

A STRATEGY FOR ECOVILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

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- 1) The first step is to adopt an attitude, a shift of emphasis, from proactive ‘creation’ to receptive ‘manifestation.’ This approach is founded on the perception that the ecovillage *wants* to happen; people want it to happen; Gaia wants it to happen. There is no need to feverishly or strenuously force the development; it will happen of its own accord, in attunement with natural rhythms. The Village Designer is more like a sensitive midwife participating in a magnificent birth than a leader ‘in charge’ and ‘in control.’ This is not a call for negligence or inattention – no, it is by deep knowledge, creativity, perseverance, and disciplined strategic action that the designer *skillfully arranges the conditions conducive to the emergence of the village*. There is a difference.

- 2) The vehicle for the manifestation of the ecovillage will be a nonprofit corporation organized for educational purposes. The specific Mission Statement of the non-profit will be to establish an ecovillage. Initially, the Board of Directors will be composed of just six (the atomic number of carbon, basic building block of life), three women and three men. The Board will be divided into specialties:
 - A) President: an interdisciplinary specialist well-versed in the concept of ecovillage design and development, with exceptional organizational abilities. The President will be fully involved in both the design and implementation of the village as well as in the business of the corporation, which is to provide education in sustainable community design techniques. The President will be responsible for ensuring that the Board is continually re-educated as the design progresses. The President will be responsible for finding grant writers and forging consensus for the initial vision.
 - B) Treasurer: a person adept with figures, comfortable managing the finances and accounting aspects of the corporation, especially in the early stages before a permanent accountant can be hired.
 - C) Lawyer: or at least someone familiar with law, preferably well-versed in the non-profit sector.
 - D) Networker: a person who finds enjoyment in maintaining close communication with other organizations on a similar path, able to continually exchange and share information, and to keep making new connections.
 - E) Public Relations: a person able to nurture respectability for the organization within the local community, and able to work with government officials and the media.

F) Secretary: a person who is interested in keeping records at meetings and compiling a history. Ideally, also fluent in mediation, conflict resolution, and consensus skills.

The initial number of the Board is limited to six to streamline the operation while it is getting established, to ensure efficient use of meeting time, and to encourage primary task delegation in those fields most necessary to get the Project underway. A Vision Statement will already be drawn and agreed upon prior to incorporation so that the 'group of six' can get right to work with the task of establishing the viability of the corporation. The initial vision is quite simple: to create (have manifest) an ecovillage. After the Project is underway, and the village has begun construction, the Board will be increased to twelve members to ensure a wide diversity of input from an increased number of specialists. The board members will receive a stipend for their efforts, or perhaps 'sweat equity' in the eventual village, and the president, who is the only full-time participant, will receive a salary that has been written into a grant proposal.

A non-profit is the best vehicle for establishing an ecovillage. It is capable of receiving tax-deductible gifts, donations, grants, and financial support from a wide array of supporters in a time of growing awareness that the current system has a limited life-span and new methods need to be tried. A non-profit is capable of maintaining a virtuous public face because it is acting in the public interest, without maximizing its own personal financial gain. And, it can adopt spiritual intentions and so rise above petty conflict.

- 3) As the non-profit is organized for educational purposes, the heart of the village will be an educational center. This will be an Ecovillage Design school, based on permaculture principles, and investigating, elaborating, and implementing the many ecological design techniques and philosophies for creating sustainable human settlements. The studies in this school could go quite deep; there is a tremendous amount of thoughtful literature and concepts to explore. Ideally, the school will be accredited so that students can be working towards a degree. There will be equal amounts of academic study and hands-on application, with a fair amount of community service work mixed in – and body work too in the form of sports and exercise. The school will take on the form of an Academy: disciplined, goal-oriented, character building, whole person education designed to produce leaders for the community. The initial goal of the school will be to create a Permaculture Demonstration Site where basic principles can be readily observed by anyone who comes by, set up for public tours. After the demonstration site is established, functioning, and evolving, students coming through the school can begin to contribute detailed designs for the ecovillage as it grows. There will be countless details to attend to so the students can make real contributions to the design process, creating portfolios for themselves along the way. The school also will have an extensive outreach program whereby students can become educators assisting people to move their properties toward

sustainability. The school will be intimately connected to and approved by the Global Ecovillage Network, as part of a network of schools spanning the globe. In this way, students may travel from ecovillage to ecovillage, expanding their understanding, witnessing diverse climate applications, and forming a global community of Village Designers. An immediate benefit for the non-profit, whose mission is to establish an ecovillage, is that students actually pay to contribute labor, to help construct the village. And of course, the students benefit because this kind of education is invaluable. This conceptualization for an Ecovillage Design school could become a world-class model since none yet exist at this quality of intensity. The most important point is that this education center and its accompanying demonstration site is the very heart of the village, the potent inner core, the virile seed from which organically germinates a village.

- 4) Adjacent to and intimately connected with the Ecovillage Design school will be a Healing Center, full of practitioners learning alternative modalities, and including an ashram of sorts: a modest temple, a sanctuary, a place where spiritual work can go hand-in-hand with academic and practical work. Spiritual work in the ashram/temple/sanctuary will consist of meditation, yoga, tai chi, singing, chanting, and prayer. This spiritual aspect, non-denominational of course, is vital to a comprehensive education, integrating mind and body, and integrating both with a higher ideal, a higher purpose. The composite picture, then, is an ecovillage whose heart is an educational center *and* a healing center, joined together, both subsumed under the legal umbrella of a non-profit corporation whose mission it is to create (have manifest) an ecovillage. The educational center could be considered the Yang and the healing center the Yin of an integrated polarity project.
- 5) Once the non-profit becomes established and the Permaculture Demonstration Site is operational, numerous *for-profit* subsidiaries can branch off from the mother corporation and feed profits back into her. In a permaculture scenario, the number of for-profit businesses are almost inexhaustible: market gardens; nurseries; seed saving and sales of heirloom varieties; value-added agricultural processing like cheeses, salsas, and ciders; medicinal herbs; a café; a winery; consultation and design services; a sustainable construction business; flowers and essential oils; basket-making; pottery; spinning and weaving; firewood and woodworking; etc., etc. The point is that once the initial permaculture systems are established, organic growth and diversity will ensure a wide range of marketable products and services, all growing out from the core and all interconnected to and related with one another. This abundance assumes, of course, that those people working in these businesses actually live on site, as residents of the village. With reduced or no rents, no commuting costs, and food freely available, these business entrepreneurs will need to take far less income for themselves. The profits realized from this income, then, can be fed back into the non-profit to continually finance the ongoing ecovillage development, in a continual return to the center. Standard economics could not

accomplish this abundance because it is centrifugal, drawing resources away from the center and into the hands of a few.

- 6) Ecovillage development is best not constructed all at once, as is the practice of standard developers. It is impossible to visualize all the interdependent components and their relationships within the village beforehand – the village is a supra-system far too complex. It is a mistake to think that we can draw up a Master Plan based on scanty observation and incomplete knowledge and then move this Plan forward as if it was the final statement. There will be many rounds of cyclical Master Plan development. How much tension, stress, and frustration are a part of our lives due to the poor planning and design that went into the rapid development of our current cities and towns? Yet we're left to live with these mistakes long after the builders have gone, and retrofitting them is a very slow and energy intensive process. In reference to Christopher Alexander's work *A Timeless Way of Building*, it is better that the development proceed in stages, growing out radially, organically, from a potent central core. Each new addition, then, preserves its holistic synthesis to the whole, its timeless character, and the village belongs to the people who will be living there. This last point cannot be emphasized enough.

