

# ‘Cohousing offers a radically simple idea’

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September 7, 2018

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Kitty Elton never intended to become a cohousing advocate, but then she never intended to be a teacher either. She began her career as a nuclear medical technologist, but being around radiation didn't seem like the best idea when she wanted to have children. English literature was her other love, a graduate degree led to teaching and the decades passed. (Her doctoral thesis is almost finished!)

Marriage and raising a family had taken her to Fredericton, NB, but when she recently retired, she was clear that she wanted to get back to the coast of British Columbia where she'd spent her young adult life. "I had a vision of a small house with a view of the ocean on Gabriola Island."

Kitty Elton will share her expertise and provide leadership at the workshop, [Is Co-housing Your Next Step?](#) in Toronto, October 20-21.

Then reality set in. The prices were frightening. And though Gabriola had beautiful views, the nearest hospital was a ferry ride away. Maybe not the most sensible location for aging in place.

"So my research led me to cohousing out of necessity. It offered a creative way I could afford to buy waterfront and have a well built home with interesting neighbours. Longing for a solitary retreat in nature, I found my haven within the embrace of community."

As in her earlier life, one thing led to another. She was too late to buy into Harbourside, a condo-style cohousing development in Sooke, BC, but in 2016 she had an opportunity to rent a unit. She fell in love with the community and decided to help build another one. West Wind Harbour, a member-planned 34-unit cohousing development, will open in the Spring of 2020. And along the way, Elton has become proficient in guiding others as they consider cohousing. "I retired and took on a full-time job," she laughs.

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"Cohousing offers a radically simple idea," Elton says. "People flourish when they belong to an active community where relationships are valued and privacy is respected. It turns out that cohousing is a very good fit for those who want to maintain their autonomy and independence as they age."

As she's worked with groups exploring cohousing, Elton often finds assumptions that run counter to her experience. "People have funny ideas about community, as if it's somehow optional," she says. "We're all in community, but some of us have the great gift of choosing the community we'll live with."

“Some people approach community hesitantly. ‘Do I have to be friendly with *everyone?*’ Well, no. You don’t have to like them all, you just have to be a good neighbour.”

The hesitation soon fades with experience, she says. “You can see people relaxing into trust.”

*Number one in a series highlighting the leadership and themes to be explored at [Is Cohousing Your Next Step](#), October 20-21, in Toronto. Read the whole series.*