

## Case study

### The Rocky Corner Community

Rocky Corner is a co-housing community on 33 acres in the town of Bethany in Connecticut. Its first members started meeting in 2006 and now they are open to get new associates.

Cohousing communities are places where residents take an active role in designing and governing their neighborhoods, with a conscious commitment to living in community. Spaces are designed to optimize both private life and social connection. Rocky Corner homes have their own kitchen, bathrooms and living areas, but also have full access to open space, courtyards, play areas and a community center.



Cohousing neighborhoods are designed for pedestrians, with cars relegated to the perimeter. This design principle fosters interaction between neighbors, which in turn helps build real community.

Rocky Corner Community intentions:

- To create the first cohousing community in Connecticut
- To live sustainably and affordably
- To know our neighbors, balancing private space and community resources
- To balance urban amenities and rural advantages

Farming and gardening is a significant part of the lives of those who are going to participate in this project. The Rocky Corner buildings are grouped together, so that the homes do not overwhelm the land, but become an integrated part of it. Their intent is to create a farm that will provide a substantial amount of the food the community needs and provide space for private gardens as well.

Their intention is to live sustainably, with a minimum of energy use – to consume less and share more. Here we share a few images of what living in Rocky Corner Co-Housing looks like:



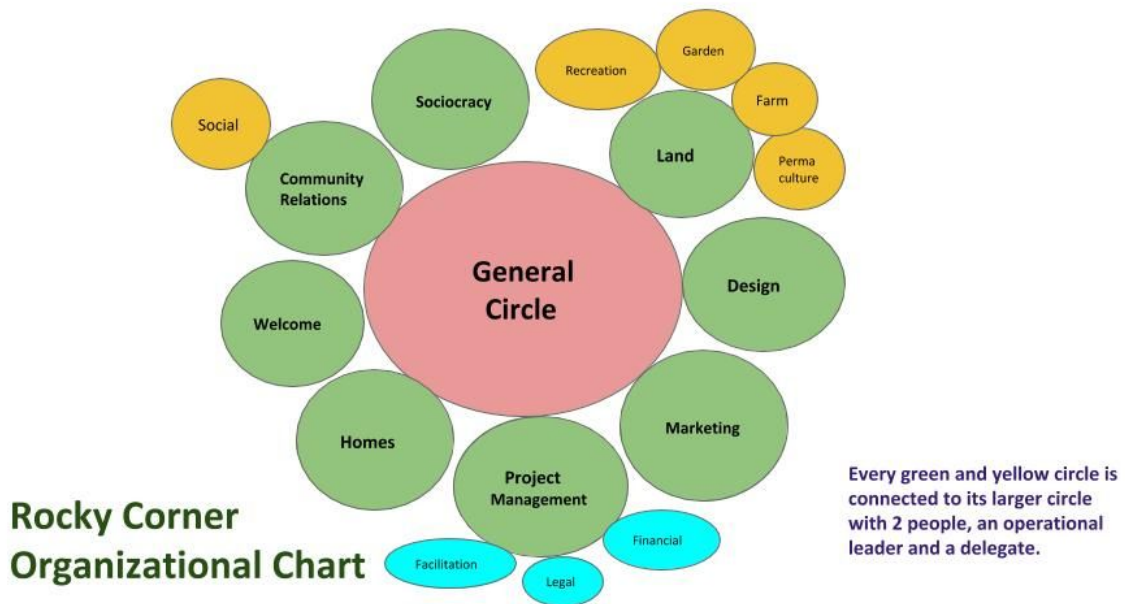
## For people in Rocky Corner sociocracy works because

Here are few statements of why they like sociocracy from real people from Rocky Corner:

- Everybody gets a voice
- Sociocracy makes me feel safe
- We can rely on people to do their part
- The people doing the work are given a clear authority
- Having defined roles empowers people, gives them authority
- The work is organized so tasks are not overlapped and people are not doing double work. It reduces conflict

They use sociocracy on Committees/Circles and have clear guidelines about their work. All circles are connected to other circles and that allows for feedback and cooperation. They follow the steps for proposal forming and decision- making which often leads to better proposals and better decisions. They also run meetings that are organized and fair with agendas and good facilitations. It is worth saying that during the meetings everyone has a turn to speak without being interrupted.

Here we share a chart of how Rocky Corner is organized:



Marie, our interviewee from Rocky Corner, says they are trying to reduce the number of circles. The way things are today the general circle has 16 people in it. They left the reorganization of the circles to a later time because of the amount of work being done to build the community. However, they are thinking and working on a new structure.

And to make things clear, the yellow bubbles are true sub-circles. The blue ones are individual people who are helping the Project Management Circle.

## How was sociocracy implemented in Rocky Corner?

An interesting case occurred for the inhabitants of Rocky Corner to have their first training in sociocracy. Marie, one of the community's pioneers says that to reduce the costs of bringing John Buck, Diana Leafé Christian and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez to the Rocky Corner community, they invited other communities to specialize as well, altogether about 30 people from 5 different communities participated!

A fine example of trust, collaboration and abundance!



Marie also tells that they decided to use sociocracy because their old way of deciding things isn't working anymore. They used to use consensus but were having problems in organizing the work and to create the community. She states that "formal consensus was a difficult process to make decisions, especially with the number of people that Rocky Corner had".

They didn't have much resistance because the entire group notice they needed something else to evolve. Marie says that before using sociocracy she doesn't think they had clear definitions of what different people were doing for the project.

## The adoption process

For the community there was no resistance to adopt the sociocratic system because everyone understood the need for a new form of governance. They used consensus but saw that it was slowing the progress of work. It took several training meetings until all members fully understood the decision-making process and the roles and leadership. They have not had training in NVC but understand that they should to improve the level of conversations and, especially, to solve conflicts.

Marie, our Rocky Corner community interviewed, also remembers that at the beginning of the works the greatest difficulty was found in describing vision, mission and aims for each group. They improved, but early attempts showed little clarity in the definition of vision, mission and aims and as a consequence, tasks that overlapped between groups.

Today the Rocky Corner Community Administration feels more organized by having an agenda that works. They believe that a good facilitator is the key to having confidence in the process and have realized that very few decisions need to be made in the general circle, most decisions are made in smaller circles.

## Some words for the future

Here are some messages that Marie and Brenda would like to pass on to those who plan to start using this process in their intentional communities:

- Follow the process carefully, do not skip steps and also advise to always have posters with steps for decision making - Decision Making Sheet - so that nobody gets hurt
- Never force fast decision-making and out-of-process decisions
- To train, Marie suggests that you begin with simple and small decisions, so the group can train how you feel about the process and learn how to express your feelings and ideas



- Identify who is a good facilitator. This is a role that one needs to practice to do much more is a role of great importance
- It also suggests the existence of a co-facilitator to ensure that steps are followed and avoiding cross-talk. The co-facilitator is a partner of the main facilitator, who supports them during the meetings. They noticed that their facilitator needed a helper, because all of them were inexperienced facilitating meetings and inexperienced with sociocracy. They call that person the co-facilitator and they sit right next to the facilitator. Their job was to keep the facilitator focused on sociocracy and on the job at hand. They might whisper advice in the facilitator's ear or they might say out loud "you forgot to call on Marie when you were asking for quick reactions." The facilitator can also use the co-facilitator to take over portions of the meeting. Sometimes this happens when the facilitator is the one presenting their own proposal to the circle, then they would ask the co-facilitator to take over the consent rounds re: their proposal.
- And, and last but not least, the conversation that everyone learns to hear while the other speaks, Marie even recommends the use of a talking stick.