

[Millworks Cohousing finishing up eco-friendly homes](#)



Millworks Cohousing is building eight homes on a 1.77-acre lot in Happy Valley. The project is scheduled to be complete in August. Image courtest of Aiki Homes

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After two years of planning and permitting, the [Millworks Cohousing](#) project in the Happy Valley Neighborhood is in the final stages of construction. When the residents move in — they are shooting for August — they will be moving into one of the most environmentally friendly single family housing developments in Bellingham.

It's hard to put a single label on what is special about the cohousing project, though.

“I label it as smart growth, low-impact development and green building,” said Rose Lathrop, project coordinator for [Aiki Homes](#), the company that designed the project and is overseeing construction.

To start with, Millworks is adding eight single family homes to a 1.77-acre lot that previously had just one house at 2600 Mill Ave., near Happy Valley Elementary School. The zoning allowed for 10 homes, but the group felt that eight provided the best site design and view corridors.

In terms of low-impact development, all of the stormwater is channeled into on-site rain gardens and half an acre of land has been set aside for an existing wetland with a buffer zone around it. Also, parking is clustered close to the street rather than having individual driveways, meaning more of the lot can be devoted to building area or green space.

The house that came with the property is being turned into a common house that will have a commercial-sized washer and dryer, an electric car hookup and a garage with plenty of storage. This extra space is key to keeping a small footprint for all the other homes, which range from 1,000 square feet to 1,700 square feet.

“Having a common house is a huge boon to having smaller houses,” Lathrop said. “You don’t need a dining room that fits 10 people in each house.”

Each Millwork Cohousing home was custom-designed for the family that will be living in it, which gives the development a varied look. Each house is a different shape, and has a different finish, meaning the houses also vary in cost.

Though each house is basically a custom design, they share a lot of common attributes. All the homes will be certified Built Green and Energy Star homes — one family is even going for LEED certification. Each unit uses the following:

- Advanced framing, which places wall studs 24 inches apart rather than 16 inches apart. This reduces material cost and improves the energy efficiency of the home.
- Sustainably built cabinets and trim using local timber.
- A hybrid insulation system with spray-foam polyurethane insulation underneath blown-in blanket insulation.
- Hydronic heat, which heats the house using hot water pipes in the floor.

Each home is also wired and piped for future energy upgrades such as solar panels, solar hot water heaters and whole-house water filtration systems. Each home also has a washer and dryer hookup, though not all of the residents are planning to use them.

“It’s really easy to do these things when you’re building the house. It’s much harder to do it later,” Lathrop said.

When Millworks Cohousing is completed this summer, it will be the second cohousing development in Bellingham, and certainly not the last. Aiki Homes is already working

with new clients to build a 12-unit, senior living cohousing project at 16th Street and Larrabee Avenue and in Fairhaven.

The clients are a father-daughter duo who were inspired by the cohousing model to create an alternative to large senior living facilities. Aiki Homes is planning to hold an informational meeting and design charrette in late April. For more information, visit www.aikihomes.com and click on “Senior cohousing in Fairhaven.”