



Co-living

Shared Accommodations for the 21st Century

Overview

In the modern sense, Co-living is a communal living arrangement in which each person gets a private bedroom and a small group of occupants share communal spaces. Co-living often materializes in two drastically distinct formats: Co-living through necessity and Co-living by lifestyle choice. The idea of surrounding yourself with like-minded or financially-beneficial occupants is not new, as roommates have been around for countless years. According to data from the US Census in 2016, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington D.C. and other prominent east-coast cities had over 33% of their populations living with a roommate.¹

Co-living by necessity

Co-living is an appealing living situation for occupants looking to help reduce overall living expenses. Typical shared resources include kitchens, laundry, and even utilities. As a result, many Co-living occupants see a 10-30% savings in their overall living expenses.

With the unprecedented increase in cost-of-living expenses compared to real wages over the past few decades, there has also been an increased interest in Co-living. Since the early 2000s, nearly 8,000 co-living beds have become available in major cities across the United States, with another 55,000 currently planned for future development.²

Co-living by lifestyle choice

Many occupants choose Co-living as a lifestyle choice. Upscale Co-living brands such as Common, Ollie, Roam, Docked, and Quarters have created hip locations with flashy branding and all-inclusive amenities throughout including lounges, co-working spaces, community game rooms, fitness areas, and outdoor spaces.

In a professional world that's become more accepting of work-from-home lifestyles, Co-living also provides social opportunities not afforded by traditional studio and one-bedroom apartments. Especially for recent transplants or more mobile workers, the built-in community provided by Co-living spaces creates a convenient location for socialization.

Restrictions

In many parts of the United States, local restrictions (typically Zoning or other housing laws) often limit the number of unrelated occupants which can comprise of a "family". In Philadelphia, for example, no more than three unrelated occupants may reside in a single dwelling unit, a restriction originally intended to reduce transient elements in certain parts of the city.

As a result of these restrictions, Co-living has faced legal challenges in many cities across the United States. Currently, Co-living doesn't

fit neatly into any traditional definitions used for urban regulation, resulting in confusion; because there aren't any recent precedents for Co-living, whether it complies with the law or not is often on a case-by-case basis. Century-old laws intended to disrupt the practice of tenement housing, single-room occupancy (SRO) housing, and boarding housing³ have only added to the juridical complexity faced by operators of Co-living arrangements.

However, laws are rapidly changing in order to accommodate the increased interest in Co-living. In 2020, the Washington State Senate removed limits on unrelated occupants,⁴ while Denver, CO increased the number of unrelated people allowed in a dwelling unit from two to five in 2021.⁵ In other locations, Co-living has found success by exploiting existing loopholes in legal definitions.

Co-living dwellings are often comprised of a "family of choice", rather than a family by blood, marriage, or adoption. These "families

Nationally, rents rose an average of 11.3% over the course of 2021, with increases continuing into 2022.⁶

of choice" consist of unrelated occupants who often share home chores, meals, and even child-rearing responsibilities. However, many municipalities continue to not recognize a "family of choice" as a family.

In the pursuit of making Co-living and its many benefits more accepted, JLS Architects has designed over 1,200 Co-living spaces for those seeking them out by necessity and by lifestyle choice.

Citations

- 1 Johnathan Vespa, Jobs, Marriage and Kids Come Later in Life (US Department of Commerce, 2017)
- 2 Isabelle Lee, The Surprising Boom in Pandemic Co-living (Ozy, 2021)
- 3 France Svistovski, Burning Down the Housing Market: Communal Living in New York (Fordham Urban Law Journal, vol. 47: 468)
- 4 Nisma Gabobe, Living Together: It's Time for Zoning Codes to Stop Regulating Family Type (Sightline Institute, 2020)
- 5 Esteban L Hernandez, More Unrelated People Can Now Live Together in Denver (Denverite, 2021)
- 6 Abha Bhattarai et al., Rents Are Rising Everywhere. See How Much Prices Are up in Your Area (The Washington Post, 2022)