

Housing Tour Review of Silver Sage Village

July 20, 2016

Compiled by Lorri Park with tour participants – Aziza, Jo C, Tari, and Lorri

The tour, guided by Art Okner, took place on July 20, 2016. Art told us Silver Sage Village came to be thanks to the minds of two architects from California that were exposed to a similar residential model in Denmark 35 years ago. They can take credit for the cohousing communities that have sprung up in this country. They saw Denmark's model as a means to introduce innovation in senior living with the value of "aging in community." Art has lived at the Silver Sage Co-housing Village for eight years.

Wikipedia describes cohousing as:

"... an intentional community of private homes clustered around shared space. Each attached or single family home has traditional amenities, including a private kitchen. Shared spaces typically feature a common house, which may include a large kitchen and dining area, laundry, and recreational spaces."

The morning we met Art in the 5,000 square foot *Common House* there weren't any other residents enjoying the beautiful space with us (but two people walked through). We sat at a huge dining table, seemingly set in the middle of the first floor of the building. A big open-concept space included this dining area, a modern and beautiful kitchen large enough for at least eight cooks and a spacious sitting area/living room. The room is high-ceilinged, full of big windows and looks out on a welcoming patio with several umbrella tables, lovely gardens, paved pathways, attractive garage structures and much green foliage, flowers and trees.

In the lower level of the *Common House* there are some rented spaces for artists (non-residents). *Silver Sage* participates in the Boulder First Fridays art showing events, welcoming the community at large to the *Village* to see the work of resident and non-resident artists. Also in the *Common House* is a crafts room (appearing to be very much utilized!), a media room, laundry room (although half of the residents have their own home laundry) a meditation/TaiChi space and an exercise room. There is also a guest room in the *Common House* that people can offer their family members or friends (\$15 – 45 per night) Art said the community offers groups and classes and non-residents are welcome to participate in them!

Although most of the 24 resident owners at *Silver Sage* are senior adults there is no restriction on age for potential residents. Art described their community as "age-targeted" (i.e., targeted at older adults) but not "age-restrictive." He said that there are some young people living in the community with their older relatives.

Each home is privately purchased and owned, but people that live at *Silver Sage* not only own their home, they are, essentially, co-owners of the entire land footprint (one acre) and its shared structures and amenities. Homes range in size from one to three bedrooms and prices vary accordingly. There is currently a three-bedroom home for sale with the hefty price tag of \$850k. (It's beautiful!) Some of the homes, however, fall into the Boulder Office of Affordable Housing criteria and can, when vacant, be purchased by lower income buyers for \$150k. Most have garages despite the community's values for driving as little as possible. The garages were built shallow to leave room for bicycles. "Most of us still drive, but we often share rides with each other," Art told us. There are elevators for all the upper units. There is also a tool shop.

It was a delight to take a look at Art's home. His 900 square feet unit seemed much more spacious than its dimensions. Again, upon entering, we found ourselves in an open-concept kitchen, dining, living room area. A cute little dog named Pico welcomed us joyfully. The floors were all done in stone tile, the rooms were all light-filled and there was even a small office. The home is heated by solar, hot water baseboards and the window coverings provide a refreshing coolness to the space. The bathroom has two sinks and a large closet. A small porch adjoins the street-side entrance. All residents have access to an enormous storage room (also in the *Common House*), wherein each household is assigned a portion.

We rode up the elevator to the second floor of the *Common House* and were met by a breathtaking view of the *Flatirons*. The outdoor spaces are highly groomed and very clean. The residents hire out for landscape care, snow shoveling and other outdoor maintenance needs. (A *Garden and Grounds Committee* ensure that the property is groomed, safe and attractive.) Residents pay a monthly fee for the care of the property (similar to an HOA Fee). This amount varies depending on how people entered into ownership. Art pays \$450. An example of something these fees might cover is the solar panels that will soon be installed on the roof of the *Common House*.

All decisions made on behalf of the community, its upkeep, its use, its welcome to new residents, its social and civic opportunities... are made by those that live there. They use consensus decision-making. They have frequent meetings to hash out issues and make plans and implement agreements regarding the property and the culture they strive to nourish for their community.

Every resident is required to serve on a subcommittee and thereby contribute equally in the care of the community and the quality of life it strives to offer residents. There are five or six committees ranging from duties on behalf of the land and structures to community enhancement. (Among other things, the latter group plans an annual retreat for the residents.) Art commented, "Our systems work!"

The social life of the community is nurtured by the common values shared by its residents. Art said they have community potluck dinners twice weekly. They also engage with each other in meetings, movie-watching, guest speaker events, artistic sharing and most importantly, in supporting each other to be able to “age in place” for as long as possible.

Art said people rally when one or more residents are sick, recently discharged from a treatment facility or temporarily disabled. They bring meals to each other and contribute help in any way(s) the more frail or at risk person could use some support. The residents are planning a new *Care Team* initiative in which they will dedicate commitment to be able to provide even greater levels of support for people with diminishing levels of functioning as they age. (Tari, one of our group that attended the tour, offered Art an introduction to her background as a gerontologist, and her interest in assisting *Silver Sage* to set up this *Care Team*.) Art said this team will be striving to fulfill the goal of assisting all members of the community to access services and supports relevant to their advancing age requirements and quality of life desires.

Although home vacancies don’t happen very often, people can express interest in moving to *Silver Sage* and be considered when a home is up for sale. There is not actually a waiting list, however. Those wanting to be considered for one of the affordable homes can apply through the City of Boulder. You would have to show your income and assets to qualify. The other homes are sold by private realtors hired by the owners. Potential residents are strongly encouraged to consider they are buying/moving into an entire community and not just a home. Current residents want to feel confident that people understand and will support *Silver Sage’s* values, vision and commitment for community living. Anyone interested in the Village is welcome to come have dinner with the residents and get a nice feel for the community and those that live there.

Those of us on the tour met for lunch afterwards and debriefed our experience in order to compile this report.

All in all, we perceived *Silver Sage Village* as a very attractive model for living and an extremely lovely place to “age in place.” Our host impressed us with his knowledge and passion for what the *Village* stands for as a unique and satisfying senior living experience. Although, all senior living residency options in Boulder County can be very expensive, (except those publicly subsidized for low income seniors) this community seems to offer most everything a resident would need to feel comfortable, safe, engaged, validated and inspired.

Some possible desired extras our group named, but did not judge as inadequate to their overall approval of *Silver Sage* included –

A formalized transportation option (such as a community van and driver) Art said they help each other whenever possible to be familiar with Boulder's available transportation options (such as Via, CareConnect, RTD, etc.) and as stated, share rides often.

A health care and/or senior resources navigator person (Could this be Tari?)

More homes, although the property is only an acre (especially more units for lower income candidates)

Additionally, our group discussed the importance of knowing whether you are the type of person that enjoys group participation activities, and shared governance of property and responsibility for community healthiness. We talked about the varying needs of people for privacy versus inclusion. We remarked on the fact that some people don't realize, nor plan for, how isolating it can be when you no longer have a spouse, are no longer driving, or are left with having most of your friends precede you in leaving the planet. Our host said at the *Village* residents frequently talk among themselves about the changes evident or foreseeable in aging. "We are prepared for aging," he said. Our group of tour participants seemed to agree!

For more information on cohousing search go to www.cohousing.org and find *Silver Sage* at www.silversagevillage.com

