

# Starting and Sustaining Intentional Communities

## *A Workshop at the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center*

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~ OUTLINES FOR MAIN PRESENTATIONS ~

### **I. Sowing Circle / OAEC Story (Adam):**

- A brief history of our project
- The OAEC/Sowing Circle model (See Handout #1: "Sowing Circle-OAEC Model")
- ~~Circles of decision-making~~

### **II. Sustainable Communities (Adam):**

- *Brainstorm – What does it mean to be "sustainable" ?*
- See Handout #2: "Rules for a Sustainable Community"
- Is sustainability a goal?
- Exploring the fundamentals of sustainability in family, community and society

### **III. Getting Started (Dave):**

- Why live in an "intentional community"?
  - *Brainstorm – "What do we see as the advantages of living in intentional community?"*
  - *Brainstorm – "What are our apprehensions about living in intentional community?"*
  - See Handout #3: "Dispelling Myths About Sustainable Communities" (from Diana Christian)
- Ask yourselves: Who is the "We"?
- Ask yourselves: What are our primary values & goals?
- Ask yourselves: What are the questions we have to deal with first? Some of them:
  - How will we make decisions? By vote? Consensus? Who has say over what decisions?

- What kind of community? (land based? urban? co-housing? egalitarian?...)
- Where do we want this to be?
- With whom do we form this community?
  - How do we bring in new "members" - what defines what level of participation?
- What can we afford/finance?
- When can we do it? What is our timeline? How flexible are we on the timeline?
- What are our legal and organizational structures for holding property, getting load, operating business, making decisions?
- What are our decision making processes?
- What are our Bottom Lines? – *Do a "spectrogram"*
- Developing a work agenda, a time line, and a research agenda
- Balance meeting *and* Doing; *Vision and Practice*

#### **IV. Finding Like Minded People With Whom to Form Community (Dave):**

- Have clear, written project goals and parameters for people interested in joining you
- Have a clear, written process that defines how people interested in joining the group engage with you, including:
  - How does someone get more information about your project?
  - When is it appropriate for someone to come to one of your meetings?
  - When does someone begin to have decision making rights in the group?
  - Are there "tiers" of involvement? When is someone "in" the group?
- **See Handout #4: "Sample: Process for Inviting People to Consider Joining the Land Project"**
- **See Handout #5: "Sample: A letter to friends soliciting new partners"**
- When is the right time to look for new members of your group?
- Who are you looking for?
  - Brainstorm and prioritize the qualities you are looking for in new "members"
  - **See Handout #6: "Who Does Well in Community? (from Diana Christian)**
  - What about diversity in our community?
- *Brainstorm – Where to find people who might be interested in our project?*
- **Note: Intentional Communities Magazine, the IC Directory and [www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org)**

## V. Co-Housing (presentation by Tina Poles):

## VI. Organizational Structures, Decision Making & Group Process (Adam):

- Democratic Decision Making, *define*
  - *Brainstorm – Core Values*
  - Modes of Decision Making: Voting? Consensus?
  - See Handout #7: “Consensus Decision Making Process”
- Power and Authority in Decision Making Processes
  - Understanding power and authority; rights and responsibility; privilege
  - “Empowerment” vs. “Power-over” (See Handout #8: “Manifest power in groups”)
  - “Authority = Privilege” vs. “Authority = Responsibility”
  - Where does the real power lie?
- Managing Decisions
  - Organizing and prioritizing your decisions before making them
  - Using brainstorm s to classify decisions to be made
  - Asking, “what is the question?” “what is at issue?”; “what needs to be decided?”
  - Categorizing decisions using criteria (time, resources, urgency, etc...)
  - Create proper “containers” for your decisions (diagram)
- Structuring meetings
  - Meetings for different circles of decision making (S.C / OAEC example)
  - Types of Meetings: “general”; committee, board, advisory, steering...
  - Customizing your meetings to fit the decisions you need to make (space, time, activities, etc...)
  - Purpose of Meetings: informational, decision making, planning, evaluation, etc (Sowing Circle community examples)
- Meeting Agendas
  - Agendas and methods of agenda management
  - How do items get on the agenda?
  - Agenda committees
  - Review Some Sample Agendas:
  - A Standard Agenda – (See Handout #9: “A Standard Agenda”)
  - *Other agenda models? Discussion*

- **Effective Meetings**

- *Brainstorm what makes for a good meeting*
- *Brainstorm what makes for a bad meeting*
- Roles at a Meeting
- Facilitator (s)
- Minute / Note Taker
- Host (s)
- Time Keeper
- Scribe (s)
- Vibes Watcher
- Other?

- **Meeting preparation and follow-up**

- *Brainstorm a checklist for meeting preparation*
- Managing Decisions Over Time; Continuity and Documentation
- Importance of accuracy, transparency and historical continuity
- Keeping notes
- Keeping decision logs
- "Who will do what by when?"; Accountability

- **Effective Group Facilitation and conduct in meetings**

- *Brainstorm a what good facilitation looks like*
- *Brainstorm what bad facilitation look like*
- Define "facilitator" / Role of facilitator
- Tips and Tools for Effective Facilitation (See Handout #10: "Effective Group Facilitation")
- Being aware of power & privilege in groups
- ~~Managing problematic personal and group behavior in groups~~
- 10,45 • Conduct guidelines for facilitators and participants

Sheet

- 45 • **OAEC/Sowing Circle organizational structures**

- Different 'circles' of decision making within a community, ex: OAEC/Sowing Circle
- 15 • The land owning group (Sowing Circle)
- Non-owning community members (new spouses or "partners")
- Apprentices / Interns

- Other “stakeholders” (See Handout #11: “OAEC Sample Intern Contract”)
- 15 • Clear Agreements (See Handout #12: “Sowing Circle Partnership Agreement Table of Contents”)
- 15 • Jobs, chores, cooking and cleaning (See Handouts #13 - #15: “Cook/Clean/Shop Schedule”, “Community Chore Rotation” and “Work Spheres”)

## **VII. Community Visioning (Adam):**

- What is a community vision and why is it important?
- Possible components of a community vision:
  - What are your guiding concepts, values, or principles?
  - What are your bottom-lines and fundamental agreements?
  - What are your social and political objectives if any?
- See Handout #16: “Sowing Circle Vision Statement”
  - Non-speculation land stewardship model
  - Support for an educational center (OAEC)
  - Non-dogmatic (religion, politics, food, lifestyle)
  - Singles and each person in a couple are treated the same
  - Shared contributions of money and labor, shared equity, shared decision making
  - Share resources: less impact, wealth in 'more than sum of parts'
  - Collective organization /consensus process
  - Progressive political and social objectives
- See Handout #16a: “Sample Vision Statements”

## **VIII. Finding Land or Property to Buy or Lease (Dave):**

- What kind of property are you specifically looking for?
  - Get as specific as you can
  - List your parameters: where, size, price, buildings, farmland, trees, water, remoteness, close to what, zoning, etc,
  - Developed or Undeveloped Land? Nice or Fixer-upper Building(s)?
  - Refer to your "bottom lines"
- See Handout #17: “Where Should We Establish Our Intentional Community?”
  - Brainstorm a “human services” version”

- Major zoning considerations for land use potential:
  - Zoning categories; county or city General Plan
  - Use Permits; Variances
  - Certificates of Compliance; Lot Line Adjustments
  - Conservation & Agricultural Easements
  - Williamson Act easement
  - "Right to Farm" and other local ordinances
  - Neighbors
- Make the county / city a land use offer that achieves your and their goals
- "Do we need to *buy* land right now?" What about leasing?
  - Lease options
    - Federal & state land leases
    - Urban public land (for farming) through public works, etc
    - "Farm Link" -- <http://www.californiafarmlink.org/>
  - Care-take part or all of someone else's land (seek out "Caretakers Gazette" -- <http://www.angelfire.com/wa/caretaker/>)
- Mailing to realtors (county board of realtors; state assn. of realtors); be specific! (See **Handout #18: "Sample Letter to Realtor & Sample Address Labels"**)
- Auctions (ask county tax assessor or tax collector and ask to be on tax auction list); check web sites (ie: search for "real estate" along with "auction")
- Approach old farms, old retreat centers and schools, & large properties
- Contact distant owners (use tax rolls)
- *Brainstorm - Advertising: posters, local journals*
- *Brainstorm - Who could help us?*

## **IX. Financing and Buying Property (Dave):**

- Much depends on who is actually buying the land (eg: what is your legal structure for purchasing the land?)
- Are you buying land for speculation or for life?
  - If when a member leaves you expect to pay them their share of the appraised value of the project (the "speculation" model), then consider the investment value of the property (eg: How is land value changing over time in area under consideration?)

- If you are not expecting to pay-out the appraised value, but just an adjusted amount based on what departing members have put in, then a low appraising area may be an advantage.
- How can you finance the purchase of a property?
  - How much cash do you have?
  - How much do you need to finance the development of your project?
  - Planning on foundation grants? – don't get your hopes up...
- If you finance by mortgage(s) – who will give you a loan?
  - Owner financed?
  - Banks?
  - Friends & family; our extended community?
  - Investors?
- Other possible help in financing the purchase (or in lowering the price):
  - Agricultural and Conservation Easements – Find land with valuable open space, critical habitat or habitat corridor, or agriculture land that could give you possibility of doing an easement in exchange for cash
  - Possible help with development form Fish & Wildlife Dept.; Soil and Water Conservation Districts, etc
- The importance of planning, clear agreements and documentation
  - Develop a “business plan” for financing your project
    - include money to get up and running; to do necessary developments
    - include reserve for the unexpected....
  - Develop clear agreements to among each other and with seller/banks/etc
  - Importance of process to include all your members
- **See Handout #19: “Sowing Circle Summary Financial Model”**
- **See Handout #20: “Sowing Circle / OAEC Financial Schematic”** (*see binder sleeve*)
- **See Handout #21: “Sowing Circle Operations and Development Budget”**
  - Budgeting for the long haul: accounting; spending (authority & accountability)
- **See Handout #22: “OAEC Maintenance Budget”**
- **See Handout #23: “OAEC Budget”**

## **X. Buying-in, Buying-out and Equity Issues in Community (Dave):**

- What does a departing member get when s/he leaves?
  - What's your philosophy around speculation - or not?: Egalitarian?; Full share of appraised value?; Adjusted for labor, risk, time or other considerations? "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs"?, etc...
  - Money vs. Labor (Physical, Intellectual, Support)
  - Profit from the "investment" (speculation)?
  - What about appreciation and depreciation of value?
  - What about money vs. labor; "Founders risk" and other considerations?
  - Timeline for repayment of a departing member
- See Handout #24: "Ideas for Addressing the Issue of Buying-in and Buying-Out of a Community"
- See Handout #25: "Addressing the Issue of a Equity, in the Event of the Sale of the Property, for a Partner Who Recently Left the Project"

## **XI. Discussion Around Participants Projects and Visions:**

### **XII. Conflict Resolution (Adam):**

- Perspectives on conflict
  - Conflict as teacher/information
  - How can we welcome conflict?
  - Awareness and conflict
- Where do conflicts arise?
  - Structural problems (See Handout #26: "Structural problems that lead to conflict")
  - Communication challenges
  - Changes to status quo or resistance to change
  - Intimate relations
  - Differences of opinion
- How does conflict manifest?
  - Acting out, both active and passive (See Handout #27: "How does Conflict Manifest?")
  - Alienation
  - Numbness , desensitization



- **Relationships and conflict**
  - Building and maintaining relationships in community
  - Creating safe containers for relationship, practicing council
  - Ritual and ceremony
  - Council
- **Have a policy in place (See Handout #28: "Sowing Circle Conflict Resolution Policy")**

### **XIII. Legal Structures for Intentional Community (Dave):**

#### **A. The question you seek to answer is: what legal structure will be best:**

- ...for your intentional community
- ...for holding real property (land and or buildings)
- ...for conducting business as part of an intentional community

#### **B. Considerations in comparing the legal forms for holding land:**

- **See Handout #29: "Questions to ask ourselves that can inform which legal structure we use for holding land and/or organizing our intentional community"**
- Liability issues
- Taxation issues
- Non-profit?, for-profit?, or both?
- How easily will each legal form allow changes in members or in distribution of profits and losses, and of decision making
- How much of a hassle is setting up and maintaining each legal entity?
- What will be more or less attractive to investors?
- How many "owners" do you want?
- Who is putting up the money? How to you protect their investment?
- Collective ownership of all the property, or individuals owning homes and/or land on commonly held property
- What happens when someone wants "out"?

#### **C. Comparing Options for Holding Land in Common or Privately:**

- **See Handout #30: "Agenda for Presentation on Legal Structures"**
- **See Handout #31: "Outline of Legal Structures Presentation"**
- Sole Proprietorships

- Tenants in Common and Joint Tenants
- Limited Liability Corporations
- Partnerships / S-Corporations
- Cooperatives
- Co-housing (subdivided or not)
- Non- Profits -- (See Handout #32: "Non-Profit Corporations")
- See Handout #33: Article, "Legal Structures for Intentional Communities"

#### D. Making the Financing Work:

- Cottage industries
  - Farming: Subscription Farms & CSA; Herbs; Farmers Markets
  - Value added products
  - Aquaculture, forestry, etc
  - Small businesses
- Non-profit education center
- For-profit education center
- Work off site
- Work on site for job off site (telecommute, telepathic employment...)

#### IX. Planning Next Steps:

- See Handout #34: "Summary of Next Steps"
- See Handout #35: "What Ecovillages and Co-housing Communities Can Learn From Each Other" (Diana Christian)