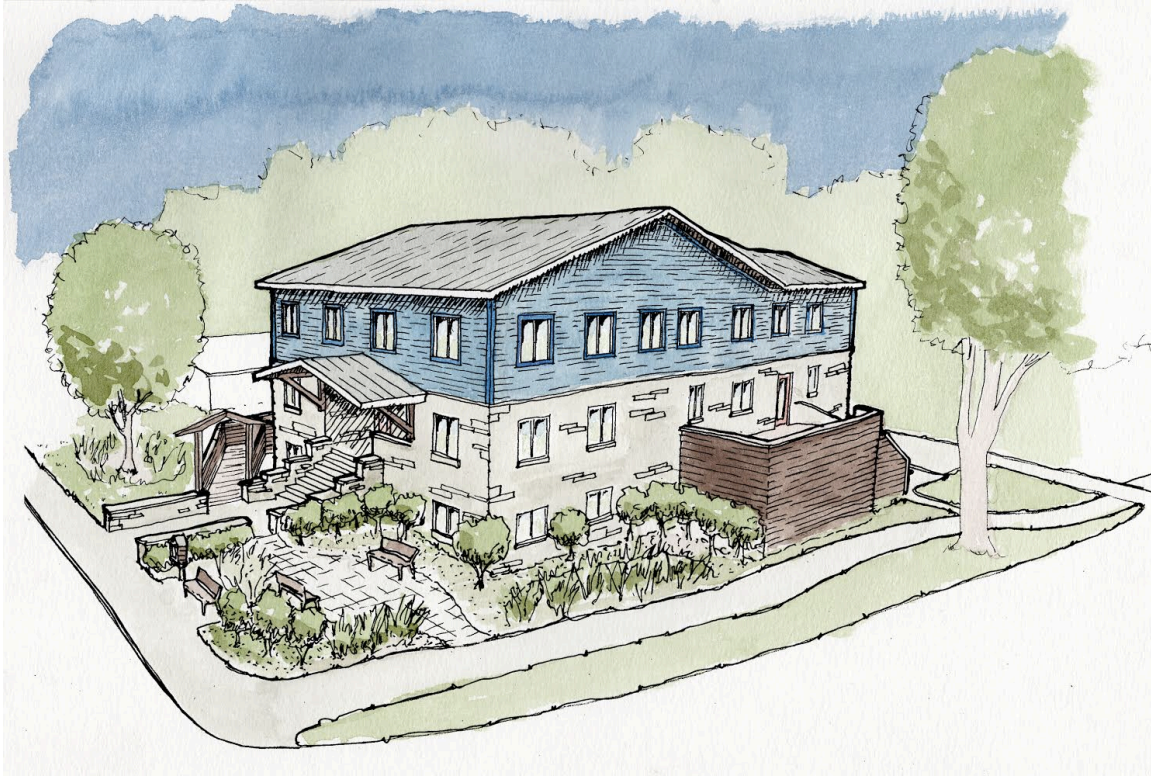


Bloomington Cooperative Living, Inc.

Use Variance Petition for 921 W. 9th St.



Who is Bloomington Cooperative Living, Inc. (BCL)?

Bloomington Cooperative Living has a twelve-year of history in Bloomington as a collective of low-income residents self-organized to provide themselves with housing, food and community. Our mission statement is “to build the foundations for a sustainable society through the practice of cooperative living.”

Emily Cheney, seeking to promote cooperation and community in Bloomington while simultaneously addressing a dire need for affordable housing, started a small cooperative house ten years ago. Since then, BCL has steadily grown. Six years ago, with support from community members, Middle Way house, and several cooperative financing organizations, we bought the old Middle Way house building at Kirkwood & Madison, and earlier this year, with the support of IUCU and the city’s Affordable Housing Fund, we refinanced the property, partnering with the city to ensure permanently affordable & ecologically-sustainable housing for our 20 residents at 404 W. Kirkwood. We also sub-rent two other properties, housing a total of 45 residents (all screened for low-income status) between the three houses, who meet monthly as the BCL “general assembly” and communicate online via the Slack project management website to coordinate the essential functions of the organization. Internally, BCL houses meet together each week in a practice of cooperation and democratic self-governance. For 10 years (8 as an official 501(c)3 nonprofit), BCL has self-organized and grown as a

vibrant example of a diverse community of low-income residents meeting their needs together.

In addition to coordinating the essential functions of a house (finances, chores, maintenance, etc.), members of BCL each cook once a week, and buy bulk organic produce and CSAs to supply the houses with shared food. Members also facilitate non-resident community members purchasing discounted bulk organic goods via Indiana Common Ground, our buying club which purchases in bulk from the supplier (UNFI) that serves Bloomingsfoods. Additionally, our boarding program allows non-residents to participate in any house's food program, supporting and participating in dinners at a pro-rated cost and labor contribution. For four years, our 404. W Kirkwood property has offered weekly use of our industrial-size kitchen to Food Not Bombs, which serves weekly vegan meals to dozens of Bloomington's food-insecure population. BCL houses, and cooperatives in general, have a history of acting as centers of social and ecological responsibility. Externally, we've partnered with Middle Way for years to provide workshops on consent and sexual assault to ensure that we can provide a different offering from the gendered issues associated with so many group-housing situations. All three houses have a history of hosting workshops, meetings and benefit events for public good, from permaculture workshops and benefits for Avalon Community Garden to voter registration events. With the support of the Bloomington Community Orchard partner planting project, our 404 W. Kirkwood property has a small nascent native fruit and nut orchard and all three houses seek to grow some of their own food in house gardens, which are made fertile with compost from house food waste.

Our cooperative houses seek to be positive contributors to the community, but even more importantly, the practice of sharing space and living together within these principles of sustainability, diversity, and cooperation produces a certain kind of citizen, a practice which we see as critical to making the most of Bloomington's future.

The 921 W 9th St. Project

We have observed the market for several years, noting Bloomington's urgent need of affordable housing, and sought opportunities to expand into a second owned property. After closing on the refinance of our 404 W. Kirkwood house this year, we began discussion around acquiring and renovating the property at 921 W 9th St, a 7500 sq ft. building immediately across the street from the Butler Park gardens, in a quiet northern nook of the Near West Side neighborhood.

Given the 2012 Service Community Assessment of Needs report (SCAN), which emphasizes Bloomington's need for affordable housing, our goal in 921 W. 9th St. is to provide affordable communal housing for working people and young families. To that end, we put forward a design that uses suites of rooms with some private space and communal kitchens to split the difference between the single-unit model we currently offer and apartments. We hope that the property and its residents can become an anchor for the Near West Side community.

921 W. 9th St. is an ideal location for our next cooperative house. Access to Butler Park, community garden, the B-Line trail and bus lines, as well as its central location will help to support a community of workers and families. Presently the house sits abandoned and gutted, with incomplete masonry and little vegetation. It is intermittently broken into

and occupied by transients seeking shelter and privacy. If given the opportunity to improve the property, BCL will transform it into a space of beauty, human connection, and community responsibility.

To address the housing crisis reported in SCAN and realize our vision of expanding affordable housing, we require a use variance on the 921 lot to allow for a cooperative house. Despite the need for truly affordable development in Bloomington and the long history of success of the cooperative model, currently the Unified Development Ordinance does not list cooperative housing as a permitted use. As such it is necessary that BCL seek a variance to establish a new cooperative house in Bloomington. We request that this use variance be tied to BCL Inc. specifically, in order to fully ensure a cooperative will occupy the house. BCL prides itself on sustainable practices and most of our members do not own cars. Street parking adjacent to the lot allows for 6-8 vehicles and our site plan accounts for 5 additional spots behind the house. We therefore request a parking variance from the minimum number of parking spaces.