

Interview with Chris Canfield

Interviewer: Tim Miller

July 20, 1995

Canfield: Okay, well, Cerro Gordo was started in 1970 with a series of discussion groups and our interests were in what we were calling at the time "alternative approaches," and the idea very quickly came out of those groups that what we should do is start a community where we try these different approaches, because they all seemed to belong together. So we were trying to synthesize some approaches that were more in harmony with the earth, with the ecosystem. So our idea of community really goes beyond just the interpersonal, or the social. We think that there really is one community here on Earth that's called the biosphere and that we're all a really big part of that. The three aspects we've addressed or thought about would be community between people, community between people and the ecosystem, and between ourselves and our deeper selves, and we really think those are just three aspects of the same thing. It's another thing to say about Cerro Gordo is that it's not so much of a commune as a larger—an idea for a larger, cooperative community that could grow to become an effective community of communities, in the way the term "community" is often used in communities which believe, like say, usually a smaller group of people—usually some kind of shared living or shared livelihood that will be quite diverse within the community of Cerro Gordo. Our ultimate goal is to do a whole town—a village for 2500 people. That figure was chosen because it's just barely big enough to support all the everyday, basic activity services within the village. So, the idea is to do here, on this almost 1200 acre site, a pedestrian village, one that is symbiotic with the natural environment and includes all of the everyday activities, not just our homes, but also our employment, and as we grow to result in a population with most of the everyday services and activities. One of the reasons simply is it's very difficult to build a no-power community suburb. We're not trying to be exclusionary; we're just trying to reintegrate the basic parts of our lives and build it to human scale and build it in a way that we have a more direct and everyday connection with the natural environment, the natural sources of support for our lives—you know, whether that's growing food, or just the ecosystem here that's supporting us. It's a very intimate relationship, after all. We're breathing in because these trees are breathing out. And we forget that if we spend all of our time in the cities and in an urban environment with strictly human concerns. We forget who we are and what life is about. So these are some of the basic assumptions behind the plan.

Q: So, this sounds like a philosophy that had probably emerged through quite a bit of discussion.

A: Although we've found—this has always been a very wide open thing. There's no set dogma, there's no one guru or philosophy or anything like that. It's always been a very diverse and open group. Those meetings started that process right at the beginning—just wide open, we're interested in people's ideas. But what we have found, of course, are an awful lot of people who have the same worldview, the same beliefs, the same approach, and so it's a self-selecting process, whether it's at our discussion farming level or people who have decided to move here. It's an open, diverse group. So, here within the community then, we see that the homes and livelihood will be privately owned, as far as the community's concerned. That doesn't mean that there won't be communal living situations, co-housing, cooperatives of various kinds at the household or the cluster household level, because we certainly expect that. In fact, there's a lot of that already. Even amongst the first ten homes that are here, forty or so people live in them. And, you know, some people have bought homesites and have built homes and others are just renting, so there's a quite a diversity. Also in age groups: retired people; very young infants, children; kids of all school ages, including college and young adults with their own houses. So, it's nice, because we want a diverse community that we're able to start out that way even with this

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early, pioneering stage. And then, working with the private homes in clusters, which as I say will be organized into by groups, we have an awful lot of cooperatives. And it's in effect the private town government of Cerro Gordo. It's one adult-one vote, it's strictly democratic and it consists of not only the homeowners, but also the permanent residents therein, so the [unintelligible] ... as well. And it provides the basic services, the access to supplies, recycling, and eventually the community facilities—the meeting hall or whatever. And eventually we'll own about a thousand acres here as the natural commons. So in private areas, the homesites, are very small—less than 10% of the sites, even if we do grow to a whole village of 2500. Over 90% of the site would be natural, preserved, or in some cases, some areas [will be garbage areas,?] but primarily a natural preserve. And so there really are two major things here behind Cerro Gordo. One is community and one is ecology, which is, as I said, another way of saying "community" to our way of thinking. But that is where we started. Once we had the basic guiding scale, we spent over two years looking for a site on the coast. We actually corresponded through mass [unintelligible] ...

Q: Is that right?

A: Well, letting them know what they wanted. And eventually found this site and purchased it in '73 and '74. And it is almost 1200 acres and it is almost this entire green space here. We were looking for natural boundaries. We're surrounded by government forest on three sides here. And there's a lake to the south. And we're walking in the foothills of the Cascades and in the forests, but we're only six miles from the interstate, so it's a practical site for doing a community through lots of strong businesses that we've imported materials and exported products. And only a half hour from Eugene, which is nice with the university. But before we bought the property, we went through some very rigorous environmental studies. And we did some two dozen difficult environmental qualifiers—soil, slopes, vegetation, wildlife habitats, etc., etc. And largely following the process designed by—outlined by Ian McCard whose book was *Design of Nature*. And the idea was to find out what's going on with this little ecosystem, at least in its current state—because it's not pristine—from logging, ranching, etc.

Q: Like everything else on the Earth.

A: Right. And to find out two things: what's the natural carrying capacity—how many people could be on the site without seriously degrading the existing ecological dynamic, and secondly, what are the intrinsic land uses or debilities? What is nature trying to say about where to do what? What fits? So, instead of taking good, prime, agricultural land and paving it over with suburbs, we were looking for a site that marginally fit our source. And that's why you see open banners [unintelligible] ... That's what we call them—marginal land—with the state of Oregon, which does have the most rigorous state-wide land use priorities in the country, has come to call non-resource land. So, this is where we'll put the people. It's a good site for that. And we also have very good forest lands and soils, primarily around the ridges of the land. And you can see that. If you look on the hillside there you can see the fir trees. So, the vegetation is telling you a lot that's going on, soils as well. See, that's a forest preserve. We had a wildlife study done and we took McCard a little bit further and said, "Instead of counting each separate factor equally, we are going to instead have big set-asides." So, good forest soil—automatically that's a rainforest, right there. We had the wildlife habitat study enlarged by a wildlife biologist who works at the Nature Conservancy and a very extensive wildlife management plan whose most striking feature is wildlife corridors along the streams. So, no building will be seen there to provide migration corridors up

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and down the valley floor. That was an interesting process, because the original study, if all the factors counted equally, identified a village center site, which if you think of traditional villages, it's paved over with buildings, plazas, corridors. Now it's a wildlife corridor. And it's because all the factors together said, "This is a good place to put people, but if you just look at the wildlife habitat, instead, then this is worth more all by itself than all of the other factors." Then it's a set-aside. So, actually our original base plan had the village center between two streams, and when we went back and re-evaluated these things, the village center had to move.

Q: So, you found another place for that, I presume?

A: Yeah, it migrated northeast 300 yards.

Q: Well.

A: It's going to be in the oak trees adjacent to the big meadow just west of us. Which essentially isn't bad. And so the idea is this traditional village center where most of the shops and services will be, and community activities and so on, in the center of the valley and then within a kilometer diameter [unintelligible]. The homes scattered in clusters and each cluster orients with the village courtyard and most of the homes are facing out and contiguous with this thousand-acre natural commons. So, again the symbiosis of village and nature—trying to implement that right in each household. We have an overall idea of where to put the houses and how many people can live here. So, we will have, for example, limited growth. So, that in a nutshell is the planning process and the ideas of trying to move with nature here. Obviously, we're still learning a lot about that, but a lot of it's already begun. But we do think of Cerro Gordo as a prototype or a demonstration project or experiment and it relates not only to communities and individuals in small groups relating amongst themselves and with the environment, but is meant to be a living laboratory for what could be done in larger communities, even at the regional basis. I mean all of our planning is done for a whole watershed here. It's only—with less than 2000 acres within government forest. But the same principles would apply at any size watershed. You could look at the Willamette Valley and say, you know, "Where do you put the people? How many people can live here? What are the natural dynamics? How do you preserve the wildlife habitat? How can people live with the natural ecosystem instead of mining it and destroying it and paving it over?" as we were just saying. So I should mention that part of what we do at Cerro Gordo is to fulfill our larger mission, as it were, as a demonstration project is being culled to a great extent networking with regards to ecological city development. We've been a co-sponsor of the Eco-City conferences. The first international one was in Berkeley in '90. And I edited that conference with Ford, and since then, there's been some other conferences in Bonn and Australia, and we're co-sponsoring and actively working on the third one in Africa, which will be next January. Eco-Fulfillments Ithaca is the primary sponsor of EcoCity 3, but we're working on that, and we're registering people as in the first one, and in fact, Brady Peaks, who was the manager of [unintelligible]. So, we're active in that arena as well. So, we don't want Cerro Gordo to be an escape for a lucky few. We want to be doing our best to prototype and show how we can live within the natural wilderness. I mean, that's obviously what we have to do worldwide.

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Q: Well, eventually the world's got to come to grips with that, I don't know when it's going to ...

A: And so, our ideas will be holistic prototypes that address these issues and we don't think we have the answers. We have a direction, we have a few answers, maybe, we have a lot of questions, and we expect that as much will be learned by Cerro Gordo's mistakes and shortcomings as from whatever successes we've had. But the fact that we're doing it—and we hope that a lot of other people are doing it—one of the encouragements of networking is it could help in the transitions which are inevitable. Society and worldwide. So, that's part of the larger mission of Cerro Gordo and I guess that's a natural lead-in to how this has all come about, because this has been a small group of people with a very big piece of land who have taken on a very big project. There's no big money behind us.

Q: I was going to ask. How'd you get 1200 acres?

A: Well, the people who are involved are of modest means, there's no grants or government money behind it, we've all been taking care of it ourselves—nickeling and diming it—and barely creeping forward because of financial constraint. And indeed, when we came here, the State Land Use Planning Law had just been enacted and we were warned by the county that we would have to wait for the state mandated county-wide planning and zoning before we would be allowed to do anything of any scale out here, and it would take about a year or two. And that was the same story we heard, "Another year or two," every year thereafter.

Q: Really. That's awful. Gee... .

A: And, it turned out—cause that state law did say that all of the counties and cities had to do these plans and get state approval for them during the '70s, and actually it was within just a few years of when it was enacted in the state. We thought, "Well, we can hold on for a few years, maybe." But it turned out that Lane County had a [unintelligible] ... so it was much, much longer. And it turned out to be the very last county in the whole state that was approved. And when it was approved in '84, it was probably appealed in the courts, so it wasn't until '89 that our approvals became final.

Q: Wow.

A: It took sixteen years for our approval to become final. So, that's the Cerro Gordo story in a nutshell. And in fact, we were one of the lucky few who were approved that quickly because it did go to the state supreme court and most of the Lane County plan was found deficient primarily with projections with farm report slants. Not being state savings. And we were one of the few special, non-resource property designations in the rural counties that were not affected by the court decision, and so the state LCDC or Conservation Development Commission reacknowledged those portions of the plan, including Cerro Gordo's, that were not subject to the court order or repealed in '88 and then they had to do it over again in '89 because they did it wrong in '88. So, it did take sixteen years. And as you might imagine, it's a very diverse group of people—and a very dispersed group of people—not everybody here who've settled up and down the coast and across the country—a few people out of the country—who were putting money in to make this happen, some hoping to live here someday, others just supporting our demonstration project, and being part of an extended community that believed in us. It was very, very difficult for us with these repeated, and seemingly endless and indefinite, delays. So, we've had lots of

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cliffhangers. And actually, at one point, there's been some freefall, because the ranch—or 900 acres of it—was actually foreclosed in the middle '80s, and the redemption period expired. But we got it back.

Q: Whew.

A: So, some real adventures and so the planning delays led to financial problems, and of course, they led to problems within the group and different people with different theories about what to do about the problems, or even what the problems were, and "who was responsible for all this anyway?" So, we've had some very interesting times with the project, because it's always been a participatory thing from the beginning—right from the very beginning with the discussion groups. "What would we like to do? What would we envision?" That's how the plan evolved. And the same is true for buying the land. "Well, who wants to put some money in?" We started formal investment groups, first to buy the ranch and then to hold pieces of the ranch as collateral. You know, and all on a limited dividend basis people had invested in this because we didn't have a lot of money around. But they thought they were investing in something that they either were wanting to live in or were hoping to live in someday, maybe when they retired, or when the kids went off to college, or something like that. Or when they could figure out how to live in the woods of Oregon, as most of us come from cities up and down the west coast. And others, as I said, just to support our demonstration project. So, once the approvals became final, we started building again. We built a few homes that stuck through some loopholes in the late '70s, and starting the late '80s, we started building a few homes here on the homestead and then elsewhere on the property. In all, we have ten homes here already, so we're going to build 750 homes here someday. The whole project will be done by the end of the next millennium. That's right. And what we're in right now is a process I call "Operation Humpty-Dumpty." What it is is taking all the different pieces of the ranch we've created and very quickly when it became clear that we were subject to these indefinite delays in planning, we started taking pieces of the ranch and deeding it to supporters. The idea was that if they could put up the money, at least we could give them something for it, so if it never got approved, or if we just gave up, they would have something and wouldn't have lost their money. And that was very appropriate—it's very cumbersome to raise money—but it was a very appropriate way we thought for that stage of what we knew—or the approvals we had yet to obtain. But that ended up creating two dozen different ownership groups on the ranch in addition to private homesites, which is separate and is owned only by the homesite owner. And so now we're in the process of taking those many, passive landownership investment groups and uniting them into one active community development company. Fortunately, in spite of the long, long delays—I mean some people have had their money in Cerro Gordo for 21 years—and we're talking about 200-some households.

Q: Really? That many?

A: So, you can imagine the average investment is quite modest to say. Somebody whose investment is \$10,000 is an exception. Although inflation has made us talk in different—we have to label dollars—because \$1,000 in 1974 is now \$3,300 in 1995. So, there are several million dollars tied up in the project.

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Q: Really. That much?

A: In current dollars. And 200-some households that will be dispersed in space and time and a very diverse group as far as their personal goals and levels of involvement, interests in Cerro Gordo. And yet, astounding that that group has been developing a stronger and stronger consensus of doing this—this reunification, this CDC, as we call it. And in fact, as we've gone out to this group with successive and detailed proposals and had each different group, or piece of the ranch, voting amongst themselves, because they do have ways of making decisions amongst themselves on proposals, we've gotten a larger and larger basis of support. And the last few rounds, we've had zero negative ballots.

Q: Really?

A: Which is astounding in a group that diverse.

Q: Yeah, it sure is.

A: We sent out the first proposal in the late '80s just after we got the approval and of those who responded, 95% said, "Yes, let's do it," and 5% said, "No, let's not." It's a good support level, but we expected that to erode as we got more and more specific and more and more practical and people saw more and more details that they'd rather do differently. But the opposite has been true, because more and more people have responded and as I said, we haven't even had any negative votes in the last year. So, we're talking about two-thirds to 100% votes in support in these various groups. So, however fuzzy or ill-focused our effort was in recruiting people—and there have been lots of frustrations and there's lots of colorful rumors about Cerro Gordo and all these other problems floating out there amongst the world and in the community as well—nonetheless, whatever it's shortcomings were, the process nonetheless is attractive to people who seem to still care and who seem to be able to work together in spite of all these delays and frustrations and hardships. It looks like we're right on course now after what we've been through. So, we feel really good about that.

Q: And you've actually got a start. I mean ...

A: Yeah. This house was just finished in December and it's actually two houses in one. It looks like a big, fancy house, but it's really two families who've gone together and it's two flats.

Q: So, it's two families plus a bed and breakfast room.

A: Yeah. And the people who built this are in the building trade. It reflects their life and craft.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. It's a beautiful place.

A: So, we feel like we're on track and we're doing [unintelligible] ...

Q: So, is this going forward? I mean, are there people now beginning—are they building their own houses I gather? Is that ...

A: Some people are working on their own, others have had contractors build their homes for them. We do have a group of people who have separate residences from the folks who live here and elsewhere in this cluster who have formed homestead homes and who have done a lot of the building in recent years,

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I think who've been involved in all of the projects, at least partially. So, it's a variety of approaches.
[unintelligible]

Q: Are there any businesses yet, or anything like that?

A: Yeah, we've had a number of businesses out here ...

Q: I guess this is.

A: The bed and breakfast, of course, is one of them. We have a bicycle trailer manufacturing business that was out here for several years, and that was a wonderful first manufacturing business for a non-automobile village.

Q: Sure.

A: And bike trailers for all the kids with the groceries can use their bicycles as well—it makes it preferable.

Q: Yeah. I use one personally.

A: Did you?

Q: Yeah.

A: At this instant in time, they're in back in Cottage Grove awaiting to jump back here because, with the construction of this house and Suzanne's marriage to Charlie, who's a builder, he's moved all of his equipment into a workshop and is setting up a cabinet shop. So, Equinox got bumped by the owners by the shop, and he's waiting for the next shop to be built, which is not yet firmed up. But, Don has been involved since '74, so he owns the Equinox buildings. So, he'll be back soon. He's definitely a community member, but not actually on site at the moment. And there are some people who work at homes as consultants and then a non-profit town forum, which is research and publishing. We also have a rather large operation in regards to forestry. Almost half of the site is forested—it's a perpetual forestry program. We cut less than the annual growth each year and it's a demonstration forest project and it's actually paying for the ranch. In the mid-80s, we refinanced the ranch and beat off the original mortgage and deeded that 900 acres, got a loan from the—well, it was the Land Branch then, now it's Farm and Credit Services—just on the 400-some acres of forest land. And of course, it's a perpetual forestry system that never goes through a clear-cut and as you look across the valley toward the mountainside, that's an active picture. That's active.

Q: Really. Wow.

A: And in effect, we did have timber crews before we started in '85, and 4.2 million board feet of standing timber. It's all real young. You can see it's all re-growth from clear-cuts in decades past. But it's a commercial size. So, we go into one area and we do very light thinning and we come back or whatever, six years later, and you just do that forever. You take one dominant tree out here and one over there—very, very light, high thinning that leads to the growth of the trees in the shade. We started off with 4.2 million board feet. We did the first full cycle in six years, and took out a quarter million board feet a year, average, so your figure is roughly 6% growth. In another timber crew, you'll find half

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of the board feet left. So, we're cutting significantly less than the annual growth. It's nice to have a demonstration project here in the middle of clear-cut country amidst the controversies in the Northwest about ecology versus economy and jobs to show that you can have a forest land of trees and there is no ultimate conflict between economy and ecology. And in fact, anytime anybody says there is, they're just drawing the picture frame too close and not looking for the real. An ecosystem is an economy—that is the economy—what's wealth? What's the source of all this? It's a biosphere, you know, including this oil we burn in a fashion, the air we breathe, and the brains we think of schemes of how to tear it all down. So, we do it as a demonstration project with the income to pay off the loan [unintelligible]. It's very interesting with all the different people coming to us too—loggers, and small woodland owners, along with the Sierra Club and environmentalists.

Q: I was going to ask if any timber company people come. They're the ones who ought to hear this.

A: We haven't really made any in-roads with big timber companies. Of course, they're doing a totally different thing, which we think makes sense as long as their own machinery doesn't cost anything in the long run. It's a real loser, replanting, you know, these plantations. Treating these trees as if they were corn and saying it's still a forest. It's just not true.

Q: Well, in the eastern US, they are literally farming trees.

A: That's not a forest.

Q: It's not a forest. It's real monoculture. It's all new, one species, just acre after acre, planted in rows. It's not a forest.

A: Yeah, and some of the machinery that they use down there is very impressive. Just pick it up.

Q: I'm sure they do. I had a whole list of questions and you've already spoken to them. Or a lot of them actually. But, basically, you're living in families, independently, right?

A: And in some cases, cooperative houses. And you know, we have this non-profit cooperative overall, we have town meetings which are once a month, to deal with the business of the co-op, but it doesn't deal with the everyday living arrangements—the household variety and relationship. That's where we think it's outside the town government and we don't yet have any community facilities. We do have a lodge and community center in the village plan for development on the property. That will be our interim village center. And we expect to get a few dollars if we open up now, and that will add more of a community focus.

Q: Do you have any plans for community meals, things like that? Or specific events?

A: Not regular meals, although some of the clusters will undoubtedly have those. In fact, the very first cluster we designed in '75, which didn't get built because of the planning problems, but helped us a great deal in extrapolating the whole community plan. We've done like a co-housing cluster for the team, with the individual units, but reduced in size, with a common kitchen and common meals, smaller common buildings and so on. And again, there's nature on one side, village courtyard on the other, all that stuff originated there. And all done with people who were going to live there participating in weekly planning sessions with the archetype. And others who for many, many months, designed this.

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And so, we've always thought that that's going to be real common in the clusters at Cerro Gordo as they grow here. There will be some kind of common facilities and in many cases, there will be meals or common bread.

Q: Well, in fact, I've heard the word co-housing applied to this. I think in the New Communities Directory, it's listed as Cerro Gordo Co-housing.

A: I don't think so, but there was a group of people who wanted to build co-housing clusters. And there are still some people interested in that but there's no specific proposal on the table right now. But we figure it's definitely going to happen within the clusters. And of course, Cerro Gordo as a whole is very much like a co-housing approach.

Q: Yeah. It really is.

A: Not so much specifically with regard to the meals but with regards to having private living spaces and then re-asserting the commons.

Q: Yeah, private and public commons in most co-housing I'm familiar with tries to shut [unintelligible]. And similarities seem to ...

A: Yeah, yeah. And I remember calling up Chuck and Katie when we first came here and saying, "This is great," and I started to describe Cerro Gordo, and she said, "We know who you are! We've been following you!" But it was so much fun reading the book and reading that people over in Denmark were going through exactly the same dynamics that we were over here in the woods of Oregon at the same time in the seventies and struggling with it, including not only the internal dynamics, but also with planning authority, with dynamics with the neighbors, and so on. Cause you know, to the neighbors when we first showed up, we were either rich hippies, or big California developers. You know, there's 2500 Californians moving in next to you. So, it was all very interesting, colorful.

Q: Did the controversy over the Rajnishys spill off on you at all? I mean, the land use was a big—I'm not sure how much it was "the issue", but it certainly was a focus of the controversy. I just wondered, did it shut down every alternative land use in the state.

A: There were some things enacted at the state level, and in fact, retroactively and applied that did have some effect on not only communities, but rural land use, in order to form a new community or new town. So, those were strange times, strange dynamics. They were not helpful at all.

Q: That's what I would have guessed. The spinoff on innocent bystanders.

A: Yeah. And it was used by different parties, you know, it was a great fundraiser for Thousand Friends of Oregon, the watchdog group, whose work we largely support, but in that case, they were using the fears of the Rajnish group to get members and investments and recruitment. I don't think it was a healthy process.

Q: Speaking of recruiting and such, what kind of process do you go through on the recruitment of getting people involved? There are over 200 households you said, but ...

A: Over 25 years.

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Q: Right, right. But is there some kind of standard people have to meet where they have to be voted in?

A: Cerro Gordo has always been an open community and process. And we don't actually go out to recruit members or supporters or residents. What we do is we publish information about what we're doing here through our non-profit town forum. That's about it. And we do have programs about what we're doing here at Cerro Gordo and also the eco-city issues—so we put on slide shows about Cerro Gordo and eco-city projects around the world in the same evening, up and down the coast, primarily. And that has, you know, attracted thousands of enquiries and subscribers to our publications and meetings, and then we invite anybody who's interested to come to our summer gatherings and visitors' groups and if people want more information, we have little workshops that will sit down and talk about it, but we really try to put the responsibility on those and make it be that—a self-motivating arrangement. We're definitely in a pioneering stage still and have been for almost 25 years, so we don't want to try to tell anybody or exclude anybody, or to try to talk them into anything. We really think in some ways, not totally deliberately, but I think, just looking at it objectively, we kind of make it difficult for people to be comfortable. The responses to orders aren't very quick and people have to keep trying to get involved in some ways, just because we don't get out there with a whole program and red carpet process. So, self-selecting and self-motivating.

Q: Now, of these 200 plus families, is it already parceled out?

A: No... .

Q: They're going to build houses. Do they know where it is already?

A: No. We do have an overall general plan, but those are mostly colored zones on a map. Where will the village center go? where are the residential zones? where are all the wildlife corridors? and so on. Some of the clusters have begun to be planned on a detailed level. This homestead is an example. So, we have two rows with a dozen homesites. The back row, we don't even know where the homesites are. We just know the number of homesites we'll put in there. So, it's an evolving, participatory planning process. We do have an overall design committee that reviews things for general dynamic performance, and deals with the details as we need to.

Q: Okay, so you do have standards. You can't—once you have a lot, you don't build wherever you want.

A: Right. It's a design theory process, and of course, we're subject to the county, their codes, as well. And ours are more rigorous. We're more concerned about the siting, the cluster, the energy conservation, the effects of solar, materials—and as clusters evolve and start adopting certain guidelines for their clusters,—so this will announce, you know, "Use natural cedar exteriors—metal or tile roofs." And generally these guidelines are pretty general, but even so, as it evolves, it gets more and more specific. But through the evolution of the building here, other areas just remain general common zones. When I say there's 200-some households evolved financially, what I mean is that those who've been supporting investors, and there are about two dozen different groups that own pieces of ranch, not as future building sites for themselves, but as collateral for their investments. As these passive landownership groups are united into one active community development property, they will feed the properties to the CDC and take shares, and we're actually in the process of organizing this, so if you registered as security through us for stakes.

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Q: So, they'll own shares of the whole and then will they also have deeds to their own lots?

A: Well, these are still the supporting investors. And so, which can include residents and people who never intend to become residents, and people who'd like to become residents someday. And so, it's important to think of Cerro Gordo really as three overlapping constituencies. I should have given you this image earlier. One is the cooperative, which includes all the homesite owners and permanent residents who are renters. And that's the residential community. The community of Cerro Gordo. And within that there are the small private homesites which are deeded free and clear to the homesite owners. And then there's the cooperative common lands that are owned by the Cerro Gordo cooperative, non-profit collectors, of which all of these home owners and residents are members. And that's the residential community, and eventually it will include this whole 1200 acres. Then there's the supporting investors—which is 200-some households, including people who are members of the co-op and planning groups, and they're scattered across the country and they own, have as security for their investment, various pieces of the land. There might be a dozen families that own ten acres. There might be three dozen families that own 100 acres. And what they're in the process of doing, that's not for residential purposes—that was just, "We need some more money this year, but we don't want to take money without giving people something," so we deeded them a piece of the ranch. Beat up the purchase mortgage and deeded it to them. And they would sell it on the open market if the whole thing had failed. But since we didn't fail, what we are in the process of doing right now, and all of these groups are supporting it, this huge majority, is they are unifying many investment parcels into one big ownership in this new community development company. It's actually going to be run by a development company, with market managers and registered shares, and they would actually trade their deeds to the company for shares from the company once we're ready register those shares. So, it's a registered organization of share-holders. We hold them for people who are in investment parcel ownerships. So, they're owning most of the undeveloped portions of the ranch. And the community development company is under contract to the co-op to conduct its affairs on a limited difficulty basis. Inflation costs 4%. Strictly within the confines of the general plan, subject to the design committee and to themselves, just like individual home owners are. So, the integrity of the plan is an umbrella over the whole thing. And all the supporters then, will go about the business of getting approval, installing utilities, delivering homesites, and that's how they'll get paid back. Some of them will get paid back by trading in their shares to buy a homesite, if they want to. Others will eventually get cash dollars [unintelligible]. So that's the Community Development Company—the CDC. And it, as I say, overlaps the co-op to a great extent. I think most of the co-op members are also supporting investors, but it's strictly voluntary. You can move to Cerro Gordo and become a co-op member and never go through the CDC route, never be pushed to join that. And we divide it because there really are—it really is two different beasts. The cooperative is home, and it has to be vaguely secure, simple, democratic, town meeting participatory. The CDC is a long-term, technical development business. It involves business risks and future approvals and lots of other technicalities, consulting professionals, things to be managed by an elected group of managers who have some business expertise. It's still democratic, but it will be one share-one vote. So, it's democratic financially after the company. But there still needs to be a representative of democracy with expertise. It's a long-term business venture. It's a different animal. Different dynamics. And that has been, actually, a source of confusion and consternation amongst the membership from time to time. I mean some people. And when people talk about a

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community cooperative, a lot of times they immediately have in mind often unstated assumptions about what that means. And it takes them a while to understand the reality of their involvement here. The simple way we explain it is that Cerro Gordo, the development project, is not a consumerist co-op. We don't have a 100-some families who each put in \$40,000 for their homesite and utilities and go about it as if we were just a big co-housing group hiring our architect and then our builder. It's a venture, because we only have a small percentage of the venture residents involved and then some supporters. So, we're leveraging our money. We're buying a ranch much bigger than we could afford as a consumerist co-op. And we have to organize it as a venture, as a business. Cooperatives—a residence cooperative—is a consumerist venture. From the contract between the CDC and the co-op. The community areas and the utilities and facilities will be developed incrementally and deeded over to the group free and clear. So, the co-op starts off small and grows. And whatever's within it is totally free and clear and there's no debt to worry about and it's strictly for residents and their own secure community.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful. That's a nice set-up, it sounds like.

A: But it does create some confusion, though, when people are getting involved. Well, at least for some people. And it takes a little while to educate people about the planning and the realities of this co-op. And I guess I should mention real briefly the third overlapping circle and that's the non-profit town forum and it does include most of us who are involved in the co-op and the CDC, but again, not required by any means. And of course, there's lots of people out there who are just interested in funding Cerro Gordo's project or maybe have only a passing interest in Cerro Gordo, but get involved in the eco-city networking and the whole sustainability aspect and movement. That's what we're trying to do.

Q: You say you have all ages. Is there any kind of organized child-care or any other age-specific ... ?

A: Not really now, but in the past we've had our own little school. They tend to have it in the facilities.

Q: Is that right?

A: We were doing that in town, but were having the problem of getting a facility that would have resources for school use. And so, as those kids were getting older, we said, "Well, we've tried everything and it's not really working right. We don't really want to build something in town," and at that time we wanted to come back here. And we said, "We'll just shelve this, and build a facility after that can be approved and go back to it." And there are a number of younger kids, and in some cases next generation. My kid's kid is here.

Q: Yeah? Is that right? Yeah?

A: My grandchild is five, now. So, when we do this little lodge and conference center down at the foot of the property there, one of the ideas is that the school can start there.

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: I mean, there should be a school for young kids to go to.

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Q: I don't know what else to ask. I guess I would like to ask the question about other communities in the area. What contacts have you had with them? There are a lot of different models to community building and I just wondered, have you had contact? Again, I was looking in the directory,—I don't know if you know that there's a new communities directory just out in the last couple of months.

A: I haven't actually looked through it. I've seen it sitting on a coffee table. And I've seen it's a lot thicker.

Q: Yeah, it's a big one. There's over 500 groups in it. But I looked around geographically and they list a long-standing group called Apple Tree in Cottage Grove, for example, which as nearly as I can tell, is about five people.

A: Yeah, just a handful, yeah. And at one point, they were actually interested in doing something with Cerro Gordo, but I guess they [unintelligible]. A lot of people in Cottage Grove gravitated to the area with some connection, however tenuous, with Cerro Gordo. They knew somebody who had moved here before to Cerro Gordo, maybe.

Q: So, you've got a larger constituency in the town that's ...

A: Well, that's true and a lot of our folks have—you know, there's all these overlapping circles, like everywhere else. Yeah, a lot of people have moved here with some kind of connections to Cerro Gordo.

Q: So, would you say overall your community relations are pretty positive? I mean, usually when you're doing something different, there's a huge antagonism... .

A: That was certainly true at the very beginning, because people didn't know who we were and we just showed up and with this grandiose plan, and as I mentioned before, you know, either the rich hippies, or the California developers. At one point, there really was a door-to-door petition campaign, and showing up at the Planning Commission, standing room only. So, it was very controversial during our first year in '74. However, a lot of us had moved to the area, even before we were allowed to build anything out there at the site, and there were like 200 of us in a town of 6,000 people. And so people got to know us. And within a couple of years, we were going to Planning Commission hearings about Cerro Gordo, and there wasn't a single person who stood up to make any negative comments about our applications. So, and yet we still find, twenty-plus years later, a few remnants of some of those colorful rumors about the commune up on the hill. Or at that time, even the "communists" moving up onto the hill. And the Rajnishys, you know, there's a rumor going around in the early '80s that the Rajnishys were going to buy Cerro Gordo.

Q: Is that right? Whoa.

A: We had to deny that twice in the local paper. Two different years. And then, given all the delays and financial problems and frustrations that have occurred at Cerro Gordo, and people coming to the area interested in it and finding out that they personally couldn't do what they wanted to do here, or they couldn't afford to build a new house, or none of us were going to get any building permits and we were going to have to wait years and years or decades to do so. You know, a lot of people drifted away from the project, frustrated and have various stories to tell about why that was. So, there's lots of really interesting, eloquent, creative stories out there about Cerro Gordo and even within the community's

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movement, I'm disappointed to say, even some of the people who publish the community's magazine, the directors, have taken it upon themselves to pass some of those things along.

Q: Have they really?

A: Haven't even checked some of those things out. So, that's a bit frustrating, but I guess totally natural and understandable.

Q: I know some of those people a little bit and their scrupulous attitude is that everyone who has something to say gets to say it, and it unfortunately spreads a lot of untruth as well as truth.

A: Yeah, and I think that approach is just fine, but I think if you're going to publish it, you need to take the right step and try to verify things.

Q: Right, right. That's what I would think.

A: And so, you know, and a project like this that seems to be stuck—there's always different theories about what's the reason for that, or what ought to be done about it. Sometimes those things or differences or debates evolve into, you know, power struggles or personality struggles. Who's at the tiller and what direction are we going to go? That's a bit disheartening. I guess one of the nice things I think about Cerro Gordo is that, you know, this is a very strong group. It's strong-willed and people with very definite ideas and people with very strong feelings about things, which is great, but as I say, that leads to interesting times. Sometimes very difficult and exhausting times. But at the same time, I've noticed that the community seems to be able to go through these things rather quickly. It might take a year or two, but when people find out that they can't agree, they often agree to disagree and agree to take whatever step needs to be taken to get along. That feels really good. And I think that's one of the reasons why Cerro Gordo has survived. There were lots of lots of opportunity for it to have failed.

Q: Yeah.

A: And indeed, some of the participants went away assuming and perhaps might even still tell you today that it did fail. There are people who say they "lost their money" at Cerro Gordo. That's a pretty small minority, but stories like that get attention, even if it's a very small percentage of the group that's saying that. But, you know, it's certainly electric, certainly, I mean, my God. [unintelligible]

Q: It remains an asset though ...

A: An asset and we own it. So, there are all these different perceptions. We often think of it as the "elephant and the blind men." It's such a big piece that it's hard to get your arms around it. Different people experience it in different ways.

Q: Sure. I guess you'd know more about that than I would. I haven't heard the negative side, though, except—well, I have heard that there have been disaffected people, but I've kind of, I guess I'd say, followed things at a distance for a long time and it's always seemed to me that it's moving.