

# Hibiscus Commons

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*an intentional residential community committed to environmentally  
and economically sustainable living and aging together*

## *Orientation Packet*

## **Hibiscus Commons Mission Statement**

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Hibiscus Commons is an intentional residential community committed to environmentally and economically sustainable living and aging together

## **Hibiscus Commons Statement of Purpose**

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Today's elders require access to affordable housing and support services. This is an increasingly elusive goal for those on fixed incomes as Bay Area housing costs skyrocket and retirement savings plummet. While our community is open to both women and men, the housing crisis is of particular concern for women who comprise the majority of single elders over the age of 55. They are commonly the most vulnerable because many have never owned their own homes and are subject to market rate rents along with instabilities inherent in rental housing and the speculative real estate market. Seniors are organizing throughout the Bay Area to explore innovative solutions to meet their housing needs and influence local policy. We are developing an intentional living community to address these issues. Our housing cooperative will provide secure, stable, affordable, and long-term housing for ourselves and other active elders of the future. We want our cooperative to serve as a prototype for other groups seeking to address the same housing and social issues.

We will offer individual and shared units for members, allowing the benefit of aging in community while creating a familiar home environment with privacy and control over our living situation. We will design our common space to foster sharing of resources, skills, and knowledge amongst ourselves and our neighbors. Living in community will naturally create opportunities for social connections to counter the adverse effects of isolation facing many seniors. We intend to provide many of the benefits of assisted living through mutual support and exchange of services, avoiding the financial burden of typical assisted living facilities. We seek to balance individual needs and preferences with the needs for self-sufficiency and provided services. Our philosophy embraces both idealism and practicality. Environmental sustainability is important to us, thus we will work to create a net-zero energy residence located near public transportation.

## Our Founding Members

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Francine Cavaliere

For 25 years in Brooklyn, New York, I simultaneously owned two coop apartments and lived with roommates. I worked actively on these two Coop Boards as President, Vice President, and Special Projects Manager for building maintenance. In the past 15 years I've enjoyed shared living as a renter in the East Bay and spiritual Ashrams. I am a retired pediatric Occupational Therapist with a specialty in learning readiness for young children with autism. I like funny movies and documentaries, Asian Art and de Young museums, classical music, ballet, yoga, meditation, tall pines and redwoods, biking, hiking, natural vistas, and ecology.



Marcia Edelen

I grew up in West Berkeley and attended Berkeley public schools. Many of my family also live in the Bay Area including my three children and two grandchildren. I have a long history of involvement in local non-profits as an employee and board member including the Berkeley Consumers Co-op and West Berkeley Fund for Community Progress. I currently serve on the board of directors for the Bay Area Community Land Trust. I work part-time for a non-profit, social services agency in downtown Berkeley. My goal is to reside in my hometown as a member of a new cooperative housing venture.



Mary McDonald

I'm interested in cooperative living to ensure that I can retire comfortably in community. I regularly volunteered at my children's schools and served on the steering committee for United in Action, the community organization that developed the 2020 Vision for Berkeley schools. Now I volunteer for Ashby Village, an organization for helping seniors live independently, and at several entertainment venues. I am an avid dragon boater, participate in local and international races, and serve on our boating club's non-profit's board of directors as the outreach director.



Barb Reusch

For many years I have been involved in cooperative projects such as households, a women's newspaper, child care coops, a grocery, and a vegetarian restaurant. The latter, a commitment of 10 years, launched me into 45 years as a vegetarian. Born and raised in Minnesota, oldest of nine, I learned to live cooperatively early. I am a single mom to a talented young woman who teaches pilates. Since 2012, I have been working to organize a group that would evolve into a community, invest in property together, and create a cooperative living space in order to secure our futures. This has resulted in the formation of Hibiscus Commons.

## History of Hibiscus Commons Formation and Agreements Made

Hibiscus Commons was born in the spring of 2014 at a meeting of TTN-Home, an organization that addresses housing options for women over 50. Both Barb Reusch and Mary McDonald attended and shared an interest in starting a cooperative housing community for their retirement years. They found they had complimentary skills to offer, and agreed to work together to make their vision a reality. We started monthly meetings with others interested in forming a housing cooperative in June 2014, and have met regularly since that time. Our early meetings focused on getting to know each other and our later meetings have focused on defining our goals and aspirations, exploring different ownership models, and taking concrete steps toward creating our community. Our group has been open to anybody who expressed an interest in being part of the housing cooperative. In the summer of 2015 we initiated a process for welcoming new members into our group more formally to make for a smoother transition into the group.

According to our common vision, our community will include:

- individual living units with a private kitchen and bathroom (though members can share a unit, we are not looking for a house to share as roommates)
- a common space including kitchen facilities for shared meals and activities
- an organic garden
- accessibility features for the disabled and elderly (grab bars, wide entrances, ramps ... )
- space for a live-in aide, if feasible

Pets will be welcomed. However, dogs must be less than 25 pounds and leashed in open common spaces. No pets will be allowed in indoor common spaces. Pet owners must ensure that their pets do not make excessive noise. Our members are both vegetarian and omnivores, and the vegetarians would appreciate it if outdoor cooking facilities were located so that they would not get odors from barbeques and other meat cooking activities. Our community will be tobacco-smoke free. In addition, we seek to be a net-zero energy and water-efficient community that is located close to public transportation. We have not decided on the specific city we would like to live in, but want to be in the East Bay (Berkeley, Oakland, Emeryville, Albany, El Cerrito, Richmond). We welcome both female and male members as well as single people and couples. One member of each household must be at least 55 years old.

Prior to property purchase, full members pay dues of \$10 per month and aspiring members pay dues of \$5 per month. The funds are used to pay expenses such as fees for legal advice and web hosting fees. All major expenditures must be pre-approved by the membership. Group decisions are made by consensus in accordance with the approved Hibiscus Commons Meeting Guidelines. At the time of purchase, the group will make decisions regarding financial commitments for the purchase and operation of the property

In August 2015, Hibiscus Commons became a committee of the Bay Area Community Land Trust and we are working with Executive Director Rick Lewis to see this project to fruition. This allows us to operate under the non-profit status of the BACLTL and focus on the tasks of finding our property and creating our intentional community. Rick also provides advisory consultation to Hibiscus Commons, as needed.

We continue to meet regularly, and are working towards defining the type of property we would like to find and which ownership model (i.e. resident-owned non-profit, resident-managed non-profit, or limited equity housing cooperative) makes the most sense for our members and for ensuring permanently affordable housing. Once this is decided, we will seek public and private funding to seed this important elder housing project.

Hibiscus Commons has grappled with a number of issues concerning lifestyles and habits that have caused considerable consternation in newly-forming and existing communities such as ours. We recognize that members' needs and desires may conflict, can change over time, and cannot always be anticipated. Our intention is to resolve conflicts in as equitable a manner as possible, making use of outside resources, if necessary.

January 12, 2017

## Hibiscus Commons Meeting Guidelines

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Meetings are informal and conducted with a spirit of respect and friendship. The following ground rules apply to all those attending our meetings.

1. Please be on time.
2. Please let the facilitator know in advance if you are unable to attend a meeting.
3. Respect the facilitator.
4. Treat each other with respect.
5. Rules of Discussion
  - a. Please raise your hand to speak.
  - b. The facilitator will keep a list of who speaks next from the order of hands raised
  - c. Please raise your hand only briefly while others are talking so as not to interrupt them with your desire to speak
  - d. Comments must be directed at the group. If a comment relates directly to the previous comment, a response is appropriate. However, do not engage in extensive individual back and forth as this will prevent others from participating. The facilitator will have discretion of when to move on from individual back and forth.
  - e. Avoid accusatory language: (Say "I feel ...", rather than "You do ...")
  - f. Think before speaking: "Does this need to be said?"; "Is there a more positive way of saying it?"; Perhaps it has already been said, and I don't need to restate or elaborate on the point; Maybe I can just say "I agree" with what so-and-so said and leave it at that.
  - g. Limit the time of your comments so other people have time to respond or add their own comments.
  - h. Allow those who have not spoken on an item to speak before you speak a second time.
  - i. When you are speaking, remember to speak for yourself and not to assume what other people think or want. This way, everyone can speak for themselves.
6. Facilitator should make sure that all members have had a chance to speak before members speak a second time on an issue.
7. Facilitator has permission to interpret the rules, the ability to monitor and the authority to intervene when the rules are not being followed.
8. Any member who feels these rules are not being complied with has the right to bring this up to the facilitator and to raise an objection. Facilitator can be overruled by a simple majority of members present.
9. The group will make decisions by consensus. When making a decision, group members may support a decision or state reservations, stand asides, and blocks. The Secretary will record the position of each member along with the names of the member. If consensus cannot be reached at the meeting where a topic is discussed, the topic will be moved to a future meeting for further discussion.
10. The facilitator will summarize action items, due dates, and who is responsible for each action at the end of the meeting.

## Process for Becoming a Member of Hibiscus Commons

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Hibiscus Commons is in the process of finding property to purchase for our cooperative housing community. We are making important planning decisions that affect the vision for our community and type of property we will ultimately purchase. To join Hibiscus Commons during this pre-purchase period, you become an aspiring member for the first six months and you must:

- attend an orientation meeting facilitated by a full member
- agree in writing to our statement of purpose and group process
- make a financial commitment to pay dues and to contribute towards our pre-purchase expenses such as legal fees and web hosting fees

Dues for aspiring members are \$5 per month. Dues increase to \$10 per month when you become a full member, though additional contributions from full members may be required for major expenses that are agreed to by the membership.

Aspiring members can discuss agenda items at all meetings. However, final decisions are determined by full members. To become a full member, you must participate in 80% of business meetings during your first six months. We will attempt to provide remote access via telephone or video conferencing for aspiring and full members who cannot attend a meeting in person. At the end of the six month period, full members will take a poll regarding your acceptance as a full member. This poll will be taken at a meeting where you are not present, and you will become a full member if the membership reaches consensus on your acceptance.

Occasionally we hold social events for the group and would enjoy it if you can join us so we can get to know each other better!

## **Aspiring Member Expectations and Agreements**

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As an aspiring member of Hibiscus Commons, I understand and agree to the following:

- \_\_\_ I have read the Hibiscus Commons Mission Statement and Statement of Purpose and agree to uphold both.
- \_\_\_ I agree to abide by the agreements previously made by Hibiscus Commons, summarized in the History of Hibiscus Commons and Agreements Made.
- \_\_\_ I agree to abide by the Hibiscus Commons Meeting Guidelines.
- \_\_\_ I agree to pay dues of \$5 per month during my tenure as an aspiring member.
- \_\_\_ I understand that I will be an aspiring member for the first six months. After six months, the full membership will take a poll and must reach consensus for me to become a full member. I agree to pay dues of \$10 per month once I attain full membership.
- \_\_\_ I agree to work collaboratively with the membership to further the goals of Hibiscus Commons, and freely offer my suggestions and ideas in a spirit of respect and friendship.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_