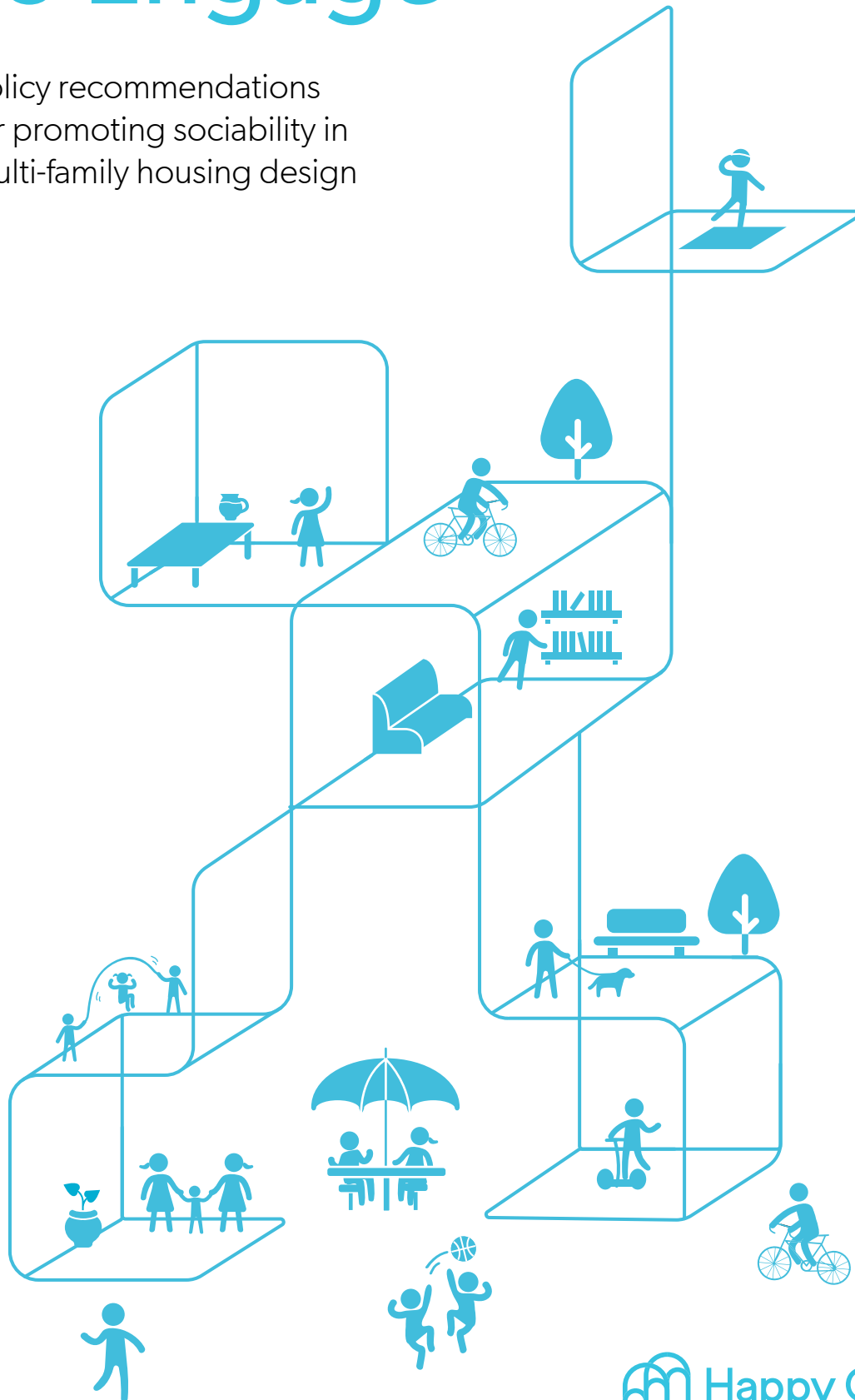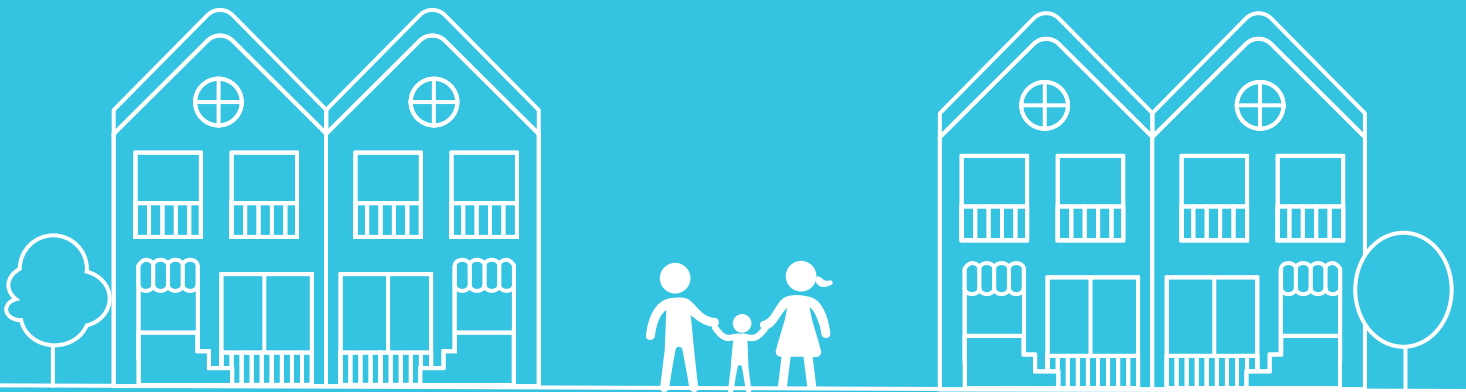# Designed to Engage

Policy recommendations
for promoting sociability in
multi-family housing design

Happy City

Policy recommendations for promoting sociability in multi-family housing design.

Happy City

real estate foundation
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Contents

"Strong social connections are the greatest contributors to human health, happiness and resilience. We need to turn multi-family housing into an engine of social wellbeing."

Charles Montgomery

Executive summary

City builders are starting to recognize that societal wellbeing is both a responsibility and a reasonable goal.

But anyone interested in creating happier, healthier and more resilient communities needs to be informed by a clear understanding of the relationship between design and wellbeing.

Strong, positive social relationships are among the most important drivers of community health, happiness and resilience. Multi-family housing design has a direct, but commonly overlooked, influence on residents' relationships and social trust.

How can we boost sociability and affordability in multi-family housing? First we need to identify the link between social wellbeing and housing design. But just as importantly, we need to break down the barriers to good design that exist in policy and in the habits of designers and builders.

With the support of the Real Estate Foundation of BC, and in collaboration with a dedicated cohort of planners, developers, health authorities and architects, Happy City set out to find pragmatic paths to more sociable housing.

Through three stages of collaboration, we identified areas of overlap across key stakeholders and compiled a set of policy recommendations that will promote sociability and improve social wellbeing in multi-family housing:

- Develop an official sociability guideline for the rezoning application process for multi-family housing.
- Offer FSR exemptions and bonus density for developments that include a surplus of social amenities.
- Fast-track development applications for pilot projects that include mixed housing types and achieve key sociability guidelines.
- Relax parking requirements for middle-density developments to allow for additional social spaces to be created instead.
- Redefine the concept of habitability to include diverse family structures.
- Remove building code and by-law restrictions on living arrangements, including those on shared uses and shared spaces.
- Allow planners to actively negotiate Community Amenity Contributions (CAC) so that larger developments can include private amenities for the building's residents and semi-public amenities open to the community.
- Review and introduce flexible standards into BC Plumbing and Building code to allow for flexibility in unit design.

Many of these actions can boost not just social relations and quality of life, but also housing affordability. But before this can happen, governments must work to remove the existing policy barriers that prevent us from implementing these actions into multi-family housing design.

Credits: Dattner Architects + Grimshaw Architects

List of contributors

Happy City Team

Paty Rios
Charles Montgomery
Omar Dominguez
Ekaterina Aristova
Cheri Hessami

Partnerships and Collaboration

Claire Gram
Vancouver Coastal Health

Keltie Craig
City of Vancouver

Gregory Dreicer
Museum of Vancouver / Vancouver Public Library

Michael Epp
City of North Vancouver

Jaspal Marwah
Metro Vancouver / City of Vancouver

Marylyn Chiang
Union of British Columbia Municipalities

Charito Gailing
Healthy Built Environmental Alliance

Stacy Barter
BC Healthy Communities / Shift Collaborative

Sociability Champions

A special thanks to this group for your amazing insight and for accompanying us through all three stages of engagement.

Bruce Haden
Bruce Haden Architects

Bruno Jury
Naturbana

Daniel Boffo
Boffo Properties

Katia Tynan
City of Vancouver Resilience office

Katie McPherson
City of Vancouver Resilience office

Kim Barnsley
Michael Green Architecture

Mackenzie Biggar
Boffo Properties

Marianne Amodio
MAHG Architects

Maura Chestnut
Catalyst Community Developments Society

Michelle Sotomayor
Conwest

Tim Yeung
Peterson

Leslie Shieh
Take Root

Supporters and participants

Ann Mclean
City of Surrey

Cindy Wilson
LWPAC

Chris Mah
City of Vancouver

Cindy Brenneis
Ramsay Worden Architects

Dana Sami
Darwin

Darryl Condon
HCMA Architecture + Design

David O'Regan
Michael Green Architecture

Emily McDonald
City of North Vancouver

Éoin O'Connor
City of Vancouver

Grace Jiang
City of Vancouver

Jennifer Cutbill
Dialog

Joe Khalifa
Kevington Building Corp

Lisa Mu
Fraser Health

Mark Woytiuk
Carscadden

Michelle Hoar
Housing consultant

Neal LaMontagne
University of British Columbia

Neil Spicer
Metro Vancouver

Shirley Shen
Haeccity

Stewart Burgess
Carscadden Stokes McDonald
Architects

Terry Sidhu
City of Richmond

The Happy Homes Project

Phase 1. Sociability through multi-family housing design.

The Happy Homes project started as an initiative supported by BC Housing, The School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia, Mitacs, RNL Design and Museum of Vancouver. The goal: to address social isolation and boost community resilience by promoting positive connections among neighbours living in multi-family buildings. We drew evidence from sociology, psychology, environmental psychology, neuroscience, public health and other fields to understand how design influences sociability in multi-family housing.

The result was a set of 10 evidence-based principles for boosting social wellbeing in multi-family housing:

Culture & values
People feel a stronger sense of belonging and attachment to places that reflect their culture, values and sense of self.

Doing things together
Residents who have opportunities to do meaningful or enjoyable things together are more likely to develop a sense of trust and connection.

Comfort
People are more likely to engage with others in environments that feel pleasant and comfortable.

Exposure
People who live in spaces that give them a greater sense of control over their exposure to others are more likely to build positive social connections.

Nature
Access to nature is strongly linked to positive neighbourhood relationships and trust among community members.

Tenure
The longer people can stay in their community, the greater the bonds of trust and local social connection.

Walkability
Mixed-use neighbourhoods that encourage walking are most likely to be associated with positive social encounters and a strong sense of community.

Social group size
Social group size has a direct influence on the quality and intensity of trusting relationships that people develop.

Participation
Residents who are involved in project design and site management processes are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and contribute to their community.

Feeling safe
People are more likely to build trusting and meaningful relationships in environments that feel safe.

Happy Homes

The Happy City team, along with a group of committed architects, developers, planners and health authorities, came up with 47 design, programming and policy actions and powerful images to represent each idea.

We created the Happy Homes Toolkit to identify principles, strategies and actions to boost social wellbeing in multi-family housing, which is offered free online.

Thanks to support from Vancouver's housing industry, including developers, architects, policy makers, planners and residents, Happy City has taken this work one step further:

Phase 2. Designed to engage.

With the support of the Real Estate Foundation, and in collaboration with a strong team of sociability champions, we have selected the six most important sociability actions from the Happy Homes toolkit. The team has agreed that these should be pursued at a policy level in Metro Vancouver. In addition to drawing on evidence from social wellbeing research, this decision also considered several factors, including: general interest within the housing industry, common priorities among stakeholders, and applicability beyond our city, with an emphasis on actions that have not yet been addressed by policy.

This second phase sought to address the gap that has been identified between current multi-family housing design and the selected actions such that they could be implemented to foster sociability.

The project engaged planners, developers, health authorities and architects through three distinct stages. Happy City led positive discussions identifying the technical, financial, social and policy barriers, as well as possible trade-offs and design recommendations for each action.

The following document outlines six key evidence-based design actions to promote sociability in multi-family housing and the community.

We think this tool should be used in two ways: First, as a catalogue of barriers to good design in policy and practice that we must work together to tear down. And second, as a guideline for developers, architects, planners, health authorities, property managers and investors to design and create housing that contributes to social wellbeing by promoting social casual encounters, meaningful relationships and connected communities.

Using this report

This report will help you understand how six big actions can boost sociability in housing.

It is divided into six sections, corresponding to the sociability actions selected through our collaborative process. Each section contains a brief overview of the importance of the selected action, including how it connects to the principles of the Happy Homes Toolkit, its impact on key social wellbeing factors, and how it applies to Metro Vancouver's housing context.
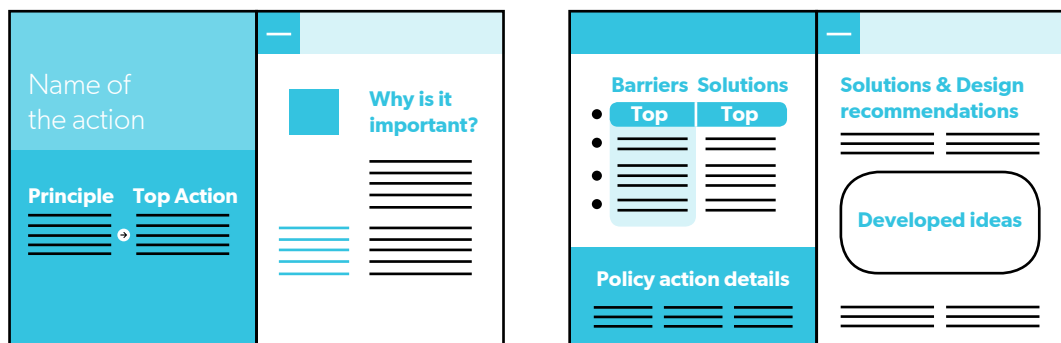
For each action, you will find a table that lists the main policy, social, technical and financial barriers identified during our consultations and workshops, matched with their proposed solutions. To further strengthen each solution, we have included a set of policy recommendations that provide supporting detail. In each section, one top sociability action is identified and accompanied by a diagram that incorporates the ideas developed through the final workshop. These diagrams highlight key design characteristics that should be considered when integrating the corresponding sociability action into multi-family housing design.

By collaborating and identifying areas of overlap across key stakeholders and industries, this report provides a set of design and policy recommendations that have the potential to make a tangible impact on social connectedness through multi-family housing design in Vancouver.

Actions
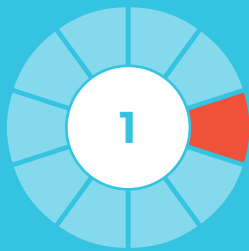
Diverse housing forms
[Tenure]

1
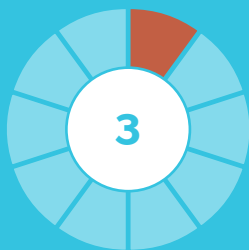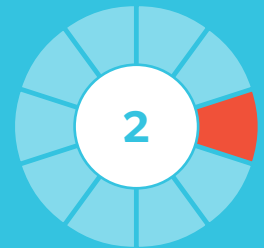
Ensure a diverse range of housing forms such as row houses, townhouses, stacked townhomes and apartments offering a wide range of bedrooms per unit.

Flexible spaces
[Tenure]

2

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

Social corridors
[Doing things together]

3

Create features and activities in social corridors that offer opportunities for neighbours to engage in a casual way.

Semi-public & public amenities
[Exposure]

4

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

Missing-middle
[Walkability]

5

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

Social group size
[Social group size]

6

In standard multi-family housing, create subclusters where no more than 12 households share a semi-private space.

Diverse housing forms

Principle for sociability:

Tenure - The longer people can stay in their community, the greater the bonds of trust and local social connection.

→

Top action suggestion to achieve social wellbeing through the principle:

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

Photo credits: DIALOGUE and Bob Matheson

Why is it important?

People who live in one place for a long time tend to report greater satisfaction, sense of community, and neighbourhood trust.

Diverse forms of housing ensure that neighbourhoods accommodate people with a wide variety of needs and interests. Therefore, as household needs change, families are able to stay in their existing neighbourhoods. Providing a mix of tenure options also addresses housing affordability and insecurity. Housing affordability is forcing Vancouverites to live far from work, reducing social time and opportunities, and increasing rates of loneliness. Access to affordable housing options that allow people to live near their places of employment can work to increase social capital and therefore decrease social isolation.

Overall, housing diversity promotes local vitality and economic health and increases social capital, which strengthens the community over the long term. Places that facilitate the interaction of a wide variety of groups - including people of different ages, ethnicities, income levels and household sizes - can build bridges of trust and mutual support between groups, and ultimately, robust and resilient communities.

Main references

Williams, D. R., & Collins, C. (2001). Racial Residential Segregation: A Fundemental Cause of Racial Disparities in Health. Public Health Reports (Vol. 116).

Bernard, S. (2013). Loneliness and Social Isolation Among Older People in North Yorkshire (No. WP 2565). York.

Valtorta, N. K., Kanaan, M., Gilbody, S., Ronzi, S., & Hanratty, B. (2016). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies. Heart (British Cardiac Society), 102, 1009–1016.

Happy City. (2017). Happy Homes: A toolkit for building sociability through multi-family housing design. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Actions

Barriers

	What's stopping us from offering a diverse range of housing forms in every neighbourhood right now?
Policy	Zoning restrictions keep architects and developers from designing and building dense, diverse and robust communities.
Social	Community resistance poses a significant challenge when trying to diversify existing neighbourhoods. Older, more established communities are often resistant to new changes that could benefit a broad range of people.
Financial	Banks are not willing to take risks on atypical housing solutions, creating challenges for proponents seeking financing for project development.

Policy Solutions

Participants' suggestions to enable a diverse range of housing forms

→ Change the municipal Zoning and Development By-law to promote a wide range of housing forms in residential neighbourhoods currently zoned for single-family homes (RS areas).

→ Develop neighbourhood-oriented engagement and awareness programs to educate residents on the wellbeing benefits of mid-density, connected communities.

→ For pilot projects that follow design recommendations on mixed housing forms:
- Lower land value
- Offer bonus density
- Reduce rezoning application fees

What additional actions will help us strengthen these policy solutions?

01. Increase the variety of homes available for renters, families, seniors and single occupancy.

02. Allow single-family homes to be transformed into flexible, multi-unit, low-density buildings.

03. Fast-track applications that include a wide variety of housing forms and offer a wide range of bedrooms per unit.

04. Reduce parking municipal requirement to zero in projects that are close to transit stops and include at least two housing forms.

05. Relax height and setback regulations for developments that offer a wide number of housing forms and range of bedrooms per unit.

06. Train stakeholder groups on the benefits and incentives of combining diverse housing forms to encourage this type of development.

What should we do from the design perspective?

01. Activate laneways with entrances and social spaces.

- Make sure laneways introduce natural features so that residents can closely experience nature.

- Create gathering spaces to promote casual social encounters.

- Maximize the number of windows looking into laneways and shared spaces.

- Ensure pedestrian pathways connecting main streets to laneways are visible and intuitive to navigate.

02. Preserve the neighbourhood's image by implementing strategic building layouts: 4 unit facades are visible from the street, but the development has 10.

03. Densify strategically: promote denser housing towards the ends of the block and vary height to achieve aesthetic complexity.

04. Allow for car-shared stalls to replace up to 50% of parking requirements, when the other 50% is used for social amenities for residents and the community.

05. Include flexible parkades that can also function as an amenity like local markets on the weekends, flexible basketball courts or skating rinks.

06. Ensure natural light and ventilation is appropriately introduced across all building in the development.

07. Aim for a maximum of 8 households sharing an entrance.
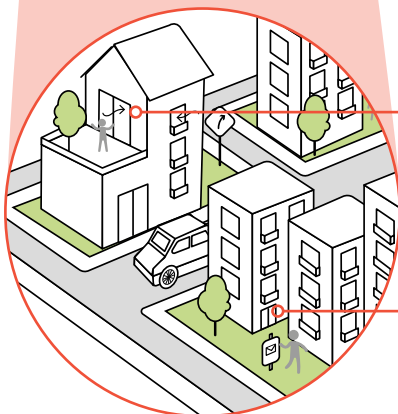
Flexible spaces

Principle for sociability:

Tenure - The longer people can stay in their community, the greater the bonds of trust and local social connection.

→

Top action suggestion to achieve social wellbeing through the principle:

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

Photo credits: MDW ARCHITECTURE

Why is it important?

Flexible interior design addresses one of the most pressing issues in all cities across the world: families are changing.

While in the past, having one, two or three bedrooms could fulfill family needs, today there are different design components that must be considered when addressing contemporary needs like multigenerational households, work/live spaces and cohousing opportunities, among others. Flexible spaces that offer features for a variety of lifestyles can attract and retain people who are moving due to changing household needs. This increases social wellbeing because people who live in one place for a long time tend to report greater satisfaction, sense of community, and neighbourhood trust.

Housing that provides flexible spaces allows residents to feel a greater sense of control and comfort in their homes. In turn, this increased sense of ease and agency improves residents' overall wellbeing. Government policies that support or stymie residents' efforts to modify the composition of their homes throughout different stages of life impact long-term residency and can therefore have a significant impact on social wellbeing.

Main references

Gang, J. (2015). Three Points of the Residential High-Rise: Designing for Social Connectivity. In CTBUH 2015 New York Conference (pp. 78–85).

Kuo, F., Sullivan, W., Coley, R., & Brunson, L. (1998). Fertile ground for community: Inner-city neighborhood common spaces. American Journal of Community Psychology, 26(6), 823–851.

Happy City. (2017). Happy Homes: A toolkit for building sociability through multi-family housing design. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Actions

Barriers

What's stopping us from designing houses with flexible spaces right now?

Policy Solutions

Participants' suggestions to enable housing with flexible spaces.

Financial

Additional flexibility features may not be cost-effective if the resulting unit price does not match market demand.

→ Fast-track development applications for pilot projects that include mixed housing types with flexible spaces.

Policy

Existing municipal building by-laws create challenges for developing flexible, creative and unconventional spaces.

→ Remove building by-laws that restrict living arrangements, including those on shared uses and shared spaces.

Technical

Existing plumbing and fire codes limit the ability to create flexible spaces.

→ Review existing codes to ensure they address current residents' needs and allow for spatial flexibility.

What additional actions will help us strengthen these policy solutions?

01. Offer design services that allow future residents to explore interior layout options.

02. Engage the community when developing Official Community Plans. As different modes of living in Vancouver are promoted, the negative perceptions of unconventional built forms will be reduced over time.

03. Introduce habitability standards for flexible units within municipal building codes.

04. Create opportunities for residents to participate in determining the use of shared flexible spaces.

05. Reduce development fees for pilot projects that include flexible units.

06. Offer a density bonus for projects where two or more units share services, e.g. laundry rooms, shared kitchens, shared movie rooms, studios, extra bedrooms.

What should we do from the design perspective?

01. Design interiors in such a way that spaces can be flexible and houses can be divided into units as needed:

- Present future layout options in design documents.

- Prepare necessary infrastructure for possible secondary suites.

- Use slidable doors that address firecode safety regulations.

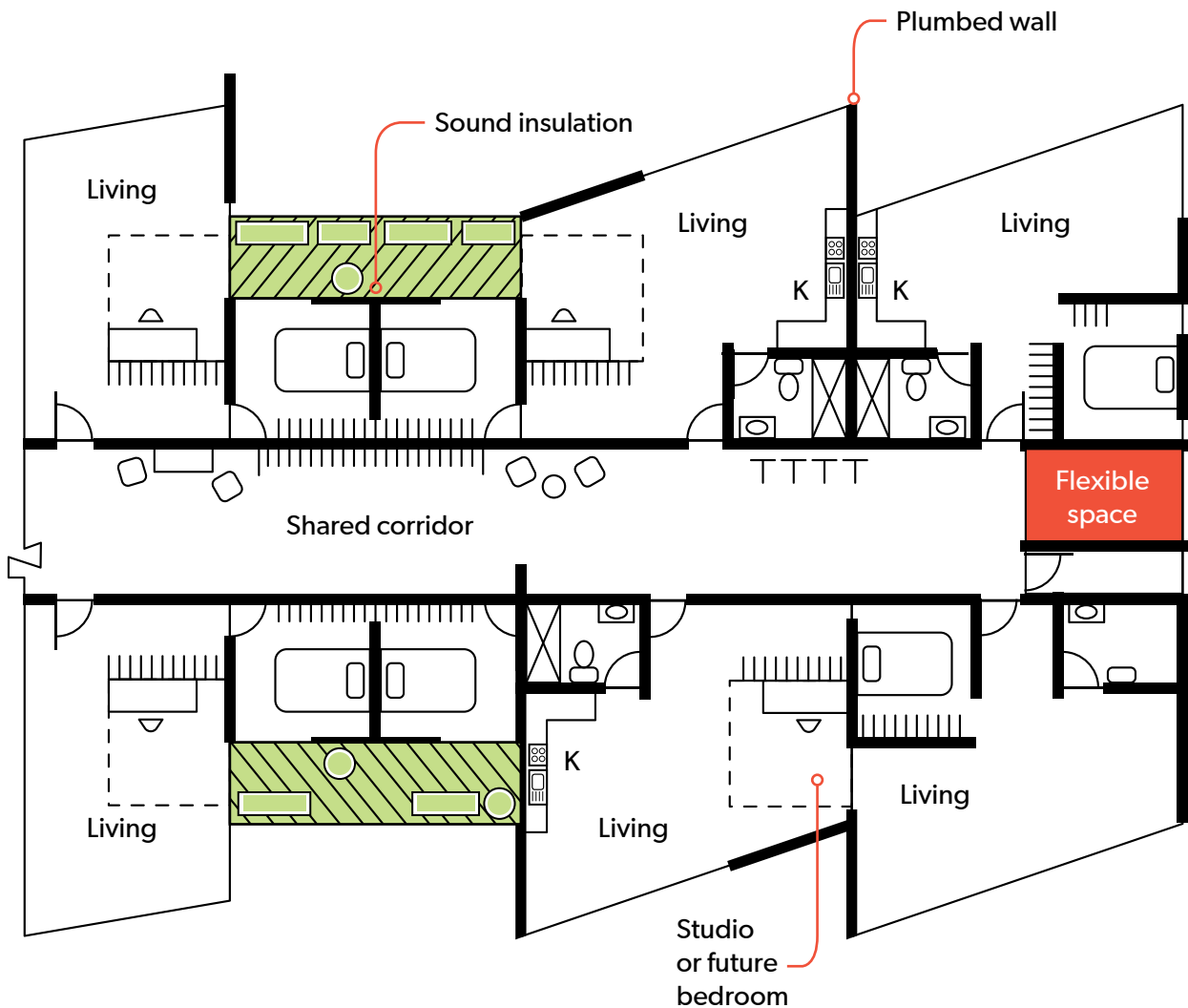- Pre-plan for changes in circulation. When designing adjacent apartments, foresee interior connectivity such that two units could be used as one.

02. Maximize access to natural light and ventilation when all subdivisions are in place.

03. Ensure sound insulation between spaces to eliminate unwelcome noise.

04. Identify flexible areas to create temporary guest space, like sheds that can be flexible offices or bedrooms.

05. Promote flexibility in shared spaces so they can be used according to residents' needs over time.

06. Include flexible features to temporarily transform interior spaces into balconies and vice versa.

Plumbed wall

Sound insulation

Living

Living

Living

K   K

Flexible space

Shared corridor

Living

K

Living

Living

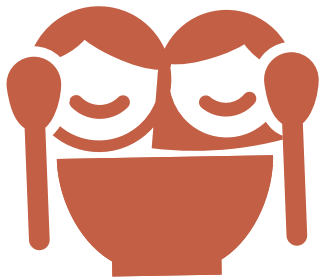Studio or future bedroom

Social corridors

Principle for sociability:

Doing things together - Residents who have opportunities to do meaningful or enjoyable things together are more likely to develop a sense of trust and connection.

→

Top action suggestion to achieve social wellbeing through the principle:

Create features and activities in social corridors that offer opportunities for neighbours to engage in a casual way.

Photo credits: Masao Nishikawa

Diverse
housing forms

Flexible
spaces

Social
corridors

Semi-public &
public amenities

Missing-
middle

Social
group size

Why is it important?

A rich community life can be based on what might seem like insignificant encounters with neighbours.

People need spaces to connect and eventually create meaningful relationships that will increase their sense of trust and connection among each others. Common spaces that promote positive relationships and facilitate trust-building encounters among residents, tenants, customers and other visitors improve social wellbeing in multi-family housing.

Informal encounters with fellow community members help build stronger social connections and increase residents' sense of belonging - a key element of wellbeing. Strong social connections also emerge when people work or play together on tasks or causes that feel bigger than themselves. Therefore designing common spaces for group activities and unscheduled interactions that allow neighbours to interact will support the development of healthy communities.

Main references

Kimura, Y., Wada, T., Fukutomi, E., Kasahara, Y., & Chen, W. (2012). Eating Alone Among Community-Dwelling Japanese Elderly: Association with Depression and Food Diversity. The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging, 16(8), 728–731.

Cattell, V., Dines, N., Gesler, W., & Curtis, S. (2008). Mingling, observing, and lingering: Everyday public spaces and their implications for well-being and social relations. Health and Place, 14(3), 544–561.

Happy City. (2017). Happy Homes: A toolkit for building sociability through multi-family housing design. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Barriers
Policy Solutions

What's stopping us from designing homes with social corridors right now?	Participants' suggestions to enable housing with social corridors that allow residents to engage in a casual way
Financial — Adding more square footage to corridors is not an efficient use of a project's budget as it does not increase sellable space and takes away from other sellable spaces.	→ Create FSR exemptions for additional square footage that facilitates social encounters and is not just designed for circulation.
Technical — Restrictions on the development's plot and designated construction area may not allow for an increase in corridor width and shared common spaces.	→ Relax height and setback restrictions when a project includes social corridors.
Policy — There are limited guidelines on designing common spaces; common spaces are often poorly located, not easily accessible and not designed to promote socializing.	→ Develop a best practice guideline for achieving sociability standards in shared common areas, including social corridors.

What additional actions will help us strengthen these policy solutions?

01. Include social corridors as part of the social amenity package required in multi-family housing.

02. Offer different social corridor design possibilities depending on the size of the development; ie. instead of increasing the width of the corridor, include a small gathering area close to a stairway landing or at the end of a hallway.

03. Promote retrofit of existing buildings by allowing retractable furniture in strategic spaces within the development.

04. Create mechanisms for future residents to share ideas and co-create social corridors and small gathering areas.

05. Offer small grants to address proper acoustic insulation strategies that will achieve a sound transmission class rating of 65 and will allow social corridors to coexist with apartment units.

06. Review building by-laws and fire code regulations to eliminate restrictions on corridor widths.

What should we do from the design perspective?

01. For smaller developments a social corridor should:

- Be 5ft wide.
- Include storage solutions.
- Be able to host 3 to 4 people comfortably.
- Be built into hallways that lead to courtyards for increased use.

* In smaller developments, social clusters at the end of corridors can be built in place of social corridors.
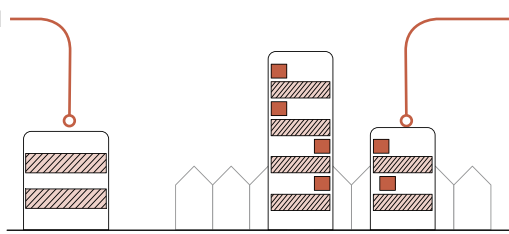
▨ **Shared corridor**

■ **Cluster amenity**

02. For larger developments a social corridor should:

- Be 7ft wide.
- Include storage solutions and shared furniture.
- Integrate varying demographic needs and expectations.
- Be able to host at least 5 people comfortably.
- Be built into hallways that lead to courtyards for increased use.
- Be included on at least every 3 storeys.
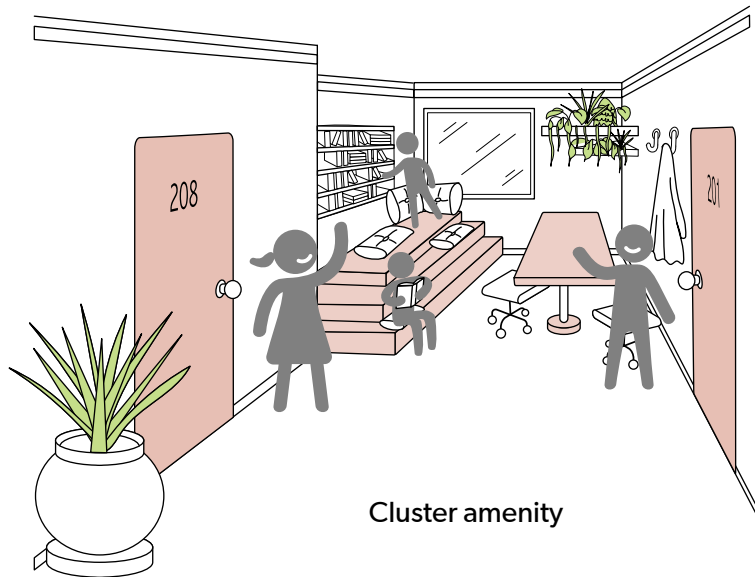
Cluster amenity

03. Develop a menu of social priorities to be addressed in the development.

04. Ensure proper sound insulation between corridors and apartments to eliminate unwelcome noise.

05. Ensure clusters and social corridors have access to natural light and exposure to nature.

06. Offer opportunities for casual encounters that address different residents' preferences according to age group.

07. Design creative solutions that are flexible and allow the use of space in different ways.

08. Locate spaces such as kitchens, living rooms and dining rooms next to the corridor to maintain privacy in bedrooms.

09. In family-oriented apartments, include windows and french doors that connect the apartments to the corridor so that neighbours can keep an eye on their children.
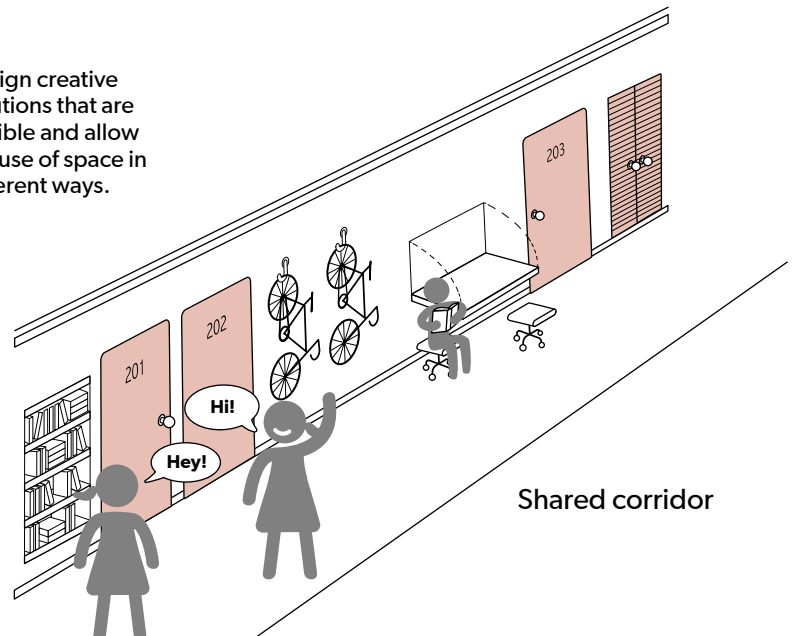

Shared corridor

Semi-public & public amenities

Principle for sociability:

Exposure - People who live in spaces that give them a greater sense of control over their exposure to others are more likely to build positive social connections.

Top action suggestion to achieve social wellbeing through the principle:

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

Photo credits: Dattner Architects + Grimshaw Architects
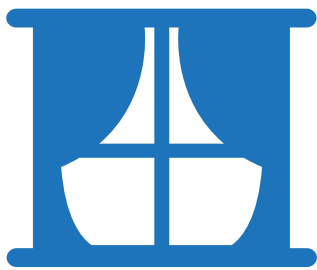
Why is it important?

Seamless transitions from private to public realm allow residents to better engage with their neighbourhood and with one another.

Providing both public and semi-public amenity spaces allows residents to feel connected to their surrounding community while controlling their exposure to the public. A sense of control, comfort and agency over their exposure to the public increases residents' sense of ease in their homes and contributes to residents' sense of personal territory, safety and satisfaction.

A variety of indoor, outdoor and common areas in housing developments with a range of uses can encourage casual encounters. Including common social spaces for residents in a development is crucial to promote wellbeing and build meaningful relationships through shared interests. Spaces that are used exclusively by a development's residents allow for a feeling of privacy and reduce feelings of crowdedness. These spaces are semi-private and facilitate recreational use at the same time. Spaces that are also open to the community foster positive social interactions and increase residents' sense of trust and belonging. Including semi-public spaces, like seating areas in common entrances to buildings and community gardens, can contribute to a sense of community at the neighbourhood level.

Main references

Churchman, A. (1999). Disentangling the Concept of Density. Journal Of Planning Literature, 13(4), 389–411.

Coley, R. L., Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (1997). Where Does Community Grow?: The Social Context Created by Nature in Urban Public Housing. Environment and Behavior, 29(4), 468–494.

Lund, H. (2002). Pedestrian Environments and Sense of Community. Journal of Planning Education and Research, 21(3), 301–312.

Happy City. (2017). Happy Homes: A toolkit for building sociability through multi-family housing design. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Barriers

Policy Solutions

	Barriers What's stopping us from designing houses with amenity spaces that are also open to the community?	**Policy Solutions** Participants' suggestions to enable housing with both public and semi-public spaces
Social	Residents' sense of privacy is affected when buildings contain public amenity space, negatively impacting their perception of safety.	Semi-public and public spaces should be accompanied with social programming, for example, with a social concierge.
Financial	Additional amenity space represents an increased cost for buyers, either upfront or through strata fees, which renters are reluctant to pay.	Create opportunities for city, community and/or private ownership of social amenities in multi-family housing, thereby reducing the maintenance costs that would otherwise get transferred to the buyer.
Policy	Existing zoning requirements are not connected to amenity planning or the Community Amenity Contribution requirements, posing challenges for creating innovative developments.	Expand the City's CAC definition to allow for public social amenities to count toward Community Amenity Contribution.

What additional actions will help us strengthen these policy solutions?

01. Complete community asset mapping to understand needs and future Community Amenity Contributions (CAC).

02. Allow CAC negotiations to be a collaborative process between planners and developers.

03. Relax setback restrictions to promote semi-public and community-oriented spaces.

04. Replace parking requirements with bicycle parking areas, bike-share and car-share initiatives.

05. Create FSR exemptions for additional public social amenities that are open to the community.

06. Offer small grants to create online apps that help residents navigate the sociability opportunities that their neighbourhood offers.

What should we do from the design perspective?

01. Ensure proper sound insulation on floors hosting social spaces to eliminate unwelcome noise.

02. Ensure shared spaces maximize access to natural and green environments.

03. Ensure that no more than 12 households are sharing the space at the same time when designing private and semi-public amenities.

04. Design spaces that create a gradual transition between the public and private spaces.

05. Offer community engagement workshops so that future residents can give feedback and participate in co-creating public amenity spaces according to their needs and preferences.

06. Design wayfinding systems so people can locate and be aware of the different social spaces that the neighbourhood offers.

Legend:
- ■ **Public**
- ■ **Semi-public**
- □ **Private**
- ■ **Green spaces**

Select a social concierge to promote a positive use of the space
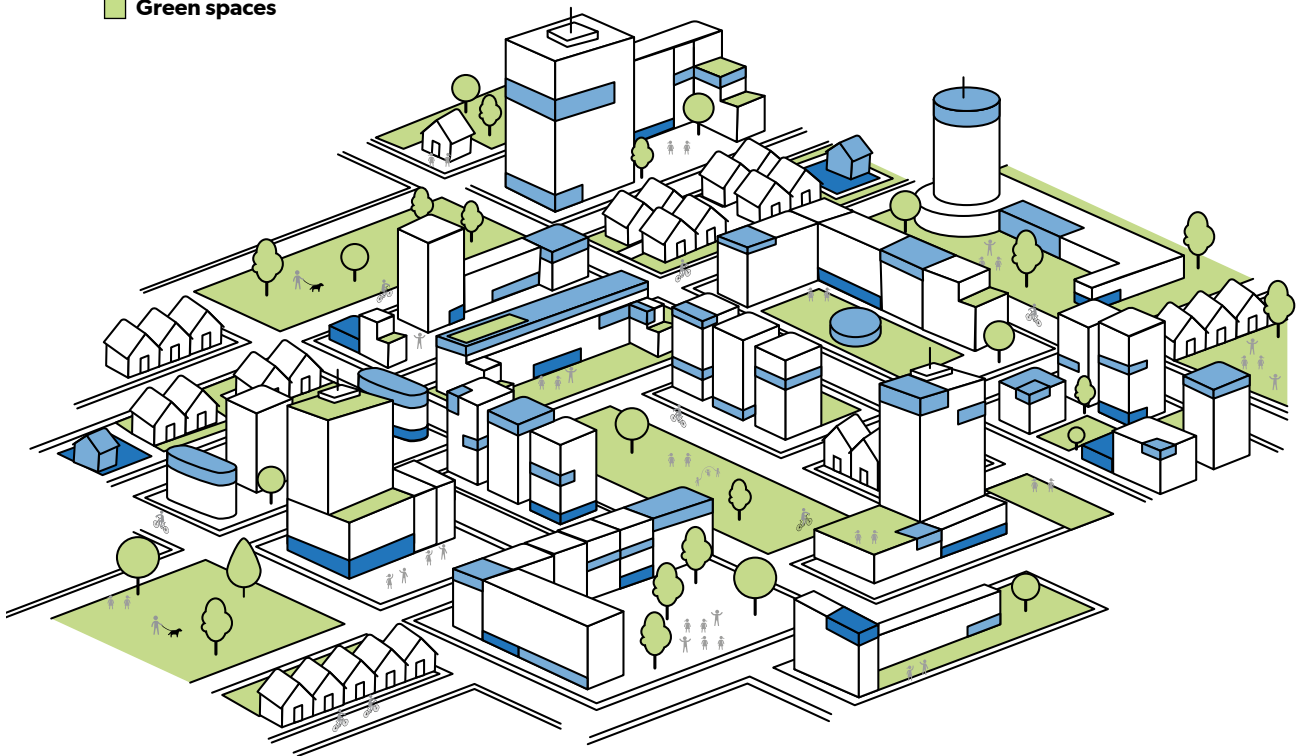
07. Public amenity spaces (open to the community) should:

- Be located on the ground floor or mezzanine.
- Promote neighbourhood shared values.
- Provide shelter from rain (if outdoors)

- Be planned and designed through community involvement .
- Balance and diversify the types of activities and shared spaces offered in the neighbourhood.

08. Private amenity spaces (for building residents only) should:

- Be included on different storeys within multi-family developments.
- Receive enough sunlight and have natural ventilation.
- Embrace flexibility accommodating different needs over time.

Missing-middle

Principle for sociability:

Walkability - Mixed-use neighbourhoods that encourage walking are most likely to be associated with positive social encounters and a strong sense of community.

Top action suggestion to achieve the principle across the city:

→

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

Photo credits: La Citta Vita on Flickr. License: CC BY-SA 2.0.

Why is it important?

The reliance on private vehicles limits opportunities for in-person interactions.

Also, people in car-dependent communities often report feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. In contrast, residents of dense, mixed-use neighbourhoods with well-connected public transport and highly accessible street networks are more likely to walk for part of their journeys. Walkable neighbourhoods with good pedestrian infrastructure and plentiful stores and restaurants tend to foster local social encounters and a sense of community and belonging.

Medium to high population density and land use mix enable residents to reach services and transit on foot, which in addition to increasing wellbeing through promoting physical activity, can also boost local social capital. Having access to shops and services within walking distance enables residents to save commuting time and use that time to connect with neighbours and the people they love. Such walkable places have been found to be more resilient in times of crisis because people are more likely to know one another.

Main references

Cooper Marcus, C., & Sarkissian, W. (1986). Housing As If People Mattered. University of California Press.

Goodyear, S. (2013, January 3). Resilience Is About Relationships, Not Just Infrastructure. CityLab.

Hassen, N., & Kaufman, P. (2016). Examining the role of urban street design in enhancing community engagement: A literature review. Health & Place, 41, 119–132.

Happy City. (2017). Happy Homes: A toolkit for building sociability through multi-family housing design. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Barriers

Policy Solutions

	What's stopping us from building medium-dense houses within mixed-use neighbourhoods?	Participants' suggestions to enable missing middle housing types within a 5-minute walk of shops and services.
Social	Communities are resistant to change and fear densification due to a lack of understanding of "good density".	Through workshops and forums, identify and share ideal neighbourhood-oriented design forms and efficiency recommendations that will allow the neighbourhood to maintain its unique character.
Policy	Zoning policies are too polarizing as they promote single-family neighbourhoods and limit density to certain areas.	Build flexibility into city-wide zoning to accommodate middle-density pilot projects that respond to the neighbourhood's character and conditions.
Financial	Rezoning and tenure processes are more complicated and expensive for mixed-use developments than they are for simplistic, single-use developments.	Fast-track rezoning projects that include mixed-use, mid-density developments and address key sociability guidelines.

What additional actions will help us strengthen these policy solutions?

01. Include opportunities that address private and public realm needs in the neighbourhood.

02. Develop a missing middle education program for policymakers and stakeholders including zoning navigation, possible incentives and life quality design enablers.

03. Reduce land costs for pilot projects that include medium-dense housing.

04. Create grants for middle-density pilot projects that comply with the neighbourhood's original character.

05. Offer a density bonus when designing a mixed-use development that addresses a predefined set of sociability criteria.

06. Relax parking requirements for middle-density developments close to transit stops.

# What should we do from the design perspective?

01. Include open shared spaces that offer climate-appropriate shelter. Increase permeability along multi-family housing blocks to ensure natural light, proper ventilation and access to nature.

02. Promote parking flexibility and alternative car sharing systems in small and medium developments.

03. Include spaces to sit and relax in streets, parks and active laneways.

04. Arrange parking to maximize positive face-to-face encounters in pleasant areas of the development.
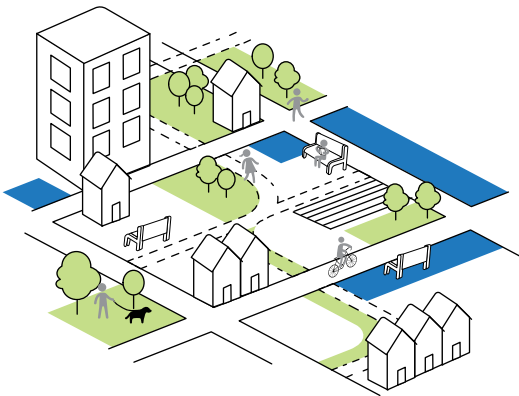
Increase permeability

Active edges

Green spaces

Enable missing-misside
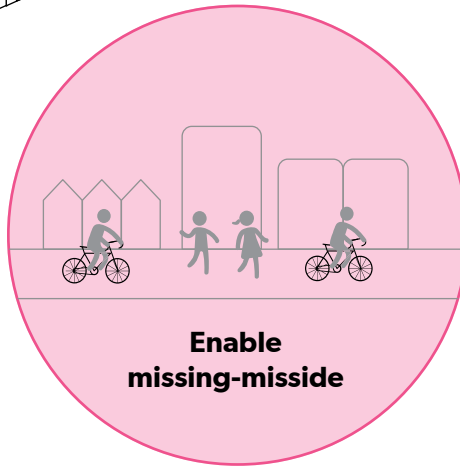
05. Ensure enough green spaces that are accessible to all members of the community.

06. Ensure that development edges have active facades and social opportunity nodes that interest neighbours.

07. Vary building height, building composition, balconies and facade materials according to the character and image of the neighbourhood.

Social group size

Principle for sociability:

Social group size - Social group size has a direct influence on the quality and intensity of trusting relationships that people develop.

Top action suggestion to achieve social wellbeing through the principle:

→ In standard multi-family housing, create subclusters where no more than 12 households share a semi-private space.

Photo credits: Happy CIty

Why is it important?

People have a limited capacity to remember faces and develop trust. This can heighten anxiety and cause people to retreat from social interaction.

In result, the perception of crowding in multi-family housing can corrode interactions with neighbours and others in the community. Dividing large residential developments into smaller clusters of households can reduce this perceived density and feelings of crowdedness.

Housing that creates opportunity for close contact with fewer neighbours allows for more trusting relationships to develop. Residents who live in apartments, townhouses and single-family homes report higher levels of satisfaction when they share private common space among 6 to 8 households. In most multi-family housing settings, residents report feeling less crowded and a greater connection with neighbours when semi-private common spaces are shared by no more than 12 adults and their children.

Main references

Coley, R. L., Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (1997). Where Does Community Grow?: The Social Context Created by Nature in Urban Public Housing. Environment and Behavior, 29(4), 468–494.

Zhang, D. (2016). Courtyard Housing in North America: Chinese Design for Health and Happiness. URBAN DESIGN International, 1–17.

Cooper Marcus, C., & Sarkissian, W. (1986). Housing As If People Mattered. University of California Press.

Happy City. (2017). Happy Homes: A toolkit for building sociability through multi-family housing design. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Barriers

Policy Solutions

	What's stopping us from achieving optimal social exposure in shared spaces?	Participants' suggestions to enable semi-private spaces shared by up to 12 households.
Financial	Building costs and development fees will increase with additional common spaces, making unit prices unaffordable for buyers.	Allow for a small number of commercial units corresponding to the development's size to subsidize costs of extra shared spaces.
Social	Shared, semi-private spaces create challenges surrounding ownership and privacy for tenants who are accustomed to clear delineations between public and private spaces.	Implement programming actions or establish a social concierge to ensure shared spaces address all needs and are used in an organized way.
Policy	Policies setting restrictions on frontages and setbacks create challenges when designing more shared common spaces in a larger development.	Offer a density bonus in exchange for developing a surplus of social spaces.

What additional actions will help us strengthen these policy solutions?

01. Offer FSR exemptions for developments that exceed minimum amenity square foot requirements.

02. Adjust parking requirements in exchange for area that will be used for additional shared spaces.

03. Relax height restrictions to include additional interior and exterior shared spaces in the rooftop of a development.

04. Retrofit projects with sociability opportunities, ensuring new Community Amenity Contributions consider asset mapping results

05. Modify setback requirements such that these areas can instead be concentrated in a common courtyard.

06. Use setback areas as open shared spaces that can be used by residents and members of the community, e.g. community gardens, bench clusters, floor games, library/reading space, etc.

What should we do from the design perspective?

Courtyard

01. Design adjacent shared spaces that can be transformed into one larger space for special events.

02. Develop usage guidelines to accompany the design of the space.

03. Ensure proper insulation in shared rooms to avoid unwelcome noise.

04. For shared courtyards in small to medium developments:

- Design windows facing the courtyard so that homes have enough sunlight and ventilation and habitability conditions are improved.

- Maintain design flexibility to address different needs.

- Locate a local shop at the end of the courtyard to increase eyes on public space and increase social opportunities for the community.

- Include a variety of courtyards when designing larger developments.

Social concierge

05. Transform storage and other required spaces into socializing opportunities across the building, e.g. entryways, laundry rooms, storage rooms, bike spaces, workshops, tool sheds.

06. Ensure there person or groups of people help the community organize while sharing spaces.

07. Design shared spaces with activities that coexist, e.g. bike shop/wash and dog wash, daycare and reading room, music room and shared kitchen.

08. Locate shared spaces in strategic places within the development so that they are visible and easily accessed by all residents.

Next steps

Designed to Engage *has provided an opportunity to identify the priorities that different stakeholders share in Vancouver's housing industry.*

We have learned that through positive conversations, we can come up with powerful policy and design solutions that will ensure multi-family housing brings people together and fosters meaningful social connections. Most importantly, this work has resulted in the identification of 6 actions that can be enabled through policy and design strategies.

Our work doesn't end here. We are keen to take this work to the next level by pursuing the policy recommendations that we have created. We believe that building sociability in our neighbourhoods is a crucial task and together, we can make this happen. Moving forward, we need to start seeing pilot projects that pursue these actions, grants that promote investing in sociability and support from different levels of government.

What can you do?

This set of actions and solutions is intended to be used to rethink the future of multi-family housing.

Our city is witnessing a very exciting moment: policy changes are addressing housing affordability to make Metro Vancouver a livable region. Imagine if we accompany these new strategies with sociability standards that promote wellbeing.

There are multiple organizations and programs that are helping address one of the most pressing issues in British Columbia: social isolation. We have developed this report as a tool to guide policy and strategies for multi-family housing. Whether you are a developer, architect, planner, investor or residential manager, this report will help guide your future projects. Please use it and share with your colleagues; we are keen to spread this work and continue building happy and healthy cities.

"There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans"

Jane Jacobs

About Happy City

Firm Qualifications

Happy City is a Vancouver-based consultancy that draws on research in psychology, neuroscience, public health and behavioral economics to illuminate the intersection between urban design systems and wellbeing.

———

Happy City uses these insights to empower clients around the world to build wellbeing into place. Our work is aligned with the City of Vancouver's world-leading Healthy City Strategy, augmenting this approach with a strong emphasis on social wellbeing and the behavioral effects of design.

Happy City uses a broad range of tools to help governments and developers maximize the health and wellbeing performance of urban policies, spaces and systems. Our tools include:
- Wellbeing audits of policies, plans and places
- Evidence-based workshops and presentations
- Collaborative consultation on planning policy and place design
- Research and publications such as *Happy City, Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*
- Immersive exercises and interdisciplinary research on the psychological impact of urban design

Recent clients include the City of Vancouver, Downtown Colorado, the Government of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Government of Mexico City's Lab Para La Ciudad Environmental Ministry, the Congress for New Urbanism, British Land - the UK's largest mixed-use developer- and Westbank.

Based in Vancouver, Happy City maintains offices in Mexico City, Halifax, Nova Scotia and Bournemouth, United Kingdom.

Our mailing address is:
312 Main St, Second Floor
Vancouver, BC, V6A 2T2

Philosophy and general approach

Urban policies, plans and placemaking have a direct, but commonly overlooked, influence on physical and psychological wellbeing.

City makers are starting to recognize that societal wellbeing is both a responsibility and a reasonable goal. But governments that are interested in creating happier, healthier and more resilient communities need to be informed by a clear understanding of the relationship between design and wellbeing.

Happy City draws on more than a decade of research in public health, psychology, neuroscience and sociology to help decision makers make pragmatic, effective choices on urban policy, planning and design. This knowledge informs our urban wellbeing framework, a simple but powerful tool for translating evidence into action. Just as every city is unique, every society's approach to happiness is distinct. Therefore, we combine our wellbeing framework with deep collaboration and engagement with clients and stakeholders on every project.

References

Bernard, 2013; Quinn & Biggs, 2010; Reducing social isolation across the lifecourse, 2015. Social Isolation and the Value of Community Connection, n.d.; N. Valtorta & Hanratty, 2012

Cattell, V., Dines, N., Gesler, W., & Curtis, S. (2008). Mingling, observing, and lingering: Everyday public spaces and their implications for well-being and social relations. Health and Place, 14(3), 544–561.

Churchman, A. (1999). Disentangling the Concept of Density. Journal Of Planning Literature, 13(4), 389–411.

Coley, R. L., Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (1997). Where Does Community Grow?: The Social Context Created by Nature in Urban Public Housing. Environment and Behavior, 29(4), 468–494.

Cooper Marcus, C., & Sarkissian, W. (1986). Housing As If People Mattered. University of California Press.

Dunbar, R. Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Evans, G. (2003). The Built Environment and Mental Health. Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 80(4), 536–555.

Fennell, C. (2014). Experiments in Vulnerability: Sociability and Care in Chicago's Redeveloping Public Housing. City and Society, 26(2), 262–284.

Gang, J. (2015). Three Points of the Residential High-Rise: Designing for Social Connectivity. In CTBUH 2015 New York Conference (pp. 78–85).

Goodyear, S. (2013, January 3). Resilience Is About Relationships, Not Just Infrastructure. CityLab.

Hassen, N., & Kaufman, P. (2016). Examining the role of urban street design in enhancing community engagement: A literature review. Health & Place, 41, 119–132.

Helliwell, J. F., & Wang, S. (2010). Trust and Well-being (No. 15911). Cambridge, MA.

Jean, M. (2011, August 27). Neighbors Connecting in Disasters. The Baltimore Sun.

Kim, J., & Kaplan, R. (2004). Physical and Psychological Factors in Sense of Community: New Urbanist Kentlands and Nearby Orchard Village. Environment & Behavior, 36(3), 313–340.

Kimura, Y., Wada, T., Fukutomi, E., Kasahara, Y., & Chen, W. (2012). Eating Alone Among Community-Dwelling Japanese Elderly: Association with Depression and Food Diversity. The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging, 16(8), 728–731.

Kuo, F., Sullivan, W., Coley, R., & Brunson, L. (1998). Fertile ground for community: Inner-city neighborhood common spaces. American Journal of Community Psychology, 26(6), 823–851.

Kwon, H. J., & Beamish, J. O. (2014). Segmentation analysis of US older adults living in multifamily housing: Reasons for moving. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 38(4), 427–434.

Lund, H. (2002). Pedestrian Environments and Sense of Community. Journal of Planning Education and Research, 21(3), 301–312.

Marsden, G. (2006). The evidence base for parking policies - a review. Transport Policy, 13(6), 447–457. Evidence Brief: Neighbourhood walkability and physical activity in urban areas. (2015).

McCamant, K. and Durrett, C. Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1994.

Perrotta, K., Campbell, M., Chirrey, S., Frank, L., & Chapman, J. (2012). The Walkable City: Neighbourhood Design and Preferences, Travel Choices and Health. Toronto, Ontario.

Plas, J. M., & Lewis, S. E. (1996). Environmental factors and sense of community in a planned town. American Journal of Community Psychology, 24(1), 109–143.

Taket, A., Crisp, R. B., Nevill, A., Lamaro, G., Graham, M., & Barter-Godfrey, S. (Eds.). (2009). Theorising Social Exclusion. New York: Routledge.

Villines, S. (2014). Community Size. Retrieved August 31, 2016, http://cohousing.org/node/2598

Williams, D. R., & Collins, C. (2001). Racial Residential Segregation: A Fundemental Cause of Racial Disparities in Health. Public Health Reports (Vol. 116).

Zhang, D. (2016). Courtyard Housing in North America: Chinese Design for Health and Happiness. URBAN DESIGN International, 1–17.

Happy City