



# Finding Common Ground

January 2025

## Up Front

*This year-in-review issue highlights the marvelous and myriad ways that Common Ground Ecovillage continues the complex work of growing community.*

The seeds of agrarian community first planted in 2008 continue to germinate and sprout as we field new initiatives, navigate frustrations and setbacks, clarify and outwork our vision and mission, and above all, deepen relationships within and without our bounds.

**Our dream of living in justice and harmony** with each other and the land is a tall order in these times. Which makes it all the more important to persist, be creative, and trust that this journey, undertaken with integrity, is what matters most. As you will see in these pages, much continues to be revealed.

We invite you to participate as you are called to weave and strengthen community within and around you. **Let's keep growing, together.**



*Photos by Kai*

Community members observed the Winter Solstice on December 21 beside the Grandmother Oak tree.



An altar is lit by candles under the Grandmother Oak.



Raindrops adorn the cedars in mid-December.

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BANNER ABOVE: Turkey tail mushrooms decorate the forest floor. / Photo by Hope



## ALL ABOUT EVENTS

### TOURS OF THE LAND

Are you a new Common Ground member or a curious person who is thinking of joining? We regularly hold tours of the Land preceding the Community on the Ground (COG) meeting which are usually **the fourth Saturday of the month (January 25) at 1:30 p.m. RSVP is required.** You can also schedule a tour at an alternate time. Contact Lisa and put "Request for Tour" in the subject line: [Lberley@yahoo.com](mailto:Lberley@yahoo.com). Or text 919-619-2979.

### RACIAL AWARENESS BOOK GROUP

#### Membership Circle

**Every Monday, 7-8 p.m., Zoom**

Contact Lisa to join with subject "Racial Awareness Book Group": [Lberley@yahoo.com](mailto:Lberley@yahoo.com)

This is a great time to join because we recently started reading a new book: *The Rage of Innocence — How America Criminalizes Black Youth*, by Kristin Henning. The book group is for CGEV members and the larger community. The format is reading aloud and breaking between paragraphs to share personal reflections, questions, and ideas. People attend as often as they can.

### MONTHLY HEART SHARE

#### HeartWeavers Subcircle

**Friday, January 17, 7-9 p.m., Zoom**

Organizers Ren Enberg and Quai Derr. RSVP [Heart\\_Share@commonground.eco](mailto:Heart_Share@commonground.eco). This month's theme TBD.

These gatherings have been a valuable way for CGEV members to get to know each other at a deeper level than our usual

### GET INVOLVED

- ◆ **All events are in Eastern Time** and open to everyone unless otherwise indicated. **You must RSVP** for details and last-minute changes.
- ◆ **COVID Policy:** For your safety and others', bring a mask in case it is needed. At CGEV, we protect those most vulnerable.
- ◆ **Accessibility:** At this stage in our development, terrain is unpaved and uneven, and restrooms are not wheelchair-accessible.
- ◆ **Google Calendar Link:** [CGEV Calendar](#)
- ◆ **To add or change an event,** email Ren at [ren.enberg2@gmail.com](mailto:ren.enberg2@gmail.com)

interactions at other meetings and events. We have a well-developed protocol for how each person participates so that you can do the important work of getting gradually more vulnerable without being judged. All humans have a deep need for "being seen," valued, appreciated, cared about, and care for others. This is a good place to go to get to know the "chosen family" that you are joining!

### COMMUNITY ON THE GROUND

#### Governance & Communications Circle

**Saturday, January 25, 3-5 p.m., Zoom and in-person at the Nest in Mebane.**

RSVP to [Becky](#), subject "COG." These all-member meetings are reliably informative and connecting for all involved. If you want to be a part of this community on any level, this meeting is for you. Stay for the potluck, too.

### COMMUNITY POTLUCK

#### Membership Circle

**Saturday, January 25, 5:30-7:30 p.m., following Community on the Ground at The Nest.**

No RSVP required. Contact [Lisa](#)

for information.

Potlucks are our time to break bread together and socialize, play, and sometimes chew over the Community on the Ground meeting content. Please bring something to share. Vegetable dishes typically predominate, but all sorts of foods are welcome. Just bring a list of ingredients or jot them down when you come. Make it a habit to come to these events!



Photo by Hope

Frost kisses the grass and leaves on the forest floor.



## CIRCLE MEETINGS

### MEMBERSHIP

Policy meetings on the **1st and 3rd Thursdays, January 2 and 16, 12-2 p.m., Zoom**. Task meetings, as needed, on alternate Thursdays. RSVP to Lisa with subject "Membership Circle": [LBerley@yahoo.com](mailto:LBerley@yahoo.com). We welcome visitors and encourage Exploratory Members to join the circle and Visiting Members to help with tasks.

### PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

**Tuesdays, January 7 and 21, 4:30-6:30 p.m., hybrid**. Email Anthony for updates and link with subject P&D: [weston@elon.edu](mailto:weston@elon.edu). Observers welcome.

### GENERAL CIRCLE

**Sunday, January 12, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Zoom**  
RSVP to Hope with subject "GC" 2 days in advance: [hopenatrix@fastmail.com](mailto:hopenatrix@fastmail.com)  
Come observe to find out what's happening with all Circles at CGEV and how you can be involved.

### LAND STEWARDSHIP

**Tuesday, January 14, 7-8:30 p.m.** Hybrid if some folks cannot attend in person. RSVP to [Doug](mailto:Doug). And please stay tuned, as we may switch to 4:30 p.m. to continue our Far Field planning in daylight.

### GOVERNANCE & COMMUNICATION

**Tuesday, January 21, 7-9 p.m., Zoom**. RSVP to Quai with G&CC in the subject line: [quaifranklin@gmail.com](mailto:quaifranklin@gmail.com)  
If you're interested in observing or helping with G&CC work, please send your request to [gov-com@commonground.eco](mailto:gov-com@commonground.eco).

### WHAT'S GOING ON?

Subscribe to our [Common Ground calendar](#) or view it in your browser. Send calendar requests with a subject line of "Calendar Request" or "Calendar Update" to [calendar@commonground.eco](mailto:calendar@commonground.eco).

And share your voice in Our Community Forum: <https://discourse.commonground.eco/>



Photo by Kai

Someone kindly tidied up the tool shed. This simple structure has been a great addition to the Common Ground Farm.

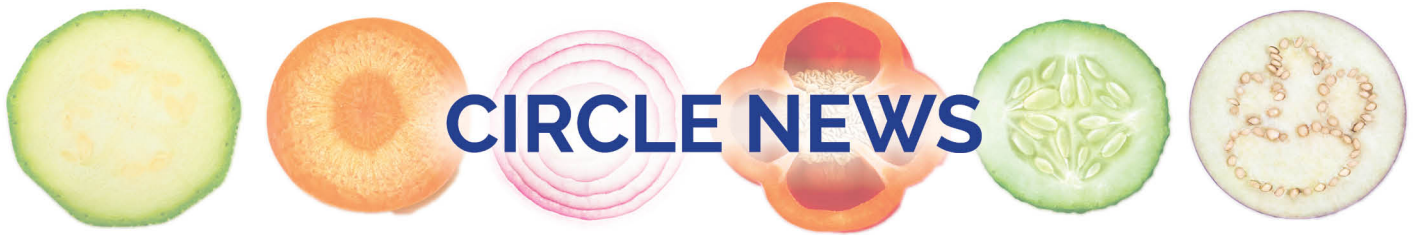
### FINANCIAL AND LEGAL TASK GROUP

Contact Becky at [blaskody@gmail.com](mailto:blaskody@gmail.com)

[com](#) to offer your participation.







## GENERAL CIRCLE

The General Circle is composed of two members from each of our four Functional Circles (FCs), plus the Treasurer. **Our role is to advise and offer feedback** to FCs as they develop initiatives and proposals, helping Circles to coordinate their efforts and consider multiple points of view. In select cases, the GC is asked to consent to proposals from FCs that affect the entire community, ensuring that we have buy-in across the board for significant steps. In 2024, the General Circle consented to several major initiatives:

- An application to establish a Conservation Easement with the Eno River Association and Orange County that will protect 63 acres in perpetuity. This application is still in process with Orange County.
- A [Land Acknowledgment](#) statement presented by Land Stewardship.
- A decision to vacate our special zoning district and temporarily revert to R1 zoning in order to pursue a different development plan, orchestrated by the Planning and Development Circle (P&D).
- Agreement to pursue a [Comprehensive Development Plan](#) considering multiple dimensions of land and community well-being, presented by P&D.
- Sponsorship of a Green Burial initiative on the Land.
- Naming our entrance road Daisy Evans Gunn Trail after our closest neighbor (now deceased) who prompted the paving of Frazier Road.
- Affirming [Community Cultural Agreements](#), written and submitted by the Membership Circle
- Electing a new Treasurer, Becky Laskody, to replace Katy Ansardi, who had filled that role since 2013.



*Photo by Kai*

Lucas tends to a fire under the Grandmother Oak while others write and ponder life on a Monday evening.

These steps forward required countless hours of serious thought, clarifying conversations, and heartfelt input from dozens of members across CGEV. We are grateful to GC Circle members (Doug, Lucas, Anthony, Momo, Lisa, Amy, Quai, Hope, and Becky) and all others who so deeply care about growing a community in concert with our vision and values for justice and harmony with each other and the land.

## MEMBERSHIP CIRCLE

The year began with the mandate from Planning and Development to Pod Up! **This means a focus on identifying compatible members with whom to share ownership of a lot and/or a home.** To that end, members who think they want to live in the village have come to COG meetings, Grounders retreats, and informal get-togethers to talk about what they like and need in a home, what financial resources they have to put into it, and when they will be ready to build. What came across this year was a strong desire (and need) to get to know each other more. We laughed

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when the MC orchestrated a form of “speed dating,” but that’s the kind of thing we needed!

Supporting members in getting to know each other is an essential part of the Membership Circle domain, and the leadership for this came from many people in 2024. We ate a lot of delicious meals together at monthly Potlucks following the COG and Grounder meetings, helped support special farm events and enjoyed the amazing weekly Farm Lunches. Members with children organized a camping sleepover on the Land (with a wonderful breakfast) so that children and parents could get to know each other better. Lucas and Robby hosted an in-person Heart Share gathering to complement the monthly online Heart Share, where people have the chance to relate to one another in a deeper way.

In the past year, the Membership Circle had a big focus on bringing together the [Cultural Agreements](#) for the community. Many members contributed to the content. There was a great sense of accomplishment when the Agreements were consented to by the General Circle and then posted on the website. The MC played an active role with the Financial and Legal Subcircle in **reaching out to members about monthly dues and their importance**. MC members provided the leadership for a COG meeting entitled Attention to Racism and Considerations for Being a Welcoming Community. These topics promoted rich discussions and ideas for actions in this coming year. The Racial Awareness book group has held strong (though small) for a fourth year.

As for new members and membership advancement, of the steady stream of new visiting members a small number have become strong, active members. A few moved here from out of state. A handful of members have advanced to the next level. And a handful are in process. If our vision and mission call to you, please be in touch!

### **PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE**

For P&D, 2024 took us from deep uncertainty and major regulatory and other obstacles to finally committing, as the Winter Solstice arrived, to a



*Photo by Kai*

Consti and friend Laura make ferments in the kitchen.

fully developed site plan as part of a comprehensive program for moving forward with the village.

Spring was a period of **consolidating a new site plan**, arranging soil testing and septic system design, setting boundaries, and working on prospective Conservation Easements. In the summer, we developed detailed Architectural Guidelines and a Building Guide. We organized and carried through an application to the Orange County Planning Department to give up our former master plan and down-zone the land back to R-1. This required going through a multi-step process that culminated in approval by the Board of County Commissioners at their meeting in early September. Next, we needed to bring forward our new site plan to apply for a Flexible Subdivision/Conservation Cluster zoning category to advance our development plan in a new guise.

**The County has now approved this plan in concept**, and we are initiating permit applications that will enable us to actually put the project’s infrastructure out for bids in early spring if all goes well.

The process to develop this new site plan was discussed in community meetings and Grounders’ retreats throughout the year. In the Member Forum you can find a thread [here](#) outlining the steps we are taking toward building. At the same time, the fall brought a vigorous and productive discussion both in the Forum and in P&D and

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Grounders meetings about whether and how we might be more ambitious or differently oriented in our development plans, especially in light of our aims of social and economic justice and greater self-sovereignty. **After a great deal of community discussion, we came to enthusiastic consent to a [Comprehensive Proposal for Moving CGEV Forward](#).** This decision enables us to initiate the big (and, yes, costly) permit applications with Orange County for the current site plan and to focus on serious financial planning in January! We'll also be working to address justice in housing, farming, and our impact on the land beings.

A key part of the vision going forward is to front-load building the Common House in order to ground future community building and to jumpstart the actual construction process. Please go to the Member Forum threads (there are two) on [Building the Common House](#) for more information. We are excited ... and ... this will take a lot of work for many people! The other consented comprehensive work — the justice work and listening still more deeply to the land itself — will also require major new initiatives and efforts. So, we're all taking a bit of a breath now ... tis the season. But then, stay tuned for "sap rising" announcements and calls to join in the work. Let's make 2025 the year!

**Financial & Legal Subcircle (F&L)** In 2024, this Subcircle reconvened to assist with planning for village development. Becky generously volunteered to become our next Treasurer and worked with Katy to make this happen. Becky, Randy, and Paul met often from late summer through December and took on a myriad of tasks: LLC equity management, reconciliation of \$500 reservation deposits, and updating of the operating dues structure and budgeting. They supported village financial planning by creating a pledge/reservation agreement and conducted outreach with the Grounders group of first-wave residents. Randy dug deep to create an extensive village funding and financing report. Paul pursued extensive research to support establishment of Common Ground's legal structure.



Kai washes leeks, getting them ready to bundle up for CSA customers.



Marlene gets the CSA bags ready for delivery.

Moving forward in 2025, F&L intends to reorganize into several small task teams that will focus on the very specific financial and legal tasks that will be needed to support the village infrastructure installation and establishment of broader community transitions. One of these initiatives, the creation of a 501(c)3 to support our educational mission, has been spearheaded by Amy Halberstadt from our Membership Circle. There is much work to do, including writing bylaws and articles of organization. When we get this in place, we will be able to receive tax deductible contributions. In the meantime, **we now have two ways to donate [on our website home page \(scroll down to see them\): PayPal and Venmo.](#)**

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Photos by Becky and Kai

Grounders meet on a chilly December day with Dusty Staub, a community leadership consultant, to help us work through issues and identify next steps.



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Monies raised will help to fund construction of the Common House.

### **The Grounders Group**

Those interested in living on the land (Grounders) have been meeting monthly since August to lay the groundwork for living on the land. This group has been focused on deepening relationships, discussing needs and aspirations for future home spaces, and exploring shared financial capacities to build homes and a Common House.

At their most recent meeting, facilitated by Community Leadership Consultant Dusty Staub, the Grounders gathered near Grandmother Oak on a chilly December afternoon to dive into these topics and identify actionable next steps. This session marked significant progress in their journey.

Looking ahead, the Grounders plan to reconvene with Dusty in early 2025. They will continue discussing how to integrate principles of social justice into shared financial support, ensuring that the vision for community living reflects the vision and mission of CGEV.

### **LAND STEWARDSHIP CIRCLE**

The Land Stewardship Circle, with its domains of Farm and Forest, has had an incredibly full and creative year. The activities of the Farm were the main theme, especially because we have three full-time farmers — Doug, Caleb, and Lucas —

who are not only working hard to grow and sell vegetable crops on a year-round basis to pay their bills, but also experimenting with a number of other crops that will potentially feed our residential Community in the near future. Gonzalo has also been stepping up to help with the annual crops while devoting a lot of time to his passion of planting and caring for perennials. Kai joined our crew as an intern in April, and in November, she graduated from Farm Apprentice to Farmer. She is currently helping us reinvent our CSA, employing her professional background in marketing. We also regularly host a large number of volunteers in our garden and packing area.

We started the year with a big project — building a new **“Wash and Pack Shed”** attached to the Barn to streamline our post-harvest work. With much help and engineering by Anthony, and a \$10,000 grant from Orange County Economic Development (kudos to Paul for helping with the grant process), the shed was built with mostly our own labor. There was grant money left over to help create a well-equipped kitchen for farmers and guests in the Barn, and to finally put down a dust-free floor.

No sooner was the kitchen installed than a new weekly community-building event was begun—the **Tuesday Farm Lunch**. This has enabled many people in our network to engage in-person with our community. The kitchen and covered

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floor space have been a big boon to the well-being of our farmers and volunteers and have also supported numerous workshops and meetings, to say nothing of spectacular potluck dinners associated with Community meetings.

A major focus of the Farm now includes educational activities such as hosting interns, offering public events and welcoming school classes. In April, more than 200 people came to the **Farm Tour Weekend**, which we presented as part of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's "Piedmont Farm Tour." This gave us an opportunity to talk about the Ecovillage as well as showcase our crops and [Full Table CSA](#) business. In May, we hosted **21 third-graders along with teachers and chaperones from the Emerson Waldorf School for a two-full-days-with-camping experience**. The kids loved it, and of course they got very connected to the world of plants, soils, seed-saving, and harvesting. Common Ground will continue to host their third-grade classes. Our deeper connection with the school is also inspired by two of their teachers, Nikki and Chris, who have become part of the CGEV "Grounders Group."

The experimental crops that we emphasized this year included grain corn, sweet sorghum for syrup, an abundant thornless blackberry crop, more work with peanuts and sesame, and involving more cover crops in our rotations.

**We also expanded our planting area** by moving the deer fence about 40 feet southward and started to design our usage of the 10-acre area we call the "Far Field."

**The main activity in our forests this year focused on conducting a prescribed burn** of 19 acres along the south edge of the western section of the Land. Hope and Lucas have led this effort to not only improve our forest, but also to network with many other Triangle landowners in a new "mutual aid" organization called the Triangle Prescribed Burn Association. Beyond that, the main work on our forestry has been the usual trail maintenance, plus a lot of planning for how



*Photo by Kai*

Volunteer Laura and Farmers Lucas and Kai talk with shoppers about the Full Table CSA at RambleRill Farm.



*Photo by Kai*

Farmer Caleb plans and prepares for the coming year.

the construction of Village infrastructure will interact with the forest. We aspire to place new emphasis in 2025 on further implementing our Forest Stewardship Plan, particularly tree-thinning work.

## **GOVERNANCE & COMMUNICATIONS CIRCLE**

The Governance & Training and Communications Circles merged in January 2024. We offer training and support for all aspects of governance and collaborative skills and handle internal and external communications. Largely through the efforts of Ren and Quai, we are shepherding the process of establishing Non-Violent Communication as a core component of how we relate to each

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other. We worked with the Membership Circle to advance the [Community Cultural Agreements](#), and the IT team established a Community Forum that has been helpful in advancing important member conversations.

Our work organizing the General Circle and coordinating monthly Community on the Ground all-member gatherings has enabled productive discussions resulting in decisions about critical community matters. **We will be scheduling Sociocracy classes in 2025.**

If you are someone who needs training, please contact Becky. And If you're interested in con-



Caleb digs into the dirt with a garden aerator.



Photo by Kai

Paul takes care of the forest area between the Nest and Common Ground next door.

tributing to the work of the IT task group, please email [IT@commonground.eco](mailto:IT@commonground.eco). We need many different kinds of skill sets such as customer relationship management, writing, editing, record and form design, etc., along with information technology-based skills.

## MEMBER HAPPENINGS

*CGEV Members may list their events not sponsored by CGEV Circles as an FYI. Supply title, date, time, location, links, and description.*

### Unlock the Secrets to Reducing Inflammation Naturally

**From Melanie Yukov of Root 2 Rise Wellness:** Discover the hidden drivers of inflammation and learn how to reduce its impact through diet, herbs, emotional balance, and energy practices. Leave empow-

ered with practical tools and expert insights to transform your well-being.

This is a 1.5-hour workshop taking place in Durham at R3 Wellness at 3 p.m. Sunday, January 26. Address: 4731 Apex Highway, NC-55. Limited spots. RSVP to [info@root2risewellness.org](mailto:info@root2risewellness.org).



**From Hope:** I've been captivated by *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence offers a New*

*Understanding of Life on Earth*, by Zoë Schlanger.

The author dives into scientific research that illuminates the hidden capacities of plants to feel, see, hear, sense, relate, communicate, and more. It's been an enlightening read and has caused me to consider, and relate to, plants in an expanded way.

