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BUILDING AN URBAN KIBBUTZ MOVEMENT IN THE U.S.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 3, 2018, in the north Israel town then known as Nazareth Ilit, I walked into Kibbutz Mishol, and my life was forever changed. What I encountered at Kibbutz Mishol was an apartment building replete with communal spaces, where 150 people live together – 70 adults and 80 of their children – in intentional Jewish community. While identifying as *chilonim* (translated as "secular," though I think "culturally Jewish" is a more apt translation), the kibbutz members live according to the rhythms of Jewish time. Each Friday night or Saturday day, small groups within the kibbutz gather for Shabbat meals. Each year the community comes together for a Passover Seder, writing their own Haggadah to reflect on how they are coming out of slavery as a community that year. When the time comes, they gather for *britot milah* and *b'nei mitzvah*. Their children run freely between the seven floors of the kibbutz building. During one of my visits to the kibbutz, one community member said that one of the best things about living in the kibbutz is not knowing where his children are, and knowing that that is a good thing because they are always with people who care for them, who are looking out for them.

The Kibbutz Mishol community is mission-driven: they are an educator's kibbutz where "education is [their] agriculture," a reference to the rural kibbutzim that built Israel as we know it today. Kibbutz members are bound by a shared mission to give back to their local community through education. They run the local public school, where their children attended alongside the children of the city's lower-income Russian Jews and local Christian Arab populations. They run the local *gan yeledim* – daycare/preschool – as well as a number of afterschool clubhouses that provide a safe haven for at-risk youth. Members regularly tour the country – speaking at schools and youth movement assemblies, teaching about the urban kibbutz movement and what is

possible in communal Jewish living – and they help others who wish to live the same way to build and sustain their own urban kibbutzim. Kibbutz Mishol is more than an apartment building where everyone knows their neighbors – it is a village. A modern reimagining of a way of life that had once been normative for humans across the globe, but that has been lost in an increasingly western world with its emphasis on the nuclear family model.

When I stepped out of Kibbutz Mishol that warm, sunny September day in 2018, I stood in the street, dazed. I did not get on the bus with my fellow rabbinical, cantorial, and Jewish educator classmates. For a moment, I contemplated dropping out of rabbinical school right there and then, calling my husband, telling him to pack up our son and our apartment and head north: we were moving into this kibbutz immediately. But as I stood there, I thought, *No. What I need to do is build this in America. America needs this. Every city in America needs the option of this way of life. This is what I am meant to do with my rabbinate*.

I have spent the past five-and-a-half years visioning and dreaming and researching and learning. Conducting interviews, earning a Master's Degree where this was the focus of my research, completing a yearlong fellowship for rabbinic entrepreneurs. All with one goal in mind: taking what Israel's urban kibbutz movement has done, and translating it into a model that will work in the North American Jewish community.

It has been a long road and one comprised almost entirely of hurdles. How to translate a socialist model into a capitalist society? How to build a communal living project in a nuclear family society? Where to build? How to identify the community? What comes first – the community? Even if we have nowhere to live together? Or the building, even if we have no community to fill it? Where does one get the capital for such an endeavor? Or if it's a rental model, how can one find an empty building in a country with an available housing crisis, let

alone convert it to the needs of an integrated community? How to make the space affordable so that it can be truly diverse and serve a representative group of American Jews? Where to start? How to get from point A to point B, let alone prove concept with a scalable model so that we can build not only a single urban kibbutz, but a movement of urban kibbutzim across America? Who are my partners in this work? For no one wants to build community alone.

In the chapters that follow I have included a Literature Review that serves as a study of why an urban kibbutz movement is needed and what the benefits are thereof, a Landscape Scan that surveys the current landscape of extant American cohousing and other communal living projects, and a Blueprint that seeks to identify the necessary components and potential pathways of building urban kibbutzim and the possible forms these urban kibbutzim could take.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology relied upon for this thesis unfolded over the course of five years from 2019 to 2024 and included site visits to urban kibbutzim and intentional Jewish communities in Israel; site visits to extant cohousing communities and potential urban kibbutz pilot cities in America; in-person and Zoom interviews conducted with founders and residents of those kibbutzim and communities; informal one-on-one conversations with over 100 Jewish professionals, lay Jews, Jews experienced or interested in communal living, cohousing developers, cohousing community-builders, and philanthropists; participation in the Hakhel Intentional Communities Tour & Conference and a Tulsa Tomorrow tour; a year-long fellowship with Atra: The Center for Rabbinic Innovation; and a review of the books, articles, studies, and research papers cited throughout this thesis. Additionally, a qualitative research study was designed and undertaken at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to provide insight into the

question of what makes innovative Jewish organizations successful, with “innovative” meaning those organizations that are newly emergent (up to 30 years old, with most being under 10 years old) and that are neither synagogues nor Jewish legacy institutions. The organizations under study for this qualitative research included Hakhel, OneTable, the OpenDor Project, Base, Avodah, the Hillel Office of Innovation, Moishe House, and Honeymoon Israel.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Even before Covid-19 forced us into isolation, the western world had been facing a loneliness crisis. According to a 2020 Harvard study, "36% of all Americans [today] – including 61% of young adults and 51% of mothers with young children – feel 'serious loneliness.'" The "potentially steep costs" of this public health crisis include "early mortality and a wide array of serious physical and emotional problems, including depression, anxiety, heart disease, substance abuse, and domestic abuse."[1] This crisis has only been exacerbated by a global pandemic that has laid bare just how insufficient American systems are for life in the 21st century, including the nuclear family structure.

Resources today are scarce, with as many as 80% of American workers living paycheck-to-paycheck.[2] Among the more outsized regular monthly costs in America are rent and childcare. According to the State of the Nation's Housing 2020 report, one in seven U.S. households are "severely rent-burdened,"[3] and rents are only on the rise.[4] Meanwhile, roughly 60% of Americans spend more than $800 per month per child on childcare, with 85% dedicating at least 10% of their household income to this necessary resource.[5] More than half of Americans live in a childcare desert[6] (defined as "any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots"),[7] and for those who do have childcare options available, "94% of parents have used at least one major cost-saving strategy to save money on child care in the past year, including reducing hours at work (42%), changing jobs (26%), or leaving the workforce completely (26%),"[8] with a disproportionate burden falling on mothers –

nearly 2 million women have dropped out of the labor force in America since February 2020, primarily due to the intersection of economics and childcare.[9]

Americans today are struggling to meet their basic needs. And they are also looking to do more than just meet their basic needs – they are seeking meaning, purpose, and community. Innovative models of communal living such as cohousing have the potential to meet basic, meaning-driven, and communal needs at once. As for combatting the loneliness epidemic, "Evidence suggests that communal living arrangements reduce feelings of loneliness and increase perceived wellbeing."[10]

Defining Cohousing

Cohousing is "a form of community living that contains a mix of private and communal spaces with substantial self-managed common facilities and activities aimed at everyday living."[11] Originating in Denmark in the 1970s, cohousing has experienced an international re-emergence in recent decades as "an innovative form of collective housing":

> This re-emergence has been associated with a growing desire for a sense of belonging, to experience more connection with the community and an increasing rejection of dominant consumption patterns. In addition, it has been boosted by the lack of affordable housing and poor rental conditions and has been presented as a potential alternative to conventional tenure arrangements.[12]

Ideally, cohousing communities are communities "of mutual support where neighbors help each other; an example of '[communities] of identity'… 'where the residents are primarily responsible for, and have to work at, preserving a spirit of harmony and cooperation to ensure their [community] provides the quality of life they desire.' Although new in the United States, the

option is beginning to get more widespread attention."[13] Cohousing is the predominant mode of communal living in America today, with a reported 6,400 active housing cooperatives and 1,200,000 dwellings in the U.S. today.[14]

Perhaps cohousing is experiencing a renaissance in this historical moment because it "is community designed to foster connection."[15] Balancing autonomy with intentional community, cohousing pairs private homes with common areas such as kitchens, dining spaces, and gardens designed to bring neighbors together. Relationships are built through proximity and collaborative decision making.[16] A 2011 study by the Cohousing Research Network found that 96% of cohousing inhabitants interviewed reported an improved quality of life.[17]

Cohousing's Potential to Combat Current American Crises

Cohousing communities combat problems in America today including "expensive child care, not enough time to cook healthy meals, disconnection from nature,[18] a sense of social isolation – what the sociologist Robert Putnam famously called "bowling alone" — and more. Older Americans, a booming population, often end up segregated generationally and in dire need of care and companionship."[19] Cohousing does not *necessarily* combat the high cost of rent in the U.S. While "most cohousing targets middle- to higher-income individuals," some house both government subsidized low-income renters and owners in the same community, a model that can be replicated to make cohousing accessible to low-income residents.[20] More innovative solutions will be necessary to make cohousing affordable for lower-middle-class residents, families with young children, the elderly, and those for whom rent is a significant burden, but who do not meet the governmental requirements to qualify for low-income housing. Just as cohousing *has the potential to* make housing more affordable in the U.S. but does not *necessarily* do so, these

communities do not *necessarily* offer residents a sense of meaning and purpose. But, through intergenerational, village-inspired living, cohousing communities do inherently offer innovative solutions for both childcare and for caring for – and utilizing the many contributions of – the elderly.[21] By being structured as intentional communities where residents know their neighbors, eat with their neighbors, share critical resources, and engage in meaningful, ongoing relationships, cohousing communities do make life easier for members, including easing financial burdens, and they are critically positioned to combat loneliness.

Serving the American Jewish Future

Today's Jewish community is not immune to that which plagues America at large in the modern age. Mental and emotional health concerns abound among America's young Jewish adults, with loneliness being their primary concern.[22] Loneliness is considered by some to be *the* existential problem facing Jews today.[23]

Meanwhile, legacy institutions and major funders remain deeply concerned about Jewish engagement, with trends showing that the next generations of American Jews are walking away from synagogue life, membership models, and those centers that served as the backbone of Jewish life in America for the preceding generations. Millennials and members of Gen-Z primarily connect with their Judaism through family and social circles,[24] indicating a need to invest in home-based Judaism and non-institutional Jewish social networks in addition to synagogue and institutional models. As one recent study observes, "relationships are the answer."[25]

As for the next generation of Jewish parents (and their children), "[home-based Judaism], connection/interaction with other Jewish families, making Jewish educational choices for

children, and finding personal meaning in Jewish life… are beliefs and behaviors that are particularly salient to contemporary Jewish families with young children."[26] Historical models of membership and engagement often fail to serve these Jewish parents – many Jewish early care and education "programs emphasize 'institutional attachment' over engaging families in Jewish life," while "relationships are more likely to be a lasting characteristic of families' Jewish engagement"[27] The CASJE Early Childhood Project, a study that explores the ways in which Jewish early care and education is associated with greater and long-term involvement in Jewish life among families with young children, concludes that "encouraging more home-based Jewish practice is a key facet of Jewish engagement for families with young children."[28]

Finally, America's aging Jewish population is largely overlooked today, in favor of an outsized philanthropic and institutional focus on Jewish adults in their 20s and 30s. There is a dearth of studies about the American Jewish aging population, though their needs as aging Jews likely overlap in many ways with the known needs of aging Americans at large. In Great Britain, for comparison, "The Jewish community has twice the number of people over 60 compared to the general UK population. Yet most of [its] resources – energy and money – are directed towards young people."[29] One can surmise that the situation in the U.S. is not dissimilar. In the New York region, Jewish seniors make up 22% of all Jews, with one third of the elderly population living alone, and 24% living in households described as poor.[30] The key recommendations of the U.K.'s study of this population can and should inform the needs of this population in America:

> The Jewish community should ensure that, as we age, we are enabled and encouraged to flourish and participate to the best of our physical and mental abilities; The emphasis should change from welfare to inclusion; Communal organisations should change to

ensure they actively include older people; The community needs to focus on this important and growing area; [and] The community needs to listen to what people are saying rather than deciding what they want and need.[31]

To serve the future of North American Jewry at every age and life stage today, what is called for is a focus on relationships, community, and home-based Jewish life. Just as cohousing offers innovative solutions for America at large, a specifically Jewish model of communal living (modeled after the cohousing movement, among other models of communal living) is uniquely positioned to serve the North American Jewish future.

Intentional Jewish Communities and the Who, What, and Why of Jewish Cohousing

Jewish Cohousing is "a modern village where neighbors engage one another through Jewish ritual, study, and culture, creating a milieu in which daily life is infused with Jewish life and where Jewish literacy, tradition, and values can therefore flourish."[32] Those interested in Jewish cohousing are intergenerational – including families with young children and retirees – and religiously pluralistic, including secular, cultural, and observant Jews. "They [are] united, however, in their curiosity about living in a setting that [offers] daily connection and support built out of a shared, uniquely Jewish community vision."[33] With an outsized Jewish representation in the larger American cohousing landscape – 10% of cohousing residents in the U.S. are Jewish[34] – an American Jewish cohousing movement is on the rise.

In Israel today (and increasingly in an international context), communities where people live together and share resources and responsibilities have an additional mission-driven component and are known broadly as Intentional Communities:

> An Intentional Community is a small and non-hierarchal group of people who have consciously decided to live together spatially and temporally around a shared purpose. In this sense, an intentional community can serve as a framework for both individual growth and moral behavior, as well as give people the opportunity to work collaboratively to make the world a better place. To become the better version of themselves."[35]

Urban kibbutzim are a subset of Intentional Communities in Israel that can inform what the American Jewish cohousing movement might look like.

Israel's kibbutzim and moshavim are historical models of what today is referred to as cohousing:

> Kibbutzim differ from other cooperative enterprises in Israel by their permanence of place and population, and from other rural settlements by their degree of communalism. All kibbutzim are permanent settlements... Traditionally they all had common ownership and democratic management of financial affairs, communal consumption and child care, and a centralized labor allocation system, which emphasized job-rotation and the reliance on member (as opposed to hired) labor.[36]

Moshavim (village cooperatives) are egalitarian collectivist communities that provide mutual assistance, operated cooperatively, and utilized collective decision-making bodies.[37] The terms "kibbutz" and "moshav" can today be used interchangeably with "intentional community," "cohousing," and "coliving":

> [T]he term "kibbutz…" originally… meant specifically communal society. In recent decades, due to the privatization of three-quarters of the nearly 280 rural kibbutzim, resulting in their transformation into cohousing-like communities on government land trusts, and due to younger generations of kibbutznics forming different kinds of urban

> intentional communities, the term "kibbutz" is now also synonymous with the term "intentional community." Similar usage of the terms "cohousing," "coliving," and others add to the confusion. Although these terms may have once had clear definitions, people tend to use the terms indiscriminately to mean whatever kind of community is at hand.[38]

It is noteworthy that, in the pandemic, traditional rural kibbutzim in Israel experienced a renaissance, boasting 70,000 more members during and post-pandemic than twenty years ago.[39] But for the countless Millennials, members of Gen-Z, Baby Boomers, and others who prefer urban to rural life, urban kibbutzim – "a city-based offshoot of the iconic Israeli communal living setup"[40] – offer the best of both worlds. Today, there are upwards of 275 urban kibbutzim across Israel. "Some pool resources (much like traditional kibbutzim) to cover food and other expenses, while [other kibbutzim] operate with more autonomy. And while all have different social missions, each maintains a commitment to improving the collective welfare of the areas in which they call home."[41]

While extant American Jewish cohousing is scarce, Noam Dolgin, a realtor who specializes in building American Jewish cohousing, observes:

> There's potential to do a lot here that can really beautifully integrate generations, socioeconomic groups, different religious expressions, and could be an example of what a progressive Jewish community can look like… It's about the ability to take [Judaism] out of institutions and into your own home. There is something different between having Shabbat in your own backyard versus going to a synagogue, something really powerful about the intimacy of a smaller community.[42]

Today, only the "kibbutz-inspired" Living Tree Alliance in Vermont is fully operational with members living onsite. Nonetheless, there is an interest in Jewish communal cohousing and a

desire to build these communities in America:

> [There has been] a decade-long attempt to build Jewish cohousing communities across North America... [A] craving for kinship has led to a ripple of activity, including an annual Jewish Intentional Communities Conference, and the creation of advisory teams, like the Jewish Cohousing Network. From Seattle to Boston, San Diego to Brooklyn, groups began coalescing in an attempt to make Jewish cohousing a reality. "Culturally, our history has been around living within community, so I imagine that our DNA structure might be oriented towards that," said Sephirah Stacey Oshkello, co-founder of Living Tree Alliance, a Jewish cohousing community and farm on 91 acres in Vermont tagged "the kibbutz reimagined." Despite this affinity and more than a decade of work, the root system of North American Jewish cohousing remains shallow. Of the seven communities listed on the Jewish Cohousing Network website, only Oshkello's has residents living together onsite.[43]

Berkeley Moshav in California anticipates breaking ground in 2024 and moving residents in in 2025,[44] [45] which would make it the second official Jewish cohousing community in the U.S. With purchase prices ranging from $880,000 to $1.6 million per unit,[46] Berkeley Moshav highlights one of the challenges the Jewish cohousing movement faces in the U.S.: affordability (and, consequently, diversity).

When thinking of how to make Jewish cohousing more affordable, how such communities might offer meaning and purpose to members, and how to live together Jewishly, America's Jewish cohousing movement might look beyond the international cohousing movement and turn to Israel's Intentional Communities and urban kibbutzim for inspiration. In addition to offering community and shared resources and the many benefits common to all

modes of cohousing, one of the benefits specific to the Intentional Community / urban kibbutz model is collaborative work. Being a mission-driven community offers a sense of meaning and purpose, which is something that many Americans are in search of today.[47]

Aharon Ariel Lavi, the founder and director of Hakhel: The Jewish Intentional Communities Incubator in the Diaspora, has made it his life's work to both build Intentional Communities in Israel and to use this model to help establish and sustain such communities in the diaspora. Lavi believes several Jewish cohousing communities are on the horizon post-pandemic. "We see people flocking in this direction. They want to live in a community, but they don't want the old institutions that are, from their perspective, kind of rigid, very expensive, not so relevant for the kind of life they want to have."[48]

Issues that Jewish Cohousing Can Address

LONELINESS

As noted above, loneliness is an epidemic and public health crisis. Perhaps counter-intuitively, young adults and parents of young children are among the loneliest people in America today:

> Young people tend to lead migratory lives, leading to weak social ties. Mothers have their children, although almost a quarter of them are raising those children without a partner; the United States has the highest rate in the world of children living with only one parent. With or without a partner, a mother may still have a hard time finding a fulfilling social life, since paid work and unpaid maternal labor take up so much of her time.[49]

In addition to young adults and mothers of small children, 43% of older people also suffer from loneliness.[50] The CDC notes that "Older adults are at increased risk for loneliness and social

isolation because they are more likely to face factors such as living alone [and] the loss of family or friends."[51]

PARENTING AND THE CRISIS OF AMERICAN FAMILY LIFE

Parenting is perhaps the number one reason that people choose to live in cohousing today. "Kids aren't stuck in their apartments; they can run downstairs. Neighbors' kids or older members [are] almost always around to babysit, and [there are often informal] day care arrangement[s]."[52] In researching her book *Essential Labor: Mothering as Social Change*, Angela Garbes found that "[children] need other people. They need family. They need friends. They need adults who are not related to them, who have a certain patience and bring something different to their life… We were not meant to raise children in isolation."[53] Meanwhile, "[p]arental burnout" is its own kind of public health crisis, defined as "chronic stress and extreme exhaustion that leads caregivers to feel detached from their children and uncertain about their parenting abilities. It can lead to serious issues like parental neglect, harm, and thoughts of escaping."[54]

Intrinsic to the problems of parenting in America today is the failure of the nuclear family model, a phenomenon that "is responsible for a 25% increase in income inequality" (Sawhill 25). The declining nuclear family structure "liberates the rich and ravages the working-class and the poor;" prioritizes individuals over families; eliminates the web of resilience and socialization that ensures that multiple people share life's burdens; deprives children of the benefits of having multiple role models; creates physical and emotional space between people – including families; encourages the outsourcing of resources such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare that historically were performed by kin; has a disproportionately negative impact on the vulnerable, including

women, the elderly, children, and African Americans; and perpetuates this broken system, leading to further isolation, trauma, and poverty.[55]

For most of human history, from prehistory until the early 20th century, child-rearing was a cooperative endeavor with many adults on hand to share in the responsibilities. The relatively nascent nuclear family model that featured "one parent (the mom) staying home and only spending her time on housework and child care was 'a historical fluke,' for the white middle and upper classes that began in the 1940s and '50s, 'based on a unique and temporary conjuncture of economic, social and political factors.'"[56] Serving the American future at this moment invites us to "reconsider our idealization of the nuclear family, which we've now seen cannot really function without the support of broken institutions, to make way for the notion that raising children is a communal obligation, of benefit not just to [those] trying 'to have it all,' but to society at large."[57]

Trends are already shifting in this direction. A 2022 Pew study found that the U.S. population living in multigenerational households has quadrupled since 1971.[58] "Millennials, the elderly, immigrants, and people of color are more likely to live in extended-family households," while more than 42% of homebuyers are looking for homes that include units for extended family[59]:

> Americans are hungering to live in extended and forged families, in ways that are new and ancient at the same time. This is a significant opportunity, a chance to thicken and broaden family relationships, a chance to allow more adults and children to live and grow under the loving gaze of a dozen pairs of eyes, and be caught, when they fall, by a dozen pairs of arms.[60]

According to Pew, the top two reasons for multigenerational living were financial issues and caregiving needs.[61]

HIGH RENTS

With increasingly high rents, especially in urban centers, people are turning increasingly toward a sharing economy.[62] While American cohousing tends to be cost-prohibitive and geared toward middle- and higher-income residents, there are organizations working to create affordable cohousing.[63] And while rental models that incorporate elements of cohousing can still be cost-prohibitive,[64] there is the potential to draw upon extant models of affordable intentional communal living, including extant cohousing communities and Israel's urban kibbutz movement, to seek innovative solutions. In the American Jewish community, specifically, there are also models such as Moishe House and Avodah that offer stipends to subsidize Jewish communal living, though these are temporary communities, bound by life stage – specifically geared toward young adults. Ultra-Orthodox Jews in America have also found ways of living together in intentional Jewish community, often as low-income renters, and operate via a sharing economy that includes *gemachs* (an interest-free money-lending fund or a sharing society for goods "meant for people to borrow things with dignity and convenience").[65]

The Benefits of Jewish Cohousing

COMMUNITY

"Community has always been, and is still, how we best care for one another. Especially within the Jewish community… [As] human beings, we do, in fact, need each other."[66] When conceiving of building Jewish community in the modern age:

> Proximity and regularity matter. A recent study found that most people report having only two close confidants with whom they have important discussions on a regular basis. It's a lot easier to sit down next to someone at a weekly common meal and spontaneously troubleshoot how to handle a rude boss or health problem than it is to call an equally stressed friend in hopes that it is a moment when he or she can talk."[67]

SHARED RESOURCES

People in cohousing and other intentional communities share responsibilities like cleaning, childcare, cooking; social benefits like eating together; social spaces such as kitchens, meeting rooms, lounges; large and expensive material resources like cars, lawnmowers,[68] skis, and travel cribs.[69] And they also share other resources that intersect with the other categories herein: combatting climate change, offering an alternative to retirement communities, the benefits of intergenerational living, financial resources, agricultural possibilities, offering a sense of meaning and purpose by giving back to local communities, environmental benefits, social events, and advantages for parents of young children[70] – the list goes on and on.

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Psychiatrist and neuroscientist Dr. Amir Levine observes that "[s]ocial connections are the most powerful way for us to regulate our emotional distress. If you are in distress, being in proximity to someone you're securely attached to is the most effective way to calm yourself."[71] And the research clearly shows not only the benefits – but the necessity – of close friendships for optimal health and wellbeing. "When we are intimate with another person, we can experience positive mental and physical reactions in our body, mind and heart."[72] How does one create these

lifesaving, sustaining relationships? To begin with, one needs consistency, availability, reliability, responsiveness, and predictability[73] – all things that are naturally built into the cohousing/kibbutz model. "Rather than depending on the nuclear family unit to meet all emotional needs, cohousing participants have a wide range of people to talk to."[74]

SERVING YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE

Cohousing offers "regular, spontaneous contact with people of all ages,"[75] a setup that benefits a community's children and adults in equal measure. After observing a cohousing community in Washington D.C., journalist Judith Shulevitz observed:

> I had my children later in life, and my parents weren't healthy enough to spend as much time with their grandchildren as all of us wanted, and then, as happens, they died. I'm nostalgic for an intergenerational experience I never had. A few weeks ago, I watched my teenage daughter spend an entire meal talking conspiratorially to two of my best friends. How often do American teenagers open up to their parents' friends? What would it have been like for her to be able to do that throughout her childhood with surrogate aunts and uncles and grandparents?[76]

American Jewish young adults are also well-served by intentional communities such as Jewish cohousing:

> Millennials are looking for intimate and horizontal structures, rather than mega-communities that make [them] feel even more lonely… Jewish Millennials see themselves as privileged, hence responsible for everybody… and do not [see] themselves in communities designed originally to protect a weak minority… [The] entire Jewish ecosystem was geared to support Jewish identity until people finish school, assuming

> they will get married soon after and circle back to the community. However, circumstances have changed: the gap between college and settling down is no longer 2-3 years, not even 10, sometimes not even 15. Communities are still the solution, we just need [new versions that are] more relevant [to] Millennials.[77]

Meanwhile, retirees are equally well served:

> We are finally beginning to understand that just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to shepherd people through their golden years…. A 2015 report by the AARP predicts a steep decline in the ratio of potential family caregivers – those age 45 to 64 – to people 80 years old and beyond. In 2015, there were 6.8 potential family caregivers for every person 80 and older; by 2050 that ratio is expected to fall to less than 3 to 1… According to a 2018 report released by Generations United and the Eisner Foundation, 85 percent of Americans say that if they need care in their old age, they would prefer a setting with opportunities for intergenerational contact over one with only a single age group.[78]

PROTECTION AGAINST NATURAL DISASTERS

The cohousing model offers a built-in safety net in times of natural disasters: living in community. "To live in a community during a crisis is crucial; you do things together you can't do alone."[79] Relationship-building is critical to successful teams,[80] and when one lives in intentional community, one lives in such a team. Intentional community members are prepared – by nature of their relationships with one another – to succeed in the face of natural disasters such as heat waves or hurricanes.[81] With climate change occurring at an alarming rate, communities

that are being built today would do well to structure themselves in a way that prepares them to tackle this uncertain, challenging future.

Additionally, and more relevant than ever, these communities offer a natural insulation against the challenges of pandemic life:

> [Covid lockdowns necessitate] an unprecedented kind of solitude. But not for Yael Einhar, a community organizer in the town of Rehovot [in Israel] who is also a member of an 'urban kibbutz…' Within a matter of days, her fellow kibbutzniks, who live among several apartments in a seven-story tower, subdivided into groups of 10 – were taking action. They then created an impromptu school, where members would alternate between teaching and working, organized food runs to local markets and even carved out time for group exercise sessions.[82]

GOOD FOR INTROVERTS, TOO

Perhaps counter-intuitively, co-housing serves those who find themselves on the introvert end of the introvert-extrovert spectrum. "Co-housing attracts a lot of introverts… Who needs a community more than those who have a hard time spontaneously cobbling one together? [As] soon as you show up in co-housing, you are swept into a round robin of meals and festivities and cleanup days."[83] And cohousing's dedication to balancing community with autonomy allows introverts plenty of space to recharge on their own.

CONNECTING TO NATURE & COMBATTING CLIMATE CHANGE

The benefits of cohousing intersect with combatting climate change, environmentalism,[84] a greater connection to nature,[85] and instilling in children and other community members a love

for the earth.[86] Even urban cohousing communities can help combat climate change by building via renovating and reclaiming abandoned spaces as opposed to new building; decreasing overconsumption through shared use of household items and vehicles.[87] New urban cohousing construction can be built as "sustainable co-housing," which:

> intends to minimize the adverse environmental impacts caused by domestic construction. It focuses on reducing carbon emissions, waste production, and energy usage. Utilizing renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, wind turbines, and rainwater collection systems, is part of the co-housing idea. It also emphasizes the utilization of environmentally friendly construction supplies like bamboo, and recycled steel.[88]

Urban cohousing "is ideally suited to ventures like group-purchased renewable energy, car shares, and hyper-local food production. Many rural and suburban cohousing neighborhoods have a farm or garden onsite."[89]

MEANING & PURPOSE

"Intentional communities… are the optimal environment for becoming *the better version of ourselves*… After satisfying their basic needs, people are craving a sense of belonging, identity and meaning. The aspiration to become a better version of one's self comes from there… In fact, data shows that almost half [of] Millennials would move to [lower] paying jobs if [those jobs] offer a better sense of meaning and serve a greater purpose than themselves."[90] While cohousing does not necessarily provide this meaning and purpose, intentional communities do by way of their inherent mission-driven component. Urban kibbutzim in Israel, for example, a

subset of intentional communities, have a mission-driven component that bonds residents to one another through giving back to the larger local community by way of various acts of service.[91]

Challenges to Success

"If co-housing offers solutions for so many of [America's] problems," asks journalist Judith Shulevitz after studying America's cohousing movement, "if we are now uniquely positioned to put at least some of its lessons into effect, what's stopping us?"[92] The challenges to success when attempting to build a cohousing community in America are many, including an American culture of independence; local zoning laws;[93] a reticence to share our lives;[94] the challenges of grassroots organizing and the significant amount of time and emotional labor that goes into building such a community;[95] the transitory nature of members—especially during the idea/building phase;[96] a lack of awareness and understanding of what cohousing is; financing; a lack of public support; and a lack of predictability of when it comes to group dynamics.[97]

Building an Urban Kibbutz Movement in America

Despite the significant challenges, the time is right for building affordable cohousing communities in America. "Americans' interest in cohousing is growing. The Cohousing Association knows of 120 communities currently in formation. The 2015 National Cohousing Conference was the largest yet, and dozens of architectural firms and real estate developers have specialized in working on these types of communities. At [one such extant] community… 300 people are on a waiting list."[98] Millennials and Baby Boomers are driving this expansion.[99]

Israel's urban kibbutz movement looks very much like America's cohousing movement, but with the added dimension of a mission-driven purpose—kibbutz members work together to

improve society. Kibbutz Mishol cofounder James Grant-Rosenhead said in a 2022 interview:

> [Having an] external focus gives [community members] the passion and strength to be able to cope with the internal interpersonal dynamics of community building and vice versa. The inter-communal dynamics of community helps strengthen [members] in [their] external missionary work to build more communities. That division of labor between the internal and the external ultimately is what provides [members with] the balance that [they] need to create something sustainable. If it's too insular, it's not sustainable. If [there are] not enough internal spokes [in the] wheel, then it's also not sustainable. There needs to be both.[100]

Community-building expert Aharon Ariel Lavi echoes this sentiment:

> In an Intentional community, togetherness is not a mere byproduct of something else, nor is it simply a means to other ends, but it is an intention in and of itself, what sociologists call a "primary group." At the very same time, the group gathers for a purpose larger than itself, what sociologists call a "secondary group."[101]

Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum, founder of the innovative Kavana Cooperative in Seattle, reflects on what made her successful in launching her non-residential Jewish community in Seattle, which has much in common with intentional communities:

> As we dreamed about building our new Jewish community, we saw our work as somewhat "retro"; we were trying to integrate some of the best features of Jewish communal models like *shtetl* and *kibbutz* with the very individualistic landscape of contemporary American society. The new Jewish community we wanted to build was one with a sense of neighborhood, an alive and lived everyday Judaism, and a dense

social fabric… and in order to do that, we needed a community model that could have binding force.[102]

In considering how to build an intentional Jewish community, Gather Consulting suggests one begin with these three questions: 1) What is my community and what makes me define my community this way? 2) What do I want my community to be and who am I missing in my community? 3) How do I get there from here?[103]

In considering how to "get there from here," we might turn again to Rabbi Nussbaum. In order to build Kavana, she wove a tight web of community in order to create a sense of extended family, empowered participants by turning them into "producers" rather than consumers of their own Jewish experiences, and built a pluralistic community for adults and families that featured multiple entry points to Jewish life and could support a wide range of Jewish practice and engagement.[104] When conceiving of what the first step might be toward building an urban kibbutz movement in America, the work – the "How do I get there from here?" – begins with building community. But that, of course, is just the beginning. For a more in-depth consideration of the necessary building clocks for an American urban kibbutz movement, see the Blueprint section of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LANDSCAPE SCAN & ANALYSIS

LANDSCAPE SCAN

In this chapter, I offer a survey of the current North American landscape of communal living, as well as non-residential intentional Jewish communities, that can be helpful for those who seek to build an American urban kibbutz movement. For the purposes of this landscape scan, the communities, models, and projects under study include:

- Cohousing
- Cooperative Housing Communities
- Co-living and For-Profit Communal Living
- Senior Intentional Communities
- Decentralized Communities
- Habonim Dror Jewish Youth Movement
- Intentional Jewish Communities & Kibbutz- and Moshav-Inspired Jewish Cohousing Communities
- "Mommunes" and Christian Communal Living Models
- Orthodox Jewish Community
- Resources for Building Intentional Communities

Cohousing Communities

Cohousing is the predominant mode of communal living in America, with a reported 6,400 active housing cooperatives and 1,200,000 dwellings in the U.S. today.[105] Balancing autonomy with intentional community, cohousing pairs private homes with common areas such

as kitchens, dining spaces, and gardens designed to bring neighbors together. Relationships are built through proximity and collaborative decision-making.[106] Cohousing communities are:

> intentional, collaborative neighborhood[s] that combine... private homes with shared indoor and outdoor spaces designed to support an active and interdependent community life. Cohousing is not a financial or legal model, but rather a descriptive term that emphasizes the active participation of residents in everything from design to governance.[107]

For a better understanding of American cohousing communities, see the Cohousing Association of America[108] and the Foundation for Intentional Community for further study of extant cohousing communities, to find emergent cohousing communities, and to seek available cohousing.

An in-depth study[109] of the effects of cohousing on mental health and wellbeing revealed that the benefits of cohousing include a positive impact on residents' quality of life, physical and mental health benefits, a sense of community *specifically among intergenerational cohousing communities*, increased autonomy, solidarity among residents, intergenerational projects, an increased sense of security, and mutual / social support. Support takes the forms of "(a) instrumental (or functional) social support involving activities such as borrowing, housework, meal preparation, and care during times of illness or childcare; (b) emotional support such as having close friendships, listening or providing support when someone had a personal problem; and (c) recreational support, provided through different social activities organizes by the residents themselves."[110]

Cooperative Housing Communities

Outside of the formal cohousing structure, there are a number of cooperative housing communities in the U.S. A small sample of cooperative housing communities[111] was studied for this landscape scan. This is intended to show the breadth of what is possible in American communal living, but is by no means an exhaustive study. The communities under study range from co-owned homes to homes owned by a single person or couple to hybrid rental/ownership models to rentals. They range in size from single-family homes to multi-room and multi-floor apartments to a cohousing model of several individual units on a shared property. They range in inhabitation from five to eighteen people, some comprised of adults and pets only and some of adults and children and pets. They feature a variety of governance models and prioritize different aspects of communal living from finances to chores to how flexible the individual community's co-living/cohousing model is. All prioritize community and a living structure that extends beyond the nuclear family model. Each offers a different model of what communal living can look like and how one (or many) can capitalize on and modify existing housing or buildable land to enable communal living. All share resources and responsibilities.

The sample under study includes:

- The Palm on Deakin: A 5-bedroom co-owned house in Berkeley, California. The 3,700 sq. ft. house is owned by its residents and includes two kitchens for greater flexibility and reduced congestion during mealtimes. It currently houses 5 adults, 1 dog, and 2 cats. Small decisions are made via a Whatsapp chat, while bigger decisions are discussed at house meetings. The house was founded in June 2020 by a group that had been living together pre-pandemic and decided to co-buy a house for more space. They were able to purchase by pooling their resources, thus enabling them to buy a house they could not

have afforded as individuals/couples. Shared responsibilities include cleaning, taking out the trash, and paying rent (presumably toward the shared mortgage). They share the one parking space and split expenses including groceries and the internet bill. Everyone in the house has their own private space, with shared communal spaces for intentional community. Before jointly purchasing the house, community members set group expectations and codified them. They draw on this document for joint decision-making for long-term decisions. They share other documents for smaller decisions. They have a shared bank account for the mortgage and household expenses, and have "HOA dues" for repairs and projects. The residents reflect that:

> Overall, we've felt privileged to be able to live with intentionality and in community with friends over the past few years. It's taught us how to communicate better, resolve conflicts better, and to experience a version of living that's different from Western societal conventions. We don't know where our co-living journeys will take us in the future (or if co-living is even in the books for all of us longer term), but we're thankful for the good memories and friendships we've created to date.

- Sage House: Sage House boasts nine bedrooms, four bathrooms, a gym, a recording studio, and a backyard fire pit in Highland Park, Los Angeles, California. The house itself, a 1905 Craftsman, was purchased in July 2020 and renovated over two years during the pandemic, adding three bedrooms and a restaurant-style kitchen. The ownership is a hybrid model where current housemates rent from the past-resident founder-owner who provides limited operational support. Self-identifying as "co-living for busy people," the community aspires to making communal living accessible, to

affordability, and to a balance between individual autonomy and the benefits of living in community. They employ collective decision making for chores, behavioral issues, and bulk purchasing, and part of rent goes into a shared account.. They have monthly meetings for informal discussion and consensus-building. Community members do an average of 2-3 hours of chores per month meet for only 1-2 hours per month. Each housemate is empowered to take initiative regarding household matters, communicating electronically.

- The Village: A rented living space housing 14 adults and four kids in a home in San Francisco, California, founded in March 2022. The children range from age two to four, and the adults range from mid-twenties to early forties. The layout of the home is three floors, each a separate unit with its own living room, kitchen, and bathroom, and, in total, has 14 bedrooms, three offices, a playroom, two common areas, a backyard, and a small patio porch. Residents move seamlessly between the three floors. They employ non-hierarchical decision-making using a do-do-ocracy[112] method for small decisions, unanimous consensus for big decisions, and an "'ask for feedback and proceed unless people have major concerns' for everything in between." The community originated when two founding couples hosted a "kid-friendly coliving picnic" to find house members. During their initial meetings the founding couples talked about shared values, non-negotiables, a vision for the future, worst-case financial scenarios, and distributing financial risk according to individual income. The founding couples looked for housemates who wanted to live communally with children, were excited about the vision, had some communal housing experience, were warm and friendly, and worked in a variety of fields. They circulated a "values & vision" document to potential residents that

communicated a bottom line re: children, food costs, sharing meals, keeping the house clean, conflict resolution, communication, and intentionally opting in. Each month, each household member contributes $500 in rent and more in dues to cover food, utilities, savings for household repairs and projects, and other miscellaneous expenses. Parents pay reduced dues for their children, and those sharing a room pay a double occupancy fee. Their chores model is "structureless," in which everyone cleans up after themselves and tidies up when they notice something needs cleaning. For lessons learned, the community states, "Parents asking for childcare help is a great way to facilitate adult-child relationships… Leaseholders should have a clear understanding of what's important to them and communicate that to people before they move in... Trial periods can be helpful but have some drawbacks… A house centered around raising children and settling down can involve a lot of upfront investment… and Many of us wish we'd socially invested in the house earlier on."

- Radish: "An 18-person multigenerational compound in Oakland, California." A flexible co-ownership model for residents and non-residents, Radish accommodates people living in different life stages, including singles, couples, and young families. It has both standalone apartments (at a higher cost) and bedrooms in a shared house (at a lower cost). The space has a large yard and communal space, and is walking distance form public transportation. It took two years to locate the right property, a 1/3 acre of land with both apartments (a 4-plex) and a five-bedroom single family home, with an open space in the center for constructing and additional building and a garden. The first year of the project was about converting the physical space to suit the community' coliving needs. Rather than decision by consensus, they created small committees to handle different aspects of

the project at this phase. Their foundational principles include transparency; flexibility of roles; a combination of rent and ownership options for residents; an exit strategy for those who want to leave; rent being tied to costs rather than profit; and collecting monthly dues for communal expenses. Some decisions are made "do-ocratically," some larger decisions are made via a governing body, and some decisions are made by consensus. Shared meals are frequent, and a Slack channel is used to facilitate this.

Co-living and For-Profit Communal Living

Typically co-living communities in the U.S. utilize a for-profit corporate model wherein one can rent an apartment in a co-living facility where profits are earned by the owning corporation. Such companies include Coliving.com,[113] SharedEasy,[114] and Common.[115] Being a corporate, for-profit model created by the owning corporation – as opposed to a grassroots effort created by the community for the good of the community – is the primary distinction between co-living and the other forms of cooperative housing under study in this landscape scan. What co-living shares with other forms of communal living is a shared dwelling space among non-biologically related people,[116] the aim of shared values among residents,[117] group discussions, common areas, weekly meals, shared workspaces, collective endeavors, "comfort, affordability, and a greater sense of social belonging."[118] Co-living's contemporary form has gained prominence in recent years due to a combination of factors including increased urbanization rates, a lack of affordable housing options, greater rates of disability requiring group home or assisted living arrangements, and a growing interest in lifestyles not dependent upon long-term contracts.[119] The more transient nature of co-living residency is another factor that distinguishes co-living from the other types of communal living under study. While retirement communities

and nursing homes are not typically considered co-living communities – perhaps because of their emphasis on individual care and de-emphasis of shared values – there are emergent senior co-living communities in America today.

Senior Intentional Communities

Senior intentional communities are on the rise, including senior cohousing communities such as Elderspirit[120] and Elderberry.[121] A study of intentional communities reports that:

> Senior intentional communities are age restrictive. Typically membership is limited to those 55 or older… Most of us are only familiar with retirement communities or senior communities that are not of the "intentional" sort. We imagine a planned community in Florida with endless rows of matching homes and abundant golf courses. The primary difference between the typical retirement community and a senior intentional community is that in an intentional community it is the seniors themselves who are in charge. Seniors own their own homes, common spaces, and shared infrastructure. They make decisions together. They are not beholden to an outside entity. Many senior intentional communities take pride in the fact that they are the ones who maintain their spaces (while of course hiring out for some tasks as necessary. Window washing on scaffolding, for example.) Because seniors own their community, they get to shape the culture around values that are meaningful to them, especially providing for a graceful and dignified aging in place. Senior intentional communities by definition are well equipped to provide for the practicalities of aging in place — think elevators,

> wheelchair accessibility, air conditioning — as well as the emotional needs, such as mutual support, engaging activities, and beautiful environments.[122]

A sample senior cohousing community under study for this landscape scan is Parkside in California. Parkside is built on 3.7 acres and comprised of private units facing a common green space, and a 2,000 sq ft Common House with a large kitchen where members meet for common meals. The average age of residents at the time the community was studied was 74.03 years. Members are mostly white women. 66% of the community's founders have an annual income of less than $35,000. Community members reported that "We have all chosen to be here… [and] we have some responsibilities toward each other… [W]e are all friends, like almost family… like extended family. We feel free to call on people if we need a companion to do something… [W]e act as neighbors and recognize that we're responsible not just for ourselves, but for the rest of the people in this community… [There is a sense of] presumed mutual responsibility." Members can contact the community's care coordinator to arrange for help with "grocery shopping, meal preparation, visiting, accompanying a neighbor on physician visits, dog walking, and even personal care." Community members feel safe and cared for. They report an increase in healthy meals, exercise, laughter, excitement, and energy. Members expressed remorse over a lack of a shared vision and common goal the community was working toward collectively. This distinguishes most cohousing communities from Intentional Jewish Communities and urban kibbutzim.

According to the research of Anne P. Glass, at Parkside, resident participation is a community hallmark, and the community is run by committees. Shared meals and the Common House provide a sense of cohesiveness. Communal activities include gatherings, meditation, forums, work days, and trips. Members provide one another with rides to the airport. There is a

men's breakfast club for the minority of male residents. Community members complain about a lack of privacy but are satisfied with "the sense of community and mutual support," indicating there is a trade-off of privacy for the benefit of community. Both owners and renters live in Parkside, and government funding subsidizes a number of the rental units. There is some dissatisfaction over a sense that some residents are "takers and not givers" (an estimated 20% of Parkside's population), and "laws related to Fair Housing made it impossible for Parkside to require resident commitment to participating in a meaningful way in community life." The community anticipates future challenges in the need to attract younger residents as current residents become older and less able. 97% of residents would recommend elder cohousing to other people their age. The community's researcher observes that "The culture that has developed at Parkside offers a significant alternative compared to the lives tinged with loneliness and isolation."[123]

In an in-depth study of the effects of cohousing on mental health and wellbeing, researchers found that the benefits of senior cohousing included social support, an active lifestyle that combatted social isolation and loneliness, an increased sense of community (though this could also "be a source of struggle and fatigue to maintain it"), an increased sense of security, and positive health outcomes – both physical and mental.[124]

Decentralized Communities

On the Hakhel Intentional Communities tour in February of 2022, those of us on the tour visited a town in the north of Israel that showcased a model of community and communal living that I think of as a "decentralized urban kibbutz." In the town of Migdal Ha Emek, a community has formed where members do not live in a house or apartment or even small neighborhood

together. Instead, the city itself is their shared space. Via a community WhatsApp groups, community members otherwise function as an urban kibbutz: they care for one another; share meals, resources, and responsibilities; celebrate holidays; raise their children; and care for their elderly, communally. As I turned to the North American landscape for a similar model that functions in the U.S., I came across ChaiVillage in Los Angeles.

ChaiVillageLA, a partnership between two synagogues, is a community of over 220 members, each living in their own home or apartment, that is organized virtually for in-person community across the city. The community engages together in events and programs including weekly walks, a short story group, movies, games, and healthy living programs. The community's Jewish celebrations include an annual Passover Seder, clergy-led learning, a Sukkot celebration, new member welcome events, and an 80's + group. Additionally, like the urban kibbutzim in Israel and Intentional Jewish Communities internationally, ChaiVillage is a mission-driven community that gives back to community members via meal deliveries, check-in calls, "friendly visits," and technology assistance.[125] ChaiVillageLA identifies as "part of the rapidly growing Village Movement," noting that:

> it's not a place; it's a virtual community led by older adults who share their optimism, skills, support and expertise with each other to navigate the challenges and opportunities of aging. ChaiVillageLA is the first synagogue-based Village in the country, a bold partnership of two reform synagogues--Temple Emanuel and Temple Isaiah--to challenge their congregants to rethink their paradigms of aging and empower them to use their accumulated experience, talents, wisdom and optimism to build a community of respect, support, caring and joy. Being a synagogue-based Village, ChaiVillageLA aligns itself

with the values of its temples, the Reform Movement and the wider Jewish community.[126]

While ChaiVillage is an elder community, it serves as a model of a decentralized "village." ChaiVillage empowers members to deepen community, combats loneliness, creates a community of care, shares resources and responsibilities, lives together (in a decentralized manner) in Jewish time, and gives back to the community through a mission-driven component. This is a replicable model that likely has a greater potential for scalability than a residential urban kibbutz given the challenges of capital, land, and zoning laws in the U.S. today.

Habonim Dror Jewish Youth Movement & Other Informal Jewish Communities

In my informal research (over one hundred one-on-one conversations with community builders in the U.S., Israel, and Mexico) I have discovered several Jewish intentional communities, including:

- Current and former shared living arrangements among members of the Habonim Dror youth movement. The two I encountered in my research were a former community located in New York City and a planned community located in Southern California. The members of these communities noted that other members of their movement are also living in similar situations. These communities featured shared apartments or houses – more of a roommate model with bedrooms being private and common areas such as the living room and kitchen being shared, but were distinguishable from a roommate living arrangement in that the group came from a shared origin of the youth movement and had shared values about the intentional community aspect of their shared living. Some members of these communities go on to eventually make

Aliyah to Israel, and if they continue living communally beyond their 20s, they typically do so in Israeli urban kibbutzim.[127].

The communities identified in my informal research tend to attract young adults and seem unlikely to be sustainable as young adults marry and/or have children. As I look to Israel's thriving urban kibbutz movement, to its intergenerationality, to the ways it has adapted to the needs of young families, I see that examples of similar Jewish communities in the U.S. are almost nonexistent, though many parallelisms exist between Israeli urban kibbutzim and American cohousing communities.

Intentional Jewish Communities & Kibbutz and Moshav-Inspired Jewish Cohousing

"An Intentional Community is a small and non-hierarchal group of people who have consciously decided to live together spatially and temporally around a shared purpose. In this sense, an intentional community can serve as a framework for both individual growth and moral behavior, as well as give people the opportunity to work collaboratively to make the world a better place. To become the better version of themselves."[128] Intentional Jewish Communities exist across the globe, and Hakhel,[129] Adamah's Jewish Intentional Communities Incubator, is an organization that exists to help people across the globe built these intentional Jewish communities. Urban kibbutzim are considered a subset of Intentional Communities in Israel that can inform what an American Jewish urban kibbutz movement might look like.

The Hakhel Intentional Communities movement boasts several communal living communities in the U.S. While I have not studied these in-depth, they include Urban Kibbutz in San Diego, Frum Farm in Colorado, K'far D.C., Boston Moshav, Kibbutz Detropia in Detroit, Brooklyn Moshav, and Moshav Derekh Shalom in Lancaster, PA.[130] When I attended the Hakhel

Intentional Communities Conference in Jerusalem in 2022, most of these communities were either in formation (typically in the visioning stage) or had tried to launch and failed. Only two functioning Jewish communal projects were operational in the Hakhel network at that time – The Living Tree Alliance in Vermont and a self-identified urban kibbutz in Seattle that is not listed on Hakhel's website. The former is discussed above; the latter was a family-owned home where people lived together in Jewish time, each with their own room and sharing common spaces, similar to the Habonim Dror collectives.

The only official extant Jewish commune in the U.S. is the Living Tree Alliance in Vermont, a "kibbutz-inspired community."[131] The Village currently is home to three families[132] and is approved for seven residences, a common house, and workshop on three of the community's 91 acres of land.[133] The moshav-inspired Jewish cohousing project Berkeley Moshav is in development in Berkeley, California, featuring "over 8,700 sf of shared space, including a large courtyard and garden, a spacious rooftop terrace with views of the San Francisco bay and Berkeley hills, as well as an indoor kids play area, art room and gym."[134]

"Mommunes" and Christian Communal Living Models

Other models of communal living are emerging in the U.S. as well. "Momunes" are communities of single mothers living and raising their children together.[135] Churches have extant cohousing communities throughout the U.S., own a significant amount of U.S. land, and are proposing urban housing developments for intentional communities with the church as the community's religious and physical center, including a 2023 proposal in Detroit.[136] The emergence of communal living in these secular and religious spheres evidences a growing American trend toward communal living and offers models outside of both cohousing and urban

kibbutzim that an American urban kibbutz movement can draw upon when considering the question of how to build an American urban kibbutz movement.

Orthodox Jewish Community

In my research, one of the most common responses I get when I tell people that I want to build an urban kibbutz movement and what that means to me is, "the Orthodox are already doing this," and I think they are correct. Liberal Judaism has much to learn from the Orthodox in terms of hyperlocal communities where members know their neighbors, care for one another, share resources and responsibilities, and live together in Jewish time. They often contain gemachs – lending collectives for everything from wedding dresses to medical equipment to baby gear and beyond. Orthodoxy ranges from Modern Orthodoxy to Ultra-Orthodoxy, with many degrees of observance and insularity in-between them, and with many micro communities and sects within them. These communities boast the benefits of "families who share your culture, who help each other with childcare, who celebrate holidays together and assist in hard times."[137]

In his research into the Orthodox community of the Beverly-La Brea neighborhood of Los Angeles, CA, ethnographer Iddo Tavory observes that the communal ties (and incidental benefits) of living in this community include:

- A "'thickness' of communal experience" that includes shared education, volunteering, and religious commonality.[138]
- "[M]ultiple network ties bringing people together within [a] circumscribed space, coalescing the Orthodox neighborhood, and transforming it from a geographically delineated area into a buzzing hub of activity."[139]
- A sense that one is *needed*, which inspires people to show up.[140]

- A culture of hospitality – and specifically of inviting one another to Shabbat meals – that is non-hierarchical, non-reciprocal, intergenerational, and beyond the bounds of age, life stage, or relationship. ("[R]etirees, single people who had moved from elsewhere, young married couples who didn't yet have children, or visitors to Los Angeles who happened to come to the synagogue were all invariably invited.")[141]
- Being bound by ritual, religious observance, narrative structures, predictability, patterns, and meaning. ("Meaning is not only mobilized in interaction: it is invoked, negotiated, and shapes the ways in which actors become part of a shared world.")[142]

"Any social self emerges and congeals in action and interaction… people have to work to sustain interaction," and the community navigates these actions and interactions through a shared sense of meaning-making.[143] Orthodox communities understand not only what it takes to build and sustain meaningful community, but also how to build a shared world through meaning-making that shapes the lives of that community. The Orthodox model can be drawn upon to inform what other intentional Jewish communities in America could look like.

Resources for Building Intentional Communities

Several resources exist for helping people to buy, rent, and implement cooperative living and affordable housing in America today. People-Centered Housing provides "affordable community living that fosters human connection, social justice, and sustainability."[144] "UHAB empowers low- to moderate-income residents to take control of their housing and enhance communities by creating strong tenant associations and lasting affordable co-ops."[145] A proposed law in NYC could enable renters to buy their buildings.[146] Livework Denver "exist[s] to empower people to live in communities that matter to them."[147] Several development firms

specialize in cohousing across the U.S.[148] The Foundation for Intentional Community offers a "Communiversary" that regularly offers workshops & webinars, hosts a podcast, and publishes books and articles that teach people about every aspect of community building and communal living,[149], and Supernuclear, the substack run by the founders of Radish (profiled above), offers a newsletter that teaches "how to live near (and with) friends."[150] While there are individual (often local) organizations and developers that help people to build cohousing, the available resources are nonetheless limited. It is no small feat to try to build a non-nuclear family model in a country so deeply shaped by the structure of the nuclear family. It is no small feat to try to build a communal living project in an increasingly individualized America. And it is no small feat to work to share resources and care for the common/greater good in a society so shaped by its relationship to both individualism and (late-stage) Capitalism. An individual or community that seeks to create a cohousing or other communal living model in America today faces significant barriers, from zoning laws to available space to capital and beyond.

ANALYSIS

Despite the fact that only one official kibbutz-inspired American Jewish community exists today and only one American moshav is in development, those interested in building a specifically *Jewish* communal living movement – an urban kibbutz movement – in America today can draw heavily on the larger American cohousing movement (just as the Living Tree Alliance and Berkeley Moshav have) as well as other secular communal housing and non-residential living communities.

What can be learned from the American cohousing and communal living movement is that there is a plethora of successful models available for those seeking to live communally.

American communal living is not a one-size-fits-all model. Home ownership, rentals, and hybrid models are all available. Housing can be made financially accessible by way of communities partnering with the government to offer low-income housing for a percentage of a community's units, though this 1) limits the ability to focus on building a community of shared values, and 2) fails to address the significant gap between low-income residents and moderate- to high-income residents. Members of the working- and lower-middle class are left struggling to stay afloat, which, of course, is reflective of the larger American economic landscape today, though that is the subject of another paper. In addition to cohousing and similar models of communal living, Jewish organizations and funders can look to Christian communal living projects and other ad-hoc movements like "Mommunes" for a sense of what is possible: religious institutions can invest in communal housing with places of worship and religious community at their center, and those who need support and suffer loneliness do not have to live this life or bear their burdens alone. Resources can be shared. Children can be raised communally. People who are not related can live together, building their own urban villages to combat society's ills. And those seeking to build communal living can find resources – if limited – via organizations and developers who specialize in communal living and co-buying. From financing to legal aid to those with the knowledge and ability to actually build communal housing, the resources are out there.

In the specifically Jewish realm, Liberal Jews have much to learn from the Orthodox: how to create a thickness of communal experience; creating a sense that one is *needed* in the community; a focus on hospitality that creates heightened levels of togetherness; how to sustain interaction; and what it means to be communally bound by ritual, religious observance, narrative structures, predictability, patterns, and shared meaning. On the other end of the spectrum of religious observance, Zionist youth movements such as Habonim Dror showcase what's possible

when starting from a place of shared experience that prioritizes communal ties, and how that can lead to strong bonds and Jewish communal living. Hakhel, the international Intentional Jewish Communities movement, provides resources for those who wish to build communities that share resources and responsibilities while living together in Jewish time. And, while not the subject of this landscape scan, with over 250 communities thriving today, Israel's urban kibbutz movement serves as a significant model for building an American urban kibbutz movement. It certainly served as the inspiration for this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE: BLUEPRINT

BLUEPRINT

"If you build it, they will come."

- Field of Dreams

"There is only one solution:
to make the people co-architects of their own destiny,
to get them to build something together…"

- Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Z"L

It is not insignificant that when I was completing this thesis, the weekly Torah portion was *Parshat Terumah*. The building of the *mishkan*. Where the wandering Hebrews gave of themselves and built their holy Jewish communal center together. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks teaches:

> The building of the Tabernacle was the first great project the Israelites undertook together. It involved their generosity and skill… It conferred on them the dignity of labour and creative endeavour. It brought to closure their birth as a nation and it symbolised the challenge of the future. The society they were summoned to create in the land of Israel would be one in which everyone would play their part. It was to become… "the home we build together."[151]

It is in this spirit that I offer the following blueprint for building an urban kibbutz movement in America. May it be something we build together.

The basic building blocks of an urban kibbutz are:

- An Intentional Community
- A Shared Vision
- Shared Resources & Responsibilities
- Shared Space
- Mission-Driven

In this blueprint I will look at each of these building blocks in turn, reflecting on what each of these components entails, what is necessary to build each, and possible variations within each.

Intentional Community

By "intentional community" I mean a group of people that has chosen to buy into the shared endeavor of the urban kibbutz. A community of people who have agreed to share resources and responsibilities, who share a vision, who are committed to the work of building and maintaining a shared space, who are committed to working together to fulfill the community's mission. This intentional community will sublimate individualism for the sense of the community and be dedicated to the greater good of both the community and its larger urban locale. This does not mean, in an American context, that the community must have a socialist economic structure or a communist ownership structure like the historical Israeli kibbutzim or like some of the contemporary urban kibbutzim in Israel. Instead, this is about knowing that community is hard work, and that it is not without its frustrations. But an intentional community believes that the benefits of communal living far outweigh the costs, and is committed to the community accordingly.

What does it take to build an intentional community? As was explored in the Literature Review, the Jewish-advised Gather Consulting leadership consulting firm suggests that community-building begins with three questions: 1) What is my community and what makes me define my community this way? 2) What do I want my community to be and who am I missing in my community? 3) How do I get there from here?[152] Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum, who built the kibbutz-inspired non-residential community Kavana in Seattle, showcases a "getting from here to there" community-building approach that involves 1) weaving a tight web of community in order

to create a sense of extended family, 2) empowering participants by turning them into "producers" rather than consumers of their own Jewish experiences, and 3) building a pluralistic community for adults and families that features multiple entry points to Jewish life and could support a wide range of Jewish practice and engagement.[153]

So, how do you actually do this? I have been turning this question over and over like Torah for the past five-and-a-half years, and I don't have a simple answer. I think that an urban kibbutz, whether residential or deconstructed, need to be hyper-local. You can't share childcare and grocery shopping and cooking responsibilities if you live 45-minutes away from your community members. In a city like Brooklyn, where I live, it can easily take 45 minutes or longer just to get from one part of town to another. To build even a deconstructed urban kibbutz in my own backyard in Brooklyn, I would need to identify my hyper-local Jewish community, and that is no small feat in a part of town that has zero synagogues, zero JCCs, no regular Jewish programming, and when we are living in a time of significantly increased antisemitism that makes it outright dangerous to publicly post Jewish-oriented invitations. The brick wall across the street from where I sit writing this thesis has "FREE PALESTINE" sprayed on it in huge red letters. I have lived in my neighborhood for a year-and-a-half, and I have not identified any Jewish community living nearby. It's not that they're not here; it's that I don't know how to find them.

One of the big questions in building an urban kibbutz movement is: Which comes first – the community or the space? There are pros and cons to each approach. You can build the community first, and then the community can build the kibbutz together. This is how it works in Israel's urban kibbutz movement. And generally how it works in American cohousing. But building community first and securing the space second takes longer. In most cases, *a lot* longer.

Starting with a space and then filling it with community – as was the case in Eastern Village, profiled below – can be a faster process, though you have less control over – and possibly less cohesion within – the community. And it can be harder to create a shared communal vision. Within the emergent Jewish cohousing movement, both the Living Tree Alliance and Berkeley Moshav started with a space and then worked to fill it, but it is notable that neither of them has reached capacity of membership, even years into their projects. The best path forward is not clear, but whether to start by building the community or the space should be an early consideration for urban kibbutz builders.

Shared Vision, Including Shared Resources & Responsibilities

The community that comprises the urban kibbutz must have a shared vision. What does it mean to live together in Jewish time? What will Shabbat look like? Holidays? Life cycle events? How pluralistic will the community be? What will be its relationship to *halacha* and *kashrut*? In communal spaces? In individual apartments? What will be the guiding principles of meals prepared in shared spaces? How will the community share responsibilities from grocery shopping to meal preparation to child and elder care to cleaning and chores? Will the kibbutz sell a product, and how will the proceeds from the sale of that product go back into the community and be shared? How will the community ensure time is spent together? How will decisions be made – small and large? What happens when someone wants to move in our out? What kind of ownership, rental, or hybrid model will be in place? What does it mean to be a "Jewish" community? Does one need to be Jewish to live there? In a Jewish+ family? Simply committed to living in Jewish time and space? What will the community's mission be? How will it give back to the larger community?

These are some – but by no means all – of the questions that I have asked and been asked during my years of research. The answer is that each community must wrestle with these questions on their own, arrive at their own guiding principles and bottom lines, and form a shared vision together. That can be harder to do if the space is built first and the community comes after. In that case, founders want to establish a kind of a charter that contains their own vision and bottom lines, and that anyone moving in agrees to uphold. It does not matter what the shared vision is, only that the community is on the same page about what *their unique* shared vision entails.

Shared Space

There are different ways to go about creating a shared space for intentional community, which I will delineate in the following sections. Namely, one can:

- Find a Building
- Bring Friends Into a Neighborhood
- Build From Scratch
- Retrofit
- Modify a Single-Family Home or Multi-Family Unit
- Build a Decentralized Kibbutz

In my own vision, the ideal shared space for an urban kibbutz is modeled after Kibbutz Mishol in Israel: an apartment building housing several individual or family units in their own apartments, with communal spaces throughout the building for shared meals, cooking, and gathering. This could be as few as two or three individual apartments (assuming the inhabitants share a vision, resources, and other elements of intentional community), though according to

Kellie Teter, a cohousing expert at Hearthstone Housing, a cohousing community in Denver Colorado, the "sweet spot" for cohousing is 33 units. Why? Because it ensures that the community is small enough to know one another but large enough to allow for some privacy.[154]

Finding a Building

A shared apartment building is easier to establish if the community or the founders have access to an empty apartment building, which is hard to come by in urban America today. It is not impossible, however. If you are reading this and you are in real estate and can help connect founders with available apartment buildings – particularly ones that can be modified to include communal spaces – I hope that you will become an active part of this movement. We need you. Another possible inroad to a shared apartment building is for a founding family/unit to make other community members aware when an apartment becomes available in their building, and slowly move the community in one unit at a time. This, of course, can take years; building a cohousing unit from scratch will likely take even longer.

Bringing Friends Into a Neighborhood

An alternative to finding a shared space in a single building is to create a shared space in a geographic locality – an urban kibbutz *eruv*, if you will. Not sharing a home or apartment building, but simply *living near your people*. I will go into greater depth about this "decentralized urban kibbutz" model in the next section, but as we are thinking about how to find a space for living together in intentional community, I want to highlight how to "live near friends" (what I am conceiving of as building a decentralized intentional community) and the benefits of this model.

In an article about how to live near friends, a woman named Priya reflected that she lives in New York City and that twenty-two of her friends live within walking distance of her. She and her husband built this hyper-local community intentionally and methodically, via the following strategy:

- They host regularly. She and her husband have hosted a weekly dinner party for over a year. This has resulted in their friends becoming familiar with – and falling in love with – their neighborhood. By getting to know one another over the course of these dinners, the couple's friends became friends with one another, and when they decided to move to the neighborhood, they were moving to live near an expanding community of *their* friends.
- The couple enabled short-term stays. The couple rented an apartment with an extra bedroom that enabled them to sublet their extra room to friends curious about living in the neighborhood.
- The couple helped their friends get leases. Priya set up Zillow and Craigslist alerts for openings in the neighborhood, forwarded listings to friends she knew were looking, and posted in the expanding group chat she and her husband created for the community they were building. "If a friend expresses interest in the unit," Priya reflects, "I schedule a tour myself. Then tell them 'I'm seeing the unit tomorrow at 3 pm if you want to join.' (Yes, I know that might seem crazy. But also remember: I live near 22 friends, and my life is awesome)… If my friend doesn't attend the tour, I take a video of the unit and ask the landlord lots of questions. Then I pass on the information to my friend."

- The couple engaged in "roommate matchmaking." Priya notes that most of her friends are in their 20s and 30s and interested in living with roommates. So if they know two or more people looking for roommates, they matchmake them with one another.
- The couple makes friends nearby. Priya reflects that a friend of hers made a WhatsApp group for her apartment building and put up flyers advertising the group. Priya herself has made friends by organizing a neighborhood trash pickup and at her local coffee shop.
- In time, Priya's community building efforts have had what she refers to as "a flywheel effect." "Once you reach a critical mass," she observes, "your neighborhood will have a magnetic pull on everyone in your orbit. While we're at 23 people today (including me), I expect 100 people in our social scene living nearby in one year. (And one day, I expect 1000 people)."
- Reflecting on what it's like to live near friends, Priya says, "Living near friends has enhanced almost every aspect of my life. My social life feels abundant and frictionless. It's easy to stay in shape by joining friends for their workouts. And I can co-work any day of the week with ease. If you want to live near your friends, it's so worth it. DO IT."[155]

The benefits of living near friends are manifold. In research undertaken by Supernuclear, the substack run by the founders of Radish (profiled in the Landscape Scan) teaches "how to live near (and with) friends." In their research,[156] the team behind Supernuclear relied heavily on the Framingham Heart Study, which found that "happiness… is not merely a function of individual experience or individual choice but is also a property of groups of people.

Indeed, changes in individual happiness can ripple through social networks and generate large scale structure in the network, giving rise to clusters of happy and unhappy individuals."[157] Supernuclear found that:

- "Nearby friends make you happy, the closer the better." Having a friend who lives within one mile of you increases happiness by 25%, and within ¼ mile by over 40%. At Radish, the team found that those who live within a 5-minute walk of the community will stop by unprompted, increasing the thickness of the community. On the other end of the spectrum, "The frequency of face-to-face encounters starts to decline once the distance between friends or relatives reaches five miles."
- Echoing what we saw in the Landscape Scan, living communally makes older adults happier than living alone.
- Longevity increases among those with stronger social relationships.[158]

The benefits of living near friends are well established, and when you are living in intentional community, you are living near friends. It may not start out that way, but this is what living in intentional community means. Living with people you care about and care for, people you share meals and celebrate holidays with. Your community members become your friends. I have offered here a blueprint of how to live near friends by encouraging them to move to your hyper-local neighborhood. Alternatively, you can identify likeminded people that already live nearby. While this method has its own challenges, as outlined above, those challenges are not insurmountable. How that hyperlocal community serves as a "deconstructed urban kibbutz" is addressed in a later section.

Building from Scratch

One pathway to shared space is to actually physically build it. Or, rather, to hire a developer – particularly one that specializes in cohousing – to do so. This is by far the most expensive and time-consuming path toward building an urban kibbutz, and for these reasons I am wary of this approach. But this is the traditional path for American cohousing projects, and if the founders of an urban kibbutz have the means and the patience to go this route, there are many benefits, including choosing where the kibbutz is located, designing individual units to meet the needs of those who will live in them, and ensuring that communal space is built in from the outset. A custom kibbutz designed and built to serve the needs of the community is ideal in terms of the finished product, though the process to the move-in date, if it starts with building community, can take upwards of ten years.

Retrofitting

On the other end of the spectrum is the retrofitting approach. As Judith Shulevitz wrote while profiling the D.C. cohousing community Eastern Village, "If co-housing didn't have to be handcrafted… maybe it could be scaled up. And this seems the moment to think about how."[159] In other words, building cohousing from scratch is expensive and time-consuming and therefore not necessarily scalable. But retrofitting – an approach to cohousing that doesn't have to be "handcrafted" – has greater potential for scalability – and this is a moment in American history that is ripe for thinking about how to scale cohousing.

In the model Shulevitz profiled, the project was developer-led. The developer retrofitted an existing building that bore a layout that was suitable for cohousing (with parking at the periphery, bearing a central pedestrian space that the living units face onto),[160] then partnered

with a cohousing community-building expert that did the work of building the community, populating the building with community members, and teaching them how to live together.[161]

I had the opportunity to interview both Don Tucker, the developer behind Eastern Village, and Ann Zabaldo, the cohousing specialist Don partnered with on this project who led the project's community-building. Key insights gained from Don and Ann include:

- The retrofitting approach can take as little as two years from inception to move-in: One year from finding a site to construction, during which time the planning, financing, and land acquisition are carried out. Then one year of construction. During these two years 80% of the units must be presold to qualified buyers "who have skin in the game." (Preselling means community members make a deposit that helps pay for some of the front-end costs, architectural fees, etc. The deposit can be up to $25K per person. The goal is to have skin in the game. Those members that make a deposit can then contribute to the design and customization of their units, with upgrades available for and extra cost.)
- Ann formed the marketing team. They were responsible for sales, and there were no sales commissions. The early buyers who did a lot of the heavy lifting, such as attending zoning meetings, received substantial discounts, and the final 20 units were sold at full market value. In other words, the market buyers subsidized the early buyers who did a lot of the work.
- When he worked on Eastern Village, Don was able to keep 50% of the units as affordable housing, which is a specialty of Don's as a developer. Today, because of changes to the affordable housing market, he thinks he could plan and execute a cohousing development with 20% affordable housing units.

- You are not a cohousing group until you have a site. Find the site and then organize the group around the site.
- Eastern Village was originally an abandoned office building. It met the cohousing diagram architecturally. There was parking on the periphery, and the units all faced a pedestrian space that was designed to maximize interaction. The property was a U-shaped building with a parking lot in the middle. There was also a county parking lot behind the building that Eastern Village could connect to (presumably for a monthly fee) so the developers didn't have to build parking – they could lease it from the facility and turn the parking lot at the center of the courtyard into a garden and pedestrian area with a common house at the back.
- Cohousing is not something a lot of developers are willing to do. Many office buildings are more expensive to convert than to tear down and build anew. Eastern Village was an exception because it had originally been designed to be residential – though in the end it was built as commercial. There will be more office buildings that are convertible, however, you need to find one that meets the cohousing diagram: parking at the periphery and a central pedestrian space that the units face onto. These exist, but they are rare.
- Don built two cohousing communities, and he won't do it again. Cohousing developers believe in the vision of community; they don't earn much from these projects: his profit target (and earned profit) for cohousing was 12%, while that for a typical condo is 20%.

- There is government money available for upgrading housing for energy efficiency for low- and medium-income housing. There is some money available for newly built housing.
- Zoning is a big problem. [Don and Ann did not elaborate on this point, but the Foundation for Intentional Community notes that "zoning is perhaps the most pernicious obstacle to intentional community formation," elaborating that "zoning poses obvious challenges to cohousing communities, which tend to cluster homes in ways that defy density maximums, setback requirements, and parking minimums. Since cohousing is neither exactly single-family housing nor exactly multi-family housing, it resides in a legal 'no-man's land.' Common houses may also fall outside the list of structures permitted by zoning."][162]
- In order to build/retrofit cohousing, the community/founders need to have private financing streams available, such as third-party financers. The cost of homes today "is crazy. It's not impossible, but it is really difficult to do affordable housing."
- Ann recommends looking for a developer whose field is affordable housing and/or green/sustainable housing (not greenwashed).
- If you build affordable housing and you get municipal grants for that, then you are faced with a lottery: you can't choose the people who come into the community. Find a developer that can finesse this. Otherwise, it doesn't work for a group to work for years and then not have control over the community. There are affordable housing developers who build other than affordable housing, who are used to working with groups of people who are their potential buyers. This benefits the community component, but at the expense of the affordability component.

When considering available spaces to retrofit, in addition to office spaces[163] and apartment buildings, builders might want to consider abandoned schools,[164] retirement homes, mental institutions, colleges, camps, and boarding schools, including the American Hebrew Academy.

Modifying a Single-Family Home or Multi-Family Unit

A shared apartment building – large or small – is by no means the only option for shared space for an urban kibbutz. An urban kibbutz can be members sharing a family home with private bedrooms, or a multi-family unit, such as the urban kibbutzim of the Habonim Dror youth movement, the unnamed kibbutz I heard of in Seattle, or The Village in San Francisco, profiled above. The downside to the family home model is that it is hard for families to have only bedrooms to themselves, rather than entire apartments. The appeal of Kibbutz Mishol is the balance of community and autonomy: having your own apartment, knowing your neighbors, and having communal spaces to gather with them, all in your own apartment building, is the ideal model for the American Jewish landscape if we are seeking to serve those beyond the young adult life stage. The Village in San Francisco, profiled in the Landscape Scan, gets slightly closer to the necessary balance of autonomy and community, with each unit in the three-floor/three-unit layout having its own living room, kitchen, and bathroom, but this is still asking for a greater tradeoff of community versus autonomy that is a harder sell especially for families.

Building a Decentralized Kibbutz

Perhaps the easiest, most cost-effective, and quickest form of shared space available in the urban kibbutz movement is the decentralized kibbutz model. Looking to the Israeli

community in Migdal Ha Emek, ChaiVillageLA, and Orthodox neighborhoods, as models, this approach takes the benefits of urban kibbutzim: consistent, intentional community where the members are in real relationship, sharing responsibilities and benefits, sharing grocery shopping and cooking and meals, having Shabbat meals and celebrating Jewish holidays and lifecycle events together, and creating a community of care, without having to overcome the hurdle of finding, building, or retrofitting a space to serve the community's needs. In these decentralized kibbutzim, ideally, community members live a walkable distance from one another (within a mile radius, let's say), communicate via a WhatsApp group, etc., share needs when they arise, have committee members that oversee the running of both ongoing and one-off community needs and programs, and essentially live in an urban village together.

Downsides include:

- The difficulty of finding community members that live within the one-mile radius of the community
- The fact that children in an urban locale like New York City, for example, can't simply walk out the door of the apartment to their friend's apartment, so a higher level of parent involvement and coordination is required
- The community will almost certainly be bereft of communal spaces (though partnership with local synagogues, JCCs, etc. could be a potential solution), and instead members will have to have a system of revolving hosting, which limits the size of gatherings and the ability for the entire community to gather
- The simple fact that it's not the same to live down the street or a mile away from your village as it is to live in the same building.

It's not the same as sharing an apartment building, but it is not only possible, it is both achievable and scalable, and the benefits are manifold. To build a decentralized urban kibbutz, I recommend partnering with a community organizer, or even working with a local synagogue or JCC to serve this function.

What's Scalable?

Multiple models for communal living exist in America today. But the grassroots, built-from-the-ground-up model of traditional cohousing that can take a decade to launch, and the modifying-nuclear-family-built-homes to accommodate communal living models of Habonim Dror and many of the Cooperative Housing Communities profiled above, largely fail to serve as scalable models. There is unlikely to be a movement of Jews across America entering into communal housing plans that will take ten years to move into or giving up their private home or apartment to live like roommates in a college dorm. The two most scalable models for an American urban kibbutz movement are the developer-led retrofitting approach of Eastern Village and the decentralized urban kibbutz. These models take the shortest amount of time to launch, with the least capital up-front, and preserve the greatest autonomy while building intentional community.

Mission-Driven

The primary component that distinguishes urban kibbutzim from cohousing communities and other forms of communal housing in America is that urban kibbutz members are bound by a shared mission, a way in which they give back to their larger local communities. In the Israeli urban kibbutz movement, my research has revealed that many communities are "educators'

kibbutzim," and the way that they give back is through education. In an American urban kibbutz movement such "giving back" could certainly be through volunteering – running soup kitchens and food pantries, growing urban farms and donating a share of the produce to fight local food insecurity, volunteering at homeless shelters, elderly homes, youth programs, etc. But there is also a uniquely Jewish pathway to giving back in an American context. These urban kibbutzim could serve the larger local Jewish community by putting on educational programs, serving as lay leaders in synagogues and JCCs, hosting communal Jewish events and holidays in the kibbutz's communal space, and doing as Kibbutz Mishol does – helping other emergent American kibbutzim to form, launch, and sustain themselves. A locale like Denver, for example, has had a significant influx in its Jewish population in recent years, and boasts a number of Jewish legacy institutions, but far fewer innovative non-institutional Jewish programs and organizations. An urban kibbutz in Denver could launch a new Jewish Emergent network shul, build in a neighborhood that has lots of young families but is outside the geographical reach of the extant offerings, partner with PJ Library[165] to offer programs for young families, build the next Lehrhaus[166] [167], and more.

As the larger American Jewish landscape increasingly shifts toward innovative models of Jewish community, urban kibbutzim could serve as the Jewish professional workforce to meet this emergent need. To some extent this is already happening in the Jewish institutional world. Some synagogues have lots of Jewish professionals, and many of them live near one another. There is a continuum of intentionality and geographic proximity in the current non-Orthodox world that could be expanded and capitalized upon within an American urban kibbutz movement.

Why do intentional Jewish communities need to be mission-driven? Firstly, this is integral to the nature of intentional communities: "An Intentional Community is a small and non-hierarchal group of people who have consciously decided to live together spatially and temporally around a shared purpose… an intentional community can serve as a framework for both individual growth and moral behavior, as well as give people the opportunity to work collaboratively to make the world a better place."[168] The mission-driven component becomes the tie that binds community members together and is a necessary balance to the interpersonal dynamics of the community. As Kibbutz Mishol cofounder James Grant-Rosenhead observes:

> [Having an] external focus gives [community members] the passion and strength to be able to cope with the internal interpersonal dynamics of community building and vice versa. The inter-communal dynamics of community helps strengthen [members] in [their] external missionary work to build more communities. That division of labor between the internal and the external ultimately is what provides [members with] the balance that [they] need to create something sustainable. If it's too insular, it's not sustainable. If [it's too focused on the external], then it's also not sustainable. There needs to be both.[169]

Berkeley Moshav, for example, is not an urban kibbutz because it lacks this mission-driven component. While providing me with mentorship during the period of my research, Berkeley Moshav founder Roger Studley noted that the work of building the physical space and the community are hurdles enough without adding the mission-driven component, though it remains to be seen whether the community will have the glue needed to hold it together over time without this. Is living together Jewishly enough of a shared mission? The answer may be yes. In fact, I hope that it is – I would love nothing more than to see Berkeley Moshav thrive for decades to come. But what makes an urban kibbutz an urban kibbutz as opposed to a moshav – a

Jewish bent on the normative cohousing model – is having this mission-driven component, which not only binds community members together, but also offers a sense of meaning and purpose that many Americans are in search of today.[170]

Considerations for Funders and Jewish Organizations

The basic building blocks of an urban kibbutz are an intentional community with a shared vision, including shared resources and responsibilities, and shared space that is mission-driven. However, there are other considerations when seeking to translate Israel's urban kibbutz movement into something that will work in the North American Jewish community. Some of these are particularly relevant to funders and Jewish organizations.

The first is the role of philanthropy. No Jewish nonprofit organization in America today exists or is sustained without significant philanthropic support. In a 2022 qualitative research study that I conducted on innovative Jewish organizations in America today, in which I studied Hakhel, OneTable, the OpenDor Project, Base, Avodah, the Office of Innovation, Moishe House, and Honeymoon Israel, "participants emphasized the critical role of funding at every stage of organizational life, and this research indicated that innovative Jewish nonprofit organizations would likely cease to exist without philanthropic dollars."[171] When thinking about funding urban kibbutzim, Jewish philanthropists may want to think outside the traditional funding models for Jewish nonprofits, considering how they could make an impact via venture philanthropy and impact investment.[172]

While individual urban kibbutzim may run as for-profit models that sell a product to sustain the community, a larger centralized urban kibbutz movement would likely need to function as a nonprofit organization that would depend on philanthropic support. Urban

kibbutzim could, of course, pop up organically, but a centralized movement would benefit from being supported and run by a nonprofit umbrella organization. The role of philanthropy will also be crucial in building individual urban kibbutzim, especially when seeking to diversify the populations that are able to live within them. If one wants to build a *Jewish* urban kibbutz, one may not be able to utilize affordable housing. Were Jewish philanthropy, as opposed to the government, to offset the costs of a number of units in each building in order to make them affordable, these hurdles would be overcome, and there would be the added benefit that this housing would become accessible not only to low-income community members, but to working-class and lower-middle-class Jews and Jewish+ folks. Funders could provide initial capital for projects, even working on an interest-free loan as opposed to a donation model, thereby empowering kibbutz founders to build without initial capital being a hurdle. Funders could make communities accessible – enabling urban kibbutzim to be diverse economically, ethnically, across gender and ability level, across the rainbow of sexual orientation, to Jews of Color, and beyond – in a way that these communities would not be able to do if reliant upon the traditional cohousing model, a model that prioritizes middle- and upper-middle-class participation due to financial constraints. If accessibility, broadening the Big Tent of Judaism, reaching those "on the fringes," "bringing in" the unaffiliated, and a commitment to DEI are the goals of today's Jewish funders, investing in the urban kibbutz movement is a significant way to meet these goals.

The second consideration I want to lift up in this section is the importance of intergenerationality and the danger of building for and supporting young adults alone. In my 2022 study, my primary finding was that an outsized philanthropic and institutional focus on young adults was having the unintended consequence of leaving vast segments of the American

Jewish population unserved and without the Jewish community, programming, and spiritual homes they were seeking.[173]

The outsized focus of funders and of innovative Jewish organizations on serving young Jewish adults has serious implications for those who are beyond this life stage – including older Millennials, members of Gen-X, parents of young children, and America's significant aging population – leaving these populations underserved. Interviewees observed that, while they hope those they serve will go on to find extant spiritual homes after graduating from their innovative offerings, they are noticing that most are not finding their spiritual homes beyond what these young-adult-focused communities provide. "People who are thinking about religious life differently in America and seeking spirituality also continue to get older," observed one interviewee. Each of the interviewees indicated a clear drop-off in spiritual centers for those beyond the young adult phase of American Jewish life.

Another echoed that they have learned that there is "a steep fall-off in resources" beyond what is provided by innovative Jewish organizations, especially rent subsidies and gathering places for community. "We have given them the enthusiasm they need to build community," this interviewee observed. "We've tried to meet their new needs with training, but [to continue to live Jewishly they must] spend their own money [and] see their own home as a gathering place." This is the model of OneTable, for example. It offers subsidies and training to empower young Jewish adults to host Shabbat dinners, with the goal that they have the knowledge and experience necessary to continue hosting after moving beyond OneTable's age range. This, of course, assumes that once people move beyond the young adult phase of Jewish life in America, they are financially situated to afford rent in the cities where Jews tend to live, that they can afford to live in homes large enough to host gatherings, and that they have the means and the support

necessary to live the same kind of Jewish life without organizational support that they lived with organizational support.

One of the organizations under study indicated an awareness of the false assumptions at play by funders and innovative community leaders alike when it comes to the financial needs of Jewish Americans beyond the young adult life stage:

> We can make an assumption that people at different stages of life don't need the same financial assistance... [but] they may need it [and] say, wow, this is a real gift... Are we making a false assumption about people's financial ability at a certain stage of life, and, if so, how do we deal with that?

When funders and innovative organizational leaders consider what is needed to serve the shifting landscape of North American Jewry, they will need to address this question.

In general, the organizations under study in my 2022 study shared an understanding that those beyond the life stage of young adults have unmet needs today, and that those needs will only grow as those currently defined as young adults move on to the next stage of their lives. One interviewee noted that Generation X and Millennials are beginning to age out of young adult communities but still have the needs of those considered young adults. Likewise, the innovative communities and organizations under study are largely failing to serve aging and elderly adults.

I invite us to take this a step further, moving beyond the scope of research and into the realm of common sense. If a funder's interest is in serving young adults, perhaps an effective way to serve them is through intergenerational community. The Jewish community has never been segmented into age or life stage. Historically, elders were valued for their wisdom – not to mention their cooking skills and help with the children. Elders in our Jewish communities had a role to play, one that enriched the lives of members of every generation in a Jewish community.

Today, the synagogue is one of the last centers of intergenerational Judaism, and its benefits are manifold. As generations of young Jews are increasingly moving away from legacy institutions, it is critical that we bring intergenerational Jewish community along with us into this brave new world.

My dream is that someone at Moishe House – an organization with both the financial means and the knowledge to actually build an America urban kibbutz movement – would read this thesis, build America's first urban kibbutz, and scale it so that this mode of Jewish community that is both innovative and deeply-rooted in tradition would exist and thrive and help shape the Jewish future in every city in America. But I fear that Moishe House, with its emphasis on serving young adults, would build these urban kibbutzim only for young adults. And that is a mistake. Even if you want to build for young adults, perhaps the way to serve them best is to place them squarely in the milieu of intergenerational Jewish community. There they can stay – instead of leaving when they "age out" – in the intentional Jewish community they have *built together* – alongside a village-like Jewish community comprised of members of every age and life stage – as they go on to marry (or not), have children (or not), and raise (or help raise) the next generation of American Jews in thick community, in Jewish time, guided by *tikkun olam*, and absolutely affiliated – in a way that was perhaps unimaginable a generation ago, but which is perfectly poised to serve the emergent landscape of a new American Jewish future. We have the opportunity to *build something together*.

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