

NUBANUSIT NEIGHBORHOOD AND FARM

Co-housing is a type of residential development that marries private residences with communal spaces to create cooperative neighborhoods founded on sustainable living principles.



Bringing Community Back Home

BY KAREN FINOGLE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SWIFT CORWIN

Some say you can't have the best of both worlds, but Shelley and Robin Hulbert are willing to prove them wrong.

First, the Hulberts lived in downtown Peterborough and enjoyed easy access to friends and neighbors. But they had no land. So they bought a farm a few miles outside of town and began a small dairy operation and apiary. Growing a good portion of their food has been wonderful, Shelley says, but they miss being part of a community. "No one just drops in, because we're off the beaten path," she explains.

That's about to change.

When 114 acres of land went up for sale in 2003, the Hulberts took notice. Located just a mile's walk from downtown Peterborough, the property is a quintessential New England pastoral scene. Sweet pastureland yields to timber stands that envelop surrounding hillsides, while the Nubanusit River chortles by on the property's northern edge. Living in a state where population growth is outpacing the rest of New England, the Hulberts feared what might happen to the land.

"We didn't want it to be developed in a traditional way, nor did we want it to be purchased and have the community at large lose access to the beauty of the woodlands and river," Shelley says.

At about the same time, a friend gave Shelley a book on co-housing, a type of residential



development that marries private residences with communal spaces to create cooperative neighborhoods founded on sustainable living principles. In August 2004, the Hulberts, and some like-minded friends, purchased the land and assembled a dream team of sustainable building experts to meld their two worlds into one.

The 29-unit Nubanusit Neighborhood and Farm is now nearing completion. The mixture of single-family homes, fourplexes, and farmhouse duplexes all share frontage on a pedestrian path that weaves through the neighborhood from a central parking lot. A common house offers shared space for potluck dinners, guest quarters, and community events. Every residence also has a private, outdoor backyard space that overlooks a natural area.

"We wanted to find a way to shape this community using as much previously developed land as possible, and if we couldn't, then we would try to place those portions of the built area outside the high productive agricultural land," architect Sheldon Pennoyer says.

The community was built on only about three and a half of the 114 acres, and, Pennoyer adds, "We were able to keep the 'natural edge' of the project – the edge of tree and meadow lines – and that's a healthy thing in terms of the built environment because it really enhances wildlife and bird habitat."

Much of the pastureland will be used to support the neighborhood's organic farm, which will have a small dairy operation, apiary, chickens for eggs, and a community supported agriculture program.

Consideration for the external environment extends inward as well. All cedar shake homes are built in the New England vernacular with high insulation levels, triple glazed windows, and low flush toilets. Structures are south facing to take advantage of the sun's light and energy, and residents have the option of installing solar devices for hot water generation. A central pellet boiler plant in the common house uses locally produced biomass fuel and heats all residences. An internal metering system is also in place to enable the community to one day live off the grid.

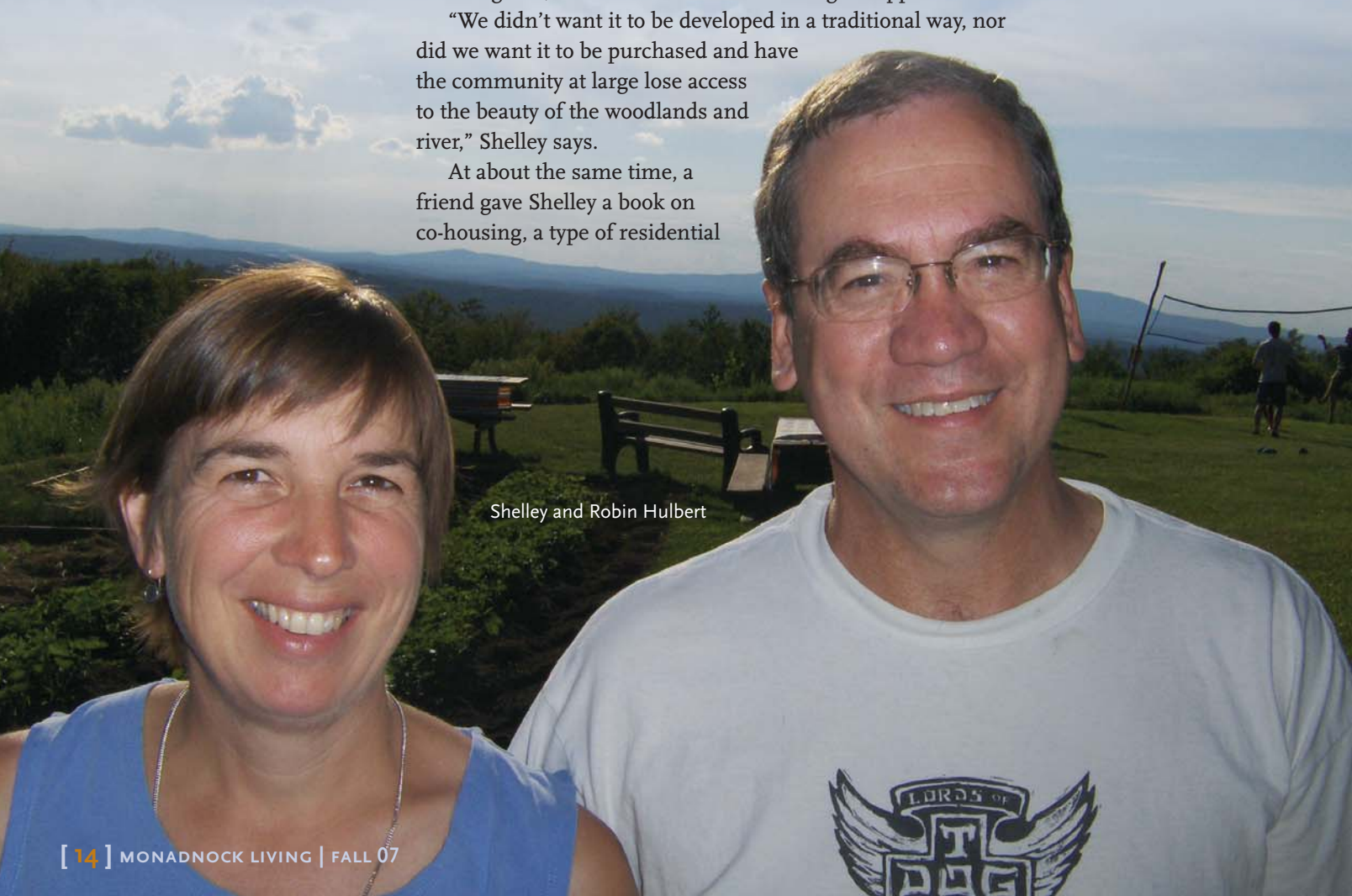
Shelley says Nubanusit Neighborhood is a dream come true. "That we can be an example for how people can reduce their carbon footprint and live lightly on the earth is a wonderful thing as well."

Karen Finogle is a freelance writer and senior editor at AMC Outdoors.

For more information on purchasing a home within Nubanusit Neighborhood and Farm, visit www.peterboroughcohousing.org, send an email inquiry to info@peterboroughcohousing.org or call 603.924.7897.

The web site highlights floor plans for single-family, two and three bedroom duplex units, purchase prices and steps to ensure that you are a "good match" for co-housing.

ILLUSTRATION BY DONGIK LEE



Shelley and Robin Hulbert