

Steve Gaarder

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Creating Sustainable Communities

Steve Gaarder is an expert at creating sustainable communities, models for making the transition to a sustainable world. For the past 20 years, he has been a key player in the development of Ecovillage at Ithaca, a world-class example of earth-friendly living. His goal is to take what he has learned and help communities around the world.

EcoVillage at Ithaca, located in the beautiful Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, is part of a growing global movement for a saner, more sustainable human culture. Comprising an intentional community and a non-profit educational organization, the project is developing an alternative model for suburban living which provides a satisfying, healthy, socially rich lifestyle, while minimizing ecological impacts. Features of the village include:

- Built on 180 acres/65 hectares just outside of the city of Ithaca, New York, USA
- Two, soon to be three, cohousing neighborhoods totaling 100 housing units
- A large organic vegetable farm, greenhouse, and pick-your-own berry farm on site
- An incubator farm for educating the next generation of organic farmers
- Energy-efficient, passive solar construction
- Residents have an average ecological footprint that is less than half that of the average American
- The village uses electricity entirely from renewable sources, half of it generated on site
- Residents share expertise and help each other in myriad ways
- Group-managed services and systems make it easier to be more sustainable
- Sharing equipment and facilities allows a smaller footprint
- Many shared meals reduce footprint, save time, and bring people together
- Draws from traditional ways of living worldwide, and in turn helps validate those ways in the 21st century

Part of Ecovillage at Ithaca since the first residents' group was formed, Steve has worked on many projects:

- The first charter for the original residents' group
- The original design and installation of the village Internet system
- Evolution of the system into a high-performance fiber optic network
- Combining multiple neighborhoods into a cohesive village.
- Design and operation of the water system.
- The village site design.
- The solar electric system that provides half the electricity for an entire neighborhood.
- Clarifying and codifying the community's decision-making process.
- Keeping the community's innovative technology working.
- Working out the financial arrangements among the neighborhoods and the non-profit.
- Currently working with the new third neighborhood on site, infrastructure, and energy systems planning.

Committees and roles include:

- The steering committee for the entire process of developing and building the first cohousing neighborhood
- The Village Association and Cohousing Cooperative boards of directors
- The village process/steering committee
- The "Geek Team" who manage the village network
- The cook team who prepare the common meals
- The village site design committee

Outreach activities include:

- At Findorn Community, Scotland, UK, 2005: presentation at the 10-year conference of the Global Ecovillage Network.
- At Lebensgarten Community, Steyerberg, Germany, 2003: presentation to the community.
- At Bluestockings Bookstore, New York City, USA, 2011: public talk in cooperation with Dreamriver Press.
- At Cirenas, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica, 2012: presentations about Ecovillage and permaculture to their students.
- At Nikola-Lenivets, Kaluga Region, Russia, 2012: Visiting Lecturer at the Future Living Project Summer School.

Expertise includes:

- Systems design
- Village design
- Permaculture design
- Community process
- Problem-solving
- Writing
- Nonviolent Communication
- Renewable energy
- Electronics
- Computer software and hardware
- Goal setting
- Conflict resolution
- Meeting facilitation
- Motivation

Education:

- Permaculture Design Course at Sirius Community, taught by David Jacke, 2004.
- Empire State College, Ithaca, N.Y. Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, 1995.
- Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa. 1971 to 1974, majoring in philosophy.

Miscellaneous:

- Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).
- Speaks fluent German, some Russian and French, and currently learning Mandarin Chinese.
- Avocations include classical and folk music, storytelling, folk dancing, and fantasy and science fiction literature.