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Designed to Engage Policy & Barriers

Over the last few months, we have been collaborating with a cohort of developers, designers, public health advocates and planners to identify opportunities to improve policy on multi-family housing. The goal: reduce barriers so that we can build multi-family housing in BC that nurtures social wellbeing.

The different activities that took place have enable us to come up with interesting findings, possible trade-offs and solutions for what the cohort considers the most urgent housing policy actions.

In the next pages, you will see where we are at; the ideas and insights that have emerged from this collaboration. These ideas will help you take a stand and come prepared to the workshop where we will come up with powerful policy recommendations.

Policy recommendation no. 1

Addressing Tenure: Ensure a diverse range of housing forms such as row houses, townhouses, stacked townhomes and apartments offering a wide range of bedrooms.

Barriers & trade-offs	
What is keeping us from doing this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project economies: it is cheaper to do 1-2 bedroom units. • Policy is currently not enforced / Current zoning. • Market demand isn't still clear about families asking for 3 bedroom apartments. • Banks are not willing to take risks on atypical solutions. • Established layout patterns such as cul du sacs. • People prefer to live in houses, don't want to change their neighbourhoods. • There is a lack of communication strategy to create awareness.
Existing policies to encourage/discourage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage: Family guidelines, housing reset? • Encourage: Purpose built rental policy. • Encourage: Richmond Arterial Road Policy - allows townhouses and duplexes up to 3 levels. Only 2 levels when transitioning to SF housing. • Discourage: Zoning – too much SF housing (will it really change with the housing strategy?) • Discourage: Richmond pursues center densification, not dense suburbs • North Vancouver: 10% of the total units in a development should be 3 bedroom units.
What could planners and developers negotiate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When including “x” % of 3 bedroom units, to get amenity space exemptions. • Fast track when including “x” % of 3 bedroom units. • Offer incentive if developers mix and match. Ex. 10% 3 bedroom units + 10% affordable units. • FSR exemptions according to the area. • Incentivize with City land and encourage experimental developments. • Lower price on land value for pilot projects. • Allow dividing a SF home into 2 or 4 units. • Consider relaxation on setbacks. • Promote through grants experimental projects.

Solutions & design recommendations	
To consider as part of a guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require “x” % of 3 bedroom units in developments that have more than “x” units. Ex. Include 5% 3 bedroom units in developments with less than 30 units, include 30% 3 bedroom units above 30 units. • Include areas where stacked homes and town houses are allowed in SF neighbourhoods to promote gradual change. • Promote egalitarian densification around the city, not just close to transport hubs. • Densify close to retail. E.i. Dunbar would be highly benefited from this decision. • Analyze trends in each community to identify required housing types • Define what a 3rd bedroom minimum characteristics should be. • Encourage ground oriented housing types. • Limit FSR but allow different mass forms. • Infills should be designed in creative ways.

Other design opportunities or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote 3 bedroom units in the first floors.• Connect family units with family amenities.• Explore long term transformations: how can families have additional space if they grow? How can they shrink?• Get people more involved in the awareness process: “why is it good for us?”• Navigating zoning and density should be easy.
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Policy recommendation no. 2

Addressin Doing things together: Create features and activities in shared corridors that offer opportunities for neighbours to engage in a casual way.

Barriers & trade-offs	
What is keeping us from doing this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could alter privacy. • The space is not saleable and might reduce seleable areas. • Setbacks are already a restrain. • Programming these areas might result in increased strata fees. • How do we apply this to house oriented developments?
Existing policies to encourage/ discourage it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage: Family guidelines encourage adding spaces to meet with other residents. However, it is not reinforced. • Discourage: fire code.
What could planners and developers negotiate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Density bonus • Give density if they comply with a "sociability credit". • If they exceed the minimum requirements, then trade it with extra density. • Exclude the extra area added from FSR and count it as amenity space. • Relax setbacks when introduced into a project.

Solutions & design recommendations	
To consider as part of a guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulate noise produced in corridors. • Satisfy firecode regulations. • Introduce daylight into corridors; shared corridors should have windows. • Locate the kitchen close to the corridor and include windows for casual chats. • Shared corridors should include minor storage spaces. • Include an emergency kit close to the stairways. • Define programming options along with the design. • Link with small amenity space creating sub-clusters for several floors. • Introduce nature into the shared corridor. • Increase elevator and stair landing
Other design opportunities or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with BCH or BCHMC to create grants and pilot this idea (grant would make up for possible loses) • Building to be automatically eligible for neighbourhood grant to cover programming and maintenance • Consider shared corridors specially in family levels

Policy recommendation no. 3

Addressing Walkability: Enable missing middle (or medium-dense) housing types in all areas within a 5-minute walk of shops, services, green space and transit.

Barriers & trade-offs	
What is keeping us from doing this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current zoning (will it change with housing reset?) • Safety issues. • People don't want to transform their neighbourhoods. • Lack of a communication strategy to create awareness.
Existing policies to encourage/discourage it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage: Reset strategy is promoting infills in SF neighbourhoods. • Discourage: SF neighbourhoods predominate in Vancouver.
What could planners and developers negotiate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow subdividing SF homes. • Include community services or shops in the groundfloor.

Solutions & design recommendations	
To consider as part of a guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rezone to include townhouses and rowhouses in SF neighbourhoods – change should be progressive-, and fast track these projects. • Promote working and living opportunities in alleyways, sharing space with service areas. • Increase density close to commercial hubs. • Include more pedestrian pathways to detonate under utilized areas. • Should be accompanied by a policy that encourages innovative housing
Other design opportunities or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an awareness strategy “Community talks”: talk to residents about the benefits and rationale behind promoting density, create trust

Policy recommendation no. 4

Addressing Tenure: Design housing with flexible spaces, such as dividable rooms, secondary suites and exterior additions.

Barriers & trade-offs	
What is keeping us from doing this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy doesn't make it easy. • City is deciding how people should live. • We don't talk enough about this. • We lack a guideline and specifications on what makes a livable bedroom.
Existing policies to encourage/discourage it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage: Family guidelines encourage 3rd bedroom (4.1.2) • Encourage: Richmond policy - secondary suit is allowed in built rental townhouses and apartments. • Discourage: FSR doesn't allow exterior additions. • Discourage: Fire code restrictions. • Discourage: Setbacks and heights.
What could planners and developers negotiate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different design considerations that could address safety required by the fire code. E.i. having a shared kitchen. • Flexible analysis according to each situation.

Solutions & design recommendations	
To consider as part of a guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary suites should comply with universal accessibility guidelines: wide hallways, bars in bathroom, etc. • Secondary suites should comply with the following: 25% opening (glass or window), air circulation system, movable closet, what else? • Allow separating rooms with a slidable door that addresses the fire code safety regulation. • Flexible rooms should enhance livable environments in a home. • Spaces below ground level should ensure enough sunlight. • Leave space for customization. How much?
Other design opportunities or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When possible, people should be able to participate and choose what they really need. • Developer to design a kit with different options on interior layout. • Having an interior design service instead of just sales. • Explore the design of rooms that can be shared by two units. • Introduce the grow home concept: homes that are bare in the interior – families can adjust according to budget and needs.

Policy recommendation no. 5

Addressing Exposure: Create amenity spaces that are open to the community and others that are just for development residents.

Barriers & trade-offs	
What is keeping us from doing this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People’s perception about not wanting to share, loosing sense of safety and privacy. • Amenities in small projects are not viable. • It is not a requirement and isn’t encouraged.
Existing policies to encourage/ discourage it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage: Guideline for high density development requires 400 sqft (but it doesn’t considers number of units or families living there). • Discourage: policy restricts sqft for amenities. • Discourage: no guidelines. • Discourage: Building code restrictions
What could planners and developers negotiate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSR exemptions for common outdoor spaces. • Density bonus for ground floor and mezzanine amenities. • In small developments consider financial contribution to a bigger development to increase amenity space. Residents of both buildings would share amenities. • In small developments consider financial contribution to community spaces. • Height relaxation to allow indoor amenity rooms next to outdoor spaces (specially in 4/5 storey buildings)

Solutions & design recommendations	
To consider as part of a guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design flexible spaces. • Create a management program. Consider a social concierge to organize and regulate use public and semi-private spaces. • Include amenities open to the public like shops in the ground floor and mezzanine. • Design spaces just for residents in other levels, with the possibility of inviting friends. • Control access with an app. • Link amenity spaces. E.i. indoor with outdoor spaces • Use rooftops as private amenity spaces. • Relate sqft of amenity spaces to the number of units. • Amenity spaces should have sun exposure, be spacious, be safe, have a view and include greenery, what else?
Other design opportunities or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City should identify needs in a community to promote successful spaces that are open to the community. • Create amenities where people share values like food, gardening, crafts, sports, etc. • Design a cluster of mini-community centers throughout the neighbourhood.

Policy recommendation no. 6

Addressing Social group size: In standard multi-family housing, create sub-clusters where no more than 12 households share a semi-private space.

Barriers & trade-offs	
What is keeping us from doing this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cost increases.• We can't sell units at higher prices, become unaffordable.
Existing policies to encourage/discourage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discourage: there is only a minimum of sqft for amenity spaces and are considered FSR
What could planners and developers negotiate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DCL exemption for extra sub-clusters.• Fast-track project when addressing sub-cluster capacity.

Solutions & design recommendations	
To consider as part of a guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amenity spaces that encompass different needs or interests of the residents.• Reserve some amenity spaces just for families, others for young people and others for seniors.• Make sure the space is designed to host 12 households.• In open shared space make sure there are toilets and water fountains.
Other design opportunities or recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant to pilot experimental projects.• City should identify needs in a community to promote successful spaces that will be occupied by residents and maybe the community.