



**Older Women's Network (OWN)
OWN Housing Committee
December 2010**

Whole Village: Tour of an Intentional Community

The OWN Housing Committee gathers information about models of affordable, supportive housing. Following the presentation on SuitePeas (*Contact, Winter 2010*), Whole Village was the next model we visited to learn first-hand about an intentional community, (sometimes referred to as co housing).

As the name implies, intentional communities are custom designed by the people who choose to live together. Consequently living modes vary widely. Usually, private living quarters are combined with common spaces for dining together, and recreation areas are provided for joint activities. Laundry and yard equipment is often shared. Together members determine how costs will be assessed and the rules they will live by.

Examples of Intentional community life are rare in Ontario but Whole Village, just outside the Town of Caledon welcomed us. Its members describe it as “an eco-village and biodynamic farm” and its vision is to “create a community with a commitment to sustainability and land stewardship that provides a place to farm and live in harmony with the natural habitat.”

We entered a large, handsome low-rise building with 11 units ranging from bachelor to 2 bedroom apartments, all with views of the pastoral setting. Many attractive common spaces are included. The building includes ecologically sustainable heating, cooling and waste systems. Situated on a 190-acre farm managed by a young couple hired by the collective, there are some animals - but the community is centered around a market garden that provides produce for themselves as well as customers in the surrounding community. Heritage seeds are preserved and all are encouraged to share the farm work to limit the carbon footprint.

Creating Whole Village was difficult. Legally it is described as a co-operative, and rigid building codes interfered with their original designs. Most of the units do not have full kitchens because of these restrictions. However, most of the cooking is done in the common kitchen, so the limited kitchenettes have not posed much of a problem.

Living collectively is not without its challenges. Members who range from singles to couples and families have dealt with differences and, on occasion, turned to professional mediation services. When asked for an example of a prickly problem, our host said that there are vegetarians among their members and differences arose over the slaughter and sale of farm animals. They agreed in the end that animals would be raised and killed for personal use but not sold to the clientele.

This example of collective living is very interesting and attractive, bearing in mind the adjustments required to move to a rural setting. Surprisingly, Whole Village was relatively expensive compared to other intentional communities with fewer amenities. There is a Bed and Breakfast unit available for anyone interested in visiting this unique community.

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