

## Old Neighborhoods and Housing Provide New Models for the Future.



### 2. Lack of Positive Models

- Most people and many professional planners and public officials are simply unaware of models like these small lot homes, duplexes, and housing over shops that are part of their own community but in neighborhoods outside their places of current residence or work.
- The “rediscovery” of older neighborhoods since the 1980’s and the publications of the new urbanism movement has changed some of these perceptions, but not in all areas.
- Many people find it difficult to tell what the density of a particular development might be, and focus more on the style, visual appearance, and landscaping features that combine to make a structure feel sympathetic to its larger context, or feel out of character.

## Living Close is Part of our History



### 3. Inability of planners to educate the public

The current buyer and renter interest in older American neighborhoods like this small town Victorian era district does reveal a growing trend. A series of California polls commissioned by several major foundations shows that many people who might first choose a single family home on a large lot as their “ideal” home type will then change their preference when given the option of a house on a smaller lot in an older neighborhood, where amenities, conveniences, and either a job or transit is close buy. The perceived “design value” of older neighborhoods which are statistically more dense than newer homogenous suburbs appear to compensate for getting a smaller home on a smaller lot.

However, it is difficult for the public and most elected officials to translate their potential interest in the “good feel” of older, more compact communities into the process of planning for and accepting new developments in their own neighborhoods. The very process and terminology of development tend to polarize participants, and this is where all the “bad feelings” about density come out. When confronted with the the zoning terms and metrics of density, expressed in terms of units per acre or floor area building compared to lot area, parking and open space ratios, the general tendency is to think, the lower the number for buildings, people, and cars the better, the higher the numbers of parking ratios and open space, the better.

## Single Family and Multifamily Homes Have Often Been Mixed on the Same Block



#### 4. General fear of change and loss of property values.

Affordable housing sponsors almost universally draw their greatest opposition from homeowners in adjacent single family detached homes. The mere suggestion of bringing in to the community people that could not otherwise afford the single family detached homes already there is the underlying basis of their objections. While the emotional basis of the reaction may have a social component, there is also fear that the physical form of the new development may have a harmful effect on the existing neighborhood. This anxiety has its historical basis. The entire system of American zoning that uses land use controls to segregate single family detached homes from other uses, and sets minimum lot standards up to “protect property values” was sanctioned in the 1920’s by the supreme court.

Prior to the 1920’s, the pattern of lot sizes and housing types was entirely free market driven, but it also provided a great diversity of housing types in close proximity to one another, and neighborhood patterns that have become increasingly attractive to the public when compared to the homogenous subdivisions of more modern times.

## Taller Buildings and Housing over Stores Are Found Near Transit and at Active Corners



In actuality, the amount of land taken up by older single family homes varies enormously in most parts of the nation, and the standards for one city or region may be very different than those in another. Many American cities have older neighborhoods laid out in the 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with relatively small lots, shallow front yards, small backyards, and minimal side yards so that single family detached homes are closely spaced, and can achieve densities of 12-16 units per acre or more, excluding streets. These were districts laid out to accommodate a rapidly growing urban workforce while offering a housing type than was intended for the new middle class, as opposed to the tenement and narrow row house models that factory workers still inhabited. One finds entire neighborhoods in cities with a growing mercantile and factory managerial class, like Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, St Louis, Baltimore, Richmond, and Chicago to name a few where the oldest single family detached homes were 18 to 25 foot wide units with identical plans to the attached roughhouses, except they were placed three to six feet apart and set back 5 to 10 feet from the street. The density provided by this pattern happened to also support walkable corner stores and neighborhood commercial districts, and neighborhoods with these homes and characteristics have been rapidly “rediscovered” by several generations of middle class families.

Modern building codes memorialize this first model of “detached” units by allowing lower fire rating standards to be used in single family homes that are at least 3 feet from their side lot line.

## Detached Homes Fit on Small Lots



Chicago, closely spaced "bungalows"



Photo courtesy Richard Benjamin

Providence Wide-Shallow "row homes"

Apartments Can Look Like Homes  
or Fit with Homes



1930's 4-plex,  
Spokane, Washington



Rowhouses and "false mansions"  
Boston

## Garden Apartment Districts are found Close to Job and Transportation Centers



Multifamily housing models were also adapted to the growing middle class preference for front yards, distance between buildings, and street landscaping. “Garden apartments” were developed in many American cities in the 1910-1940 period. Some were designed to resemble large homes. They differed from the older urban apartment buildings by being freestanding, low rise structures, usually with no elevators, but with parking for each units at the side or rear of the lot. They offered housing type diversity while fitting into the general lower rise, smaller scale, and more landscaped context of the green city ideals promulgated by social and health reformers in the post World War 1 period.

Taller Apartments can be Designed with Visual Interest and Human Scale





## Comparing Approaches: Poorly Designed New Market Rate Homes on Small Lots



In many parts of the nation, higher land values are forcing market rate builders to push for smaller lots, but the solutions vary widely in terms of both aesthetic appeal and general contribution to neighborhood livability. .

There are some good lessons we can learn from past housing types in the differ regions of the US.... how to make compact housing more attractive and more livable than the 1950s era motel type buildings that most people associate with “higher density housing.”

Well Designed Affordable Homes on  
Small Lots



Self Help Homes, Santa Rosa – Wide/Shallow Lots

Burbank Housing Santa Rosa Compact Lots

## Multiple Strategies in One City Can Expand Choice



San Jose, California: Baker Place– 4 low income rental units per “Grand House”

Baker Place



Crescendo Oaks, - 6 first time homebuyer townhouses in one "Mansion"

Crescendo Oaks, estimated 16 units per acre



Almaden Lakes – market rate and first time buyer town homes, low income and market rate apartments, at transit, near park and lake

## Compact Housing Builds Neighborhood Character



Parkside Gables, Stamford Connecticut

## Compact Housing Provides Good Open Space



Woodlands, Boulder, CO



Randolph Neighborhood, Richmond, VA

## Compact Housing Supports Strong Families

