village and II) The Liberty Village Community Association (LVCA), to which every homeowner belongs. These two entities will be explained in more detail in the history section of this booklet.

Our business meetings are joint LLP/LVCA meetings. They are held throughout the year every 2-4 weeks. All members are strongly encouraged and expected to come to these meetings. A minimum of 8 families present is required in order for a meeting to conduct business. Proxies are held from all members in order for business to be conducted in their absence. A calendar of meetings is planned and posted for 4 months at a time. The meeting time varies between weekday evenings, Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons. Meetings tend to occur more frequently in the winter (every 2-3 weeks) and less frequently in the summer (once a month).

The facilitation team is responsible for planning the agenda and facilitating the meeting. Agenda calls are put out on email one week prior to the meeting by the facilitator. All proposals presented at an upcoming meeting must be out on email 3 days prior to the meeting.

Business meetings generally follow the outline below:

Meet & Greet

Business meeting starts:

Tasks: Review minutes, minute taker, task taker, check quorum  
Appreciations/Check-in/Review agenda/Task List Review

AGENDA:

Open Forum:

Announcements:

Evaluation, Closing

## **Decision Making:**

All decision making at Liberty Village is done through consensus. Consensus is a process by which concerns from all community members are heard with honor and respect. The final decision is a result of resolving all concerns and finding the wisdom of the group.

Over the years, members have been extensively trained in consensus through outside trainings. New members are introduced and trained in consensus on an individual basis by the facilitators.

## **Conflict Resolution:**

Since conflict is recognized as an inevitable part of community life, conflict resolution is highly encouraged at Liberty Village. The facilitators have been trained in this technique and are available to facilitate conflict between two or more parties. Conflict resolution is also used during business meetings if needed in the large group setting.

## **Getting the Work Done:**

The basic philosophy of Liberty Village is one of trust. We all trust that each member of Liberty Village is doing for the community what they are willing and able to do at any given time. This philosophy gives members the freedom to indulge in community work when they have lots of free time and to withdraw from the community when their attention is needed elsewhere. This also means that the sharing of work at Liberty Village rarely occurs equally among its members.

Presently, all the work at Liberty Village is done through teams and individuals on a voluntary basis. There is no monthly or yearly requirement of hours that an individual must work. All members are encouraged to participate in the community in whatever ways they are able and willing.

## **Teams:**

The majority of work in the community is done through teams. Currently, the teams at Liberty Village consist of Legal/Finance, Community Facilities, Facilitation, Member Services, Design Review, and Development. Ad Hoc teams are created as needed. Any individual is welcomed to join any team. A notice of teams and team members is posted in the community room. Anyone wanting to join a team should contact a member on that team. Team meeting dates and times are posted on email and are open to the whole community.

## **Pod Dinners:**

Several neighbors have joined together and formed what we call Pod dinners. Currently, there are 2-3 pods of neighbors that meet weekly for dinners together. These dinners occur in neighbor's homes and are outside of the regular community dinners. Pods usually consist of 2-4 families and are organized by individuals within the community. Anyone interested in joining a Pod should ask around to see if there are any openings in the current Pods or they can start a new Pod themselves.

## **Social Activities:**

Social activities occur regularly and spontaneously at Liberty Village. We have several traditions that occur on an annual basis such as 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic, Halloween campfire, Thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas party. Throughout the year there are numerous game nights, musical evenings, movie nights, birthday celebrations, summer cookouts, potluck dinners, ping pong tournaments, to name a few. Social gatherings are an important aspect of life at Liberty Village. Initiation of any social event is open to any member in the community.

## **Mail:**

The US Post Office in Union Bridge, Maryland delivers mail to the cluster of mailboxes located in the parking area. Currently, the center and the uphill (East) cluster of mailboxes are in use. The downhill or west cluster of mailboxes will be used for the future homes at Liberty Village. It is very important to put outgoing mail only in the center and East mailbox clusters. Outgoing mail will NOT be picked up in the West cluster mailbox.

There is a large plastic container located to the left of the mailboxes. This container is used for large packages delivered to the residents. A notice will be placed in an individual's mailbox if they have a package in the container and the red flag on the container may be raised. This notice may say that the package is too big for the mailbox and needs to be picked up at the post office. ALWAYS, check the large container prior to going to the post office.

## **Communication:**

We enjoy free, open and friendly communication between residents and use it to help keep the community running smoothly. Neighbors can often be seen speaking with other neighbors throughout the village. Email is used for formal and important announcements. There is also a bulletin board near the mailboxes where announcements can be posted.

# **Liberty Village Property**

## **The Land:**

Liberty Village is located on 23 acres of land in Frederick County, Maryland. The homes and the parking area are clustered on 8 acres while 15 acres remain as open space. This open area consists of fields, woods, gardens, orchards and wetlands. The property is bordered on the west side by a 105-acre county park which contains soccer fields, baseball diamonds, play equipment, picnic areas and a 3-mile walking, hiking or biking trail. The east and south sides of Liberty Village are bordered by single-family homes on 5-acre lots.

## **Equipment:**

The community owns several pieces of equipment that are used to maintain the property. This equipment is available for all community members. All members are asked to treat this equipment with the same care that they would treat their own equipment. Individual community members have volunteered to be advocates for each piece of equipment. The list of advocates is posted inside the green storage contained located in the parking area. If someone is unsure how to use a machine or the machine breaks, the members are asked to notify the advocate for that equipment. If the advocate is not

available or fails to follow-up, community members should notify someone on the Community Facilities team.

## **Parking:**

All vehicles at Liberty Village are parked in the large parking lot located on the East Side of the property. There is no parking around the homes. Vehicular access to the homes through the pedestrian pathway is available for drop-off and pick-up when absolutely necessary. At present, there are no assigned parking spaces in the community.

There are 7 lampposts, which light up the parking area after dark. Five lampposts stay on until 11pm. Two lampposts remain on all night. These two lights are located at the entrance to the parking area, near Cheryl Starke's house and in the middle of the parking lot, across from the concrete pathway. It is requested that the parking space underneath this latter light remain available for anyone who arrives home very late in the evening. All the parking lights go on again from 5:30am to 6:30am in the wintertime to assist those who leave early for work. The pedestrian path lights remain on all night.

## **Pedestrian Pathway/Emergency Access:**

The pedestrian pathway/emergency access area is located around all the homes. This area is designed for adults and children to have space around their homes for walking, riding bikes, playing and visiting with neighbors without the danger of cars. This area is also used for emergency access for ambulances or fire trucks. This pathway may be used for drop-off and pick-up when absolutely necessary. Daily vehicle entrance into this area is strongly discouraged. Carts are available in the parking lot to aid in the transfer of groceries and other items from the car to the home. Once a member has finished with a cart, he/she is asked to return it promptly to the parking area, so it will be available for others to use.

## **Landscaping and Gardening:**

Landscaping and gardening are done on a voluntary basis at Liberty Village. Homeowners may landscape around their homes as they wish. Numerous individuals have taken pride and ownership in several smaller flower garden areas around the village. Help is always welcomed. Anyone interested in helping with landscaping or gardening around the community should contact Community Facilities prior to beginning. Larger areas, like the entrance circle

and around the parking lot, are usually cared for on workdays. Community Facilities will post a community-wide workday as needed to care for landscaping or maintenance needs in the community.

Vegetable gardening takes place in the open area on the south of the property. A large garden area is available for neighbors to have individual plots. Frequent sharing of fresh vegetables occurs between neighbors. There is also a compost area, an orchard and a chicken coop located near the garden. Anyone interested in vegetable gardening should contact John Beutler.

## **The Design Review Team (DRT)**

The DRT is a team that works with homeowners in the community who want to alter the outside of their homes, build or make significant changes to freestanding structures or plant large trees or shrubs. Plans for these changes are submitted to the DRT, reviewed by the team with input from the community and given final approval, pending resolution of any communal concerns. A full DRT job description is available in the white notebooks given to new homeowners.

## **Who Cuts the Grass?**

There is a lot of grass to cut at Liberty Village. All homeowners are asked to maintain the grass around their homes. Often duplexes will work out sharing the grass cutting around their duplex. Power self-propelled and push lawn mowers are available for community use and stored in the green shed located in the parking lot. Everyone is asked to check the mowers for gas and oil prior to use and to contact the advocate for the mower if there is a problem with the machine. Gas is available in the tan container near the green shed. When the gas containers are low, individuals are asked to fill the containers at the gas station and submit the receipt to the Finance team of the LVCA for reimbursement. If there is minimal-to-no gas available and an individual is unable to get to the gas station to fill the containers, they are asked to put an email out to the community asking for someone else to do this task.

A professional mower, hired by the LVCA, maintains the area around the parking lot and along the road. Neighbors, on a volunteer basis, maintain the remainder of the grassy area. Each spring Community Facilities provides a sign-up sheet for the areas that need maintenance over the summer. Neighbors who sign up are asked to maintain their area throughout the growing season. A ride-on mower is available for community use in the green shed located in the wooded area on the south side of the property. Anyone who is not familiar with using this equipment is asked to notify a Community Facilities member for instruction.

## **Snow Removal:**

When snow is predicted all cars should be parked on the west or downhill side of the parking lot. This helps to facilitate removing snow from the East Side of the parking lot first. There are 3 snow blowers for snow removal. Snow removal occurs on a voluntary basis. Anyone available and willing is asked to help with snow removal. Community Facilities is available for instruction of snow blowing machines. All homeowners are asked to shovel their walkways. Salt containers are placed along the pedestrian pathway during the winter for use along icy areas. The community asks that the salt be used with restraint, as it kills plants and grass. Spiked shoe attachments are alternatives to salt, which are used by several residents.

## **Recycling and Composting:**

Recycling and composting are encouraged at Liberty Village. There is no formal program for either of these activities. However, most neighbors are willing to help others recycle and compost as needed. All recycling must be brought to the recycling drop-off located in Mt. Pleasant as well as other locations in Frederick. There is a large compost area located near the garden for all to use.

## **The Chickens:**

The chicken coop is located adjacent to the vegetable garden area. John Beutler is responsible for the chickens. Members are encouraged to feed food scraps to the chickens. However, no eggshells or meat products should be fed to the chickens. Extra eggs are available in the community room refrigerator for \$1/dozen or 10 cents an egg.

## **Membership**

## **Early History:**

Cohousing in Frederick County began back in 1989 when John Beutler put a notice up at the Common Market in Frederick announcing a meeting for anyone interested in Cohousing. A group of interested people was formed and the search for land began. Many people came and went during these early years.

In 1993, it was decided to buy the 28-acre farm property in Libertytown, Maryland. Five households (Merlin and Cathie Porter-Border, Nellie Porter, Teresa and Ken Film, Tom Lofft and George and Naomi Davis) came together and formed Libertytown Cohousing Partnership, LLP (LLP). They pooled their money for the deposit and negotiated at contract. The initial partners and Jim Lane took out a mortgage and purchased the land, which was to become the future Liberty Village. The final sale of the property occurred in Fall, 1994. Soon after that, marketing began to bring in future residents of Liberty Village. By 1997, 19 partners had joined the LLP.

Early meetings of the LLP took place at the Manor House, located on the property. Finances were managed through a mandatory \$6,000 initial investment per partner household. Whenever it became clear that more money was needed to move forward, the hat was passed. Partners added what financial resources they could afford. In the course of building Liberty Village, over \$500,000 of investments have been voluntarily collected from the partnership. These investments are long-term investments that are expected to be returned to the partners once the development of Liberty Village is completed.

The partners worked long and hard to develop Liberty Village. Tom Lofft, Ron Petralito and Merlin Porter-Borden were instrumental in this development. PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoning was obtained in 1996. In July 1998, a multiyear tap agreement (MYTA) was signed with Frederick County allowing for up to 43 sewer taps for the community and at that same time the LLP purchased their first 10 taps.

Also during the summer of 1998, the manor house, and the 4 acres surrounding it, was sold. The proceeds from this sale paid off the mortgage on the land and thus the LLP owned the remaining 23 acres, free and clear. In fall, 1998, eight more sewer taps were purchased from the County. In addition, the LLP took out a loan for \$1 million dollars to develop the infrastructure at Liberty Village. Five partnership households guaranteed this loan.

Partners then began to purchase their lots. Proceeds from the sale of lots were used to reduce the infrastructure loan. Construction began and the first residents of Liberty Village moved into their homes in 1999. 18 homes were built between 1999-2004. In 2000, the LLP was informed of unexpected County sewer restrictions that put a hold on obtaining any future sewer taps. Thus, the development of Liberty Village was halted after 18 households, leaving 20 homes

and the Common House unbuilt as well as the partners in debt and the partner investments still outstanding.

The County is working on resolving the sewer issues in Libertytown and expects to have sewer taps available by fall, 2007. Liberty Village members are currently working on moving forward with the development of Phase II/Phase III of Liberty Village.

## **Future Development:**

Twenty more homes and a common house need to be built for the development of Liberty Village to be complete. This development has been divided into Phase II and Phase III. Phase II will be the next 10 homes, households 19-28. Phase III will be the final 10 homes, households 29-38. It is hoped that the common house will be built between Phases II and III. However, all the details for this part of the development have not yet been finalized.

Final county approval for the homes in Phase II has been granted. Once sewer taps are available, these homes can be built without delay. Final county approval for the homes in Phase III is still outstanding, being limited by the need to obtain APFO (Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance) approval. It is unclear when and if final approval will occur. If for some reason, final approval of Phase III is denied, reevaluation of the LLP finances will need to be done prior to the construction of the common house.

## **Libertytown Cohousing Partnership, LLP:**

The Libertytown Cohousing Partnership, LLP (LLP) was formed in 1994 to purchase the land and develop Liberty Village. At its peak, the LLP had 22 partners. Over the years, several partners have resigned and a few have died. Currently there are 18 partners, 13 of which live at Liberty Village.

Since the completion of Liberty Village was halted by sewer tap restrictions from the County in 2000, the LLP continues to manage the undeveloped areas of Liberty Village as well as work towards the development of the final 20 homes and the Common House. The LLP has a \$100,000 debt outstanding on the infrastructure loan. This debt is paid voluntarily by "dues" from partners as well as LVCA members. These dues also cover other expenses of the Partnership such as property taxes, water/sewer fees, and insurance. The dues are collected monthly and are recommended to be \$110 per month.

Once homes began to be built at Liberty Village and the LVCA was formed, the LLP was verbally closed to new partners. However, financial investments in the LLP are welcomed at anytime from partners and nonpartners alike. All investments are expected to be repaid at the completion of Liberty

Village. Since the final completion date is unknown, these investments need to be seen as long-term investments. The LLP expects to dissolve once the development of Liberty Village is completed. At that time, the ownership of the common land and the common house will be transferred to the LVCA.

### **Liberty Village Community Association:**

The Liberty Village Community Association (LVCA) was formed in 1999 when the first residents moved into the community. Anyone owning a lot at Liberty Village is a member of the LVCA. Currently the membership includes 18 households. The present dues for the LVCA are \$90 a month. An annual LVCA budget for the community is approved every fall to allocate for the needed services. These services include but are not limited to: maintenance of the grounds, purchase and maintenance of equipment, trash removal, social events, rental of community room, electricity, liability insurance, and marketing.

### **The White Notebook:**

A white notebook has been compiled which contains the important documents of Liberty Village. These documents include: The LLP Partnership Agreement, LVCA Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and CC&Rs as well as many of the proposals passed over the years. This notebook is given to all new LVCA members and is encouraged to be read by them.