

## EcovillageNJ: Taking a New Direction

By Victoria Zelin & Jonathan Cloud  
Center for Regenerative Community Solutions

Sunday, September 11, 2016

### Background

Earlier this year Steve Welzer reached out to Katie McCamant, the architect who along with her partner Charles Durrett is mainly responsible for bringing the idea of cohousing to the US from Denmark in the 1980s. Katie had announced, last year, a program to train a series of ecovillage enthusiasts in an effort to foster the development of 500 cohousing communities across the U.S.

After the first program concluded we were referred to Joel Rothschild, an associate as well as a student of McCamant's, who had founded Ravenna Kibbutz, a rental ecovillage in Seattle. Joel represents an "**Ecovillagers Alliance**" of a dozen experts and experienced professionals who have developed a new cooperative model for ecovillage development. After a very exciting small meeting with Joel in Lancaster, PA, in June, we invited him to present the concept to our members in July, and then again in August. The presentations were well received.

### A new cooperative design

The **Ecovillagers Cooperative (EVC)** model represents a major change in the thinking and direction of our group, which previously believed that we needed to have a property in mind in order to attract potential residents. Instead, the **Ecovillagers Alliance** seeks to build an organization, based on economic cooperation, education, and Sociocracy, before encouraging and assisting local groups in selecting enterprises or neighborhoods to develop into ecovillages. It favors urban brownfields revitalization rather than rural, "greenfield" development; and supports local groups in developing multiple revenue sources from businesses integrated with the Ecovillage and larger community. The **EVC** is itself a *Real Estate Investment Cooperative* that plans to develop several eco-communities in the mid-Atlantic region, and to generate returns for its members based on the acquisition and development of properties using this model.



The Core Team has generally reacted favorably toward this new approach. Several of us are already committed to joining the **EVC** (currently scheduled to be established in January), and working with the **Ecovillagers Alliance** to create a strong New Jersey contingent as part of this new cooperative organization.

### How this impacts us

While we've had many interesting meetings, the EcovillageNJ Meetup has not, so far, created an organic community movement that is growing and taking on responsibility for changing the way we all live. The cooperative model, if it succeeds, will help to accomplish this. Each of us will commit a definite amount of funds, time, and effort to the **EVC**, and its role will be to create a roadmap for all of us together, with all of the knowledge and resources of the **Alliance**, to create conscious communities where we want to live. Each member of the **Cooperative** will also become a member of one or more teams, which will study the relevant aspects of the **Cooperative** and plan the development of its various elements. As Steve has put it, in lining up our September 11 meeting:

*The idea will be for the groups to become self-initiating centers of inquiry over the next two months. What aspect of the ecovillage concept most intrigues you? Senior cohousing? Community horticulture? Moving your own neighborhood in an eco-communitarian direction? Or a specific proposition for an urban project in Hudson County, commutable*

*to NYC? After we see where there's a critical mass of interest we'll assign the groups to study and brainstorm together toward reporting back to our November gathering. [October's meeting is a visit to LEED architect's house.]*

So it's important to distinguish the difference between where we've been, and where we're going. This is not simply a way of finding a property, erecting the physical buildings of a village and then moving into it. EVC believes that it's going to take a willingness for individuals to start playing an active role in creating the kinds of communities we want live in. Specifically, it's going to require that, both individually and collectively: (a) we commit a decent amount of time and, for some of us, money; (b) we educate ourselves, through our own research, and the technical assistance provided from Ecovillagers Alliance, about what has worked and what hasn't worked in creating ecovillage communities, from experiences to-date; and (c) we begin to take on real functional and decision-making roles in the **Cooperative**, as the founding structure and business model that will eventually "incubate" many ecovillages in the Mid-Atlantic. **Ecovillagers Alliance** will be hosting a regional "Founders" conference in the new year, and we are all encouraged to attend.

### **CRCS role**

We at the Center for Regenerative Community Solutions (CRCS) would like to clarify our role with regard to EcoVillageNJ (EVNJ). CRCS is EcoVillageNJ's fiscal sponsor, meaning, CRCS, as a 501(c)(3), has the authority, from the IRS, to provide tax-deductible charitable receipts for contributions to EVNJ. CRCS is responsible and accountable for EVNJ's finances, and in this role, we have some say in EVNJ's plans and activities. CRCS's mission is strongly aligned with EVNJ, as we are committed to supporting communities to be economically, socially and environmentally resilient.

Until such time as EVNJ and the NJ Chapter of EVC develop their own mechanisms of financial control, CRCS will: (a) continue in the role of fiscal sponsor for the New Jersey Chapter of the **Ecovillagers Cooperative (EVC)**, and (b) continue to support the web site and the monthly EVNJ Meetup Potluck/Salons as a clearinghouse for new interested members and potential investors. As soon as **EVC** can manage its own finances, it will do so, and CRCS will no longer need to be the fiscal sponsor for the group.

Jonathan Cloud and Victoria Zelin-Cloud, CRCS cofounders, will participate in both **EVC** and EVNJ *as individuals, like everyone else*. If we volunteer to work on either EVNJ or EVC matters, it will be based on our willingness to volunteer our time, and any processes that EVNJ and EVC use to appoint/elect leaders. A longer version of this document, including details on EVNJ's financial situation (we have approximately \$6000 in our account), will be on the EcoVillageNJ.org website, and posted to EVNJ's Meetup.

We invite you to join us in these efforts!

*Victoria Zelin & Jonathan Cloud*

[vzelin@crsolutions.org](mailto:vzelin@crsolutions.org) | [jcloud@crsolutions.org](mailto:jcloud@crsolutions.org) | 908-507-3150 (V) | 908-581-8418 (J)

*And don't forget that we've scheduled a trip to visit the Ecovillage at Ithaca on Saturday, September 24. We'll arrange carpools for transportation in the morning and plan to have a picnic lunch together before the tour begins at 3. Afterward our group will have a reservation for dinner at the Moosewood Restaurant in downtown Ithaca. The carpools will head back to NJ around 7:00pm. Please let Steve know if you're planning to join us for this annual adventure.*