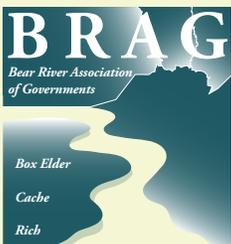


Affordable Housing

- Design Guidelines and Best Practices -



Writing and research by Dayton Crites, Regional Planner, Bear River Association of Governments

AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKS

A community which cares for all its inhabitants has a responsibility to ensure that everyone can have a roof over their heads. Affordable housing is defined as any housing that is built expressly to accommodate the needs of middle and lower income individuals who may not otherwise be able to afford a place to live.

Yet residents and local government officials are often reluctant to approve apartments or other high density development. Often, negative effects on surrounding home prices and increased crime rates are cited as concerns when opposing the development of an affordable housing complex.

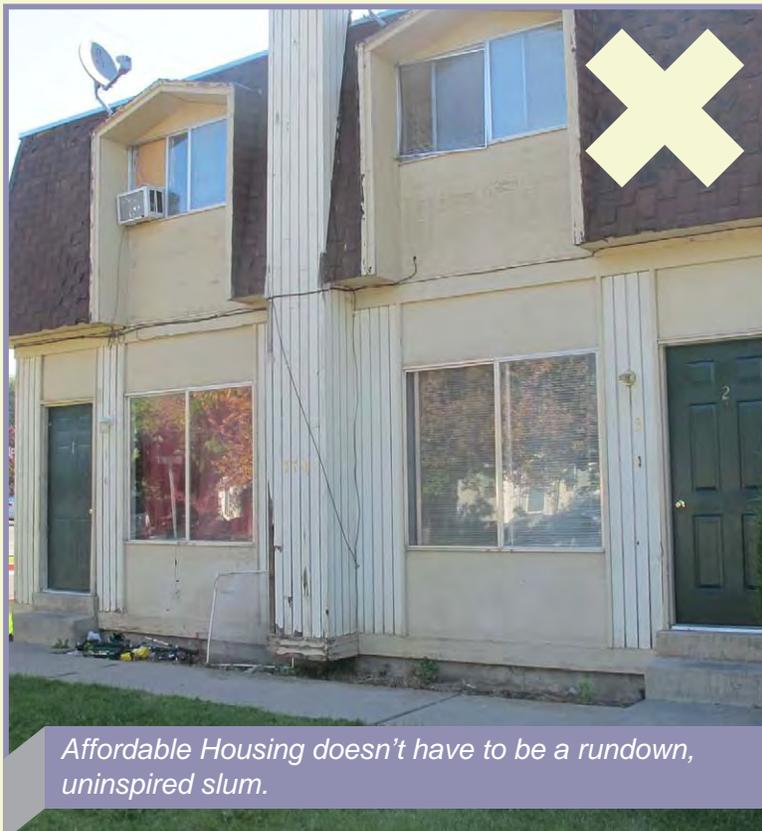
However, numerous studies have indicated that affordable housing developments that are designed, constructed, and managed well can become valuable and treasured parts of a community. This document is intended to be a brief summary of current findings regarding the effects of affordable housing developments on their communities.

Arizona State University's Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family, part of ASU's Global Institute of Sustainability, conducted an indepth review of existing research that sought to answer the question, "What effect do affordable housing developments have on surrounding home prices?"

A large number of professional and academic case studies have already attempted to answer this question. The Stardust study¹ compared 21 different research studies that analyzed the effect of specific affordable housing developments on surrounding real estate prices.

Their findings, detailed on the following pages, indicate that while there is no silver bullet which guarantees a development's success, there are a number of key factors that greatly effect how a project will impact its residents and the surrounding community.

¹Ahzen, Sherry, "How does Affordable Housing Effect Surrounding Property Values" Arizona State University, 2008



Affordable Housing doesn't have to be a rundown, uninspired slum.



*Affordable Housing can be a beautiful addition to a community like these homes in Daybreak UT.**

**image credit: Jake Young @ Flickr*

Affordable Housing and Surrounding Real Estate: What Factors Have an Impact?

Key Factors

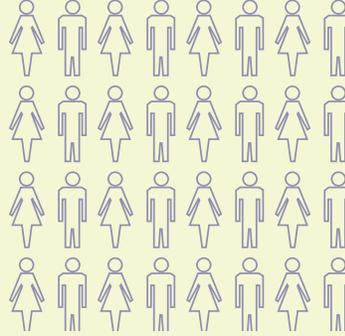
Replacement



Developments that replaced depressed conditions such as vacant, abandoned, or rundown properties generated more positive impacts on surrounding properties than those developed on vacant land in untroubled neighborhoods.



Concentration



Larger housing units resulted in positive price impacts for nearby homes, to a point. Studies indicate a point at which over concentration of housing negatively impacts surrounding home values. This point varies based on local conditions.

Management



Management matters most. Housing which maintains residential and landscape facilities avoids many of the negative effects associated with poorly managed developments. Studies found non-profit housing agencies to better maintain developments than their for-profit counterparts.

Context



Affordable housing seems least likely to generate negative property value impacts when embedded in low-poverty, stable neighborhoods and is well managed. This context provides an environment in which the developments are cherished rather than despised by residents.

No Influence

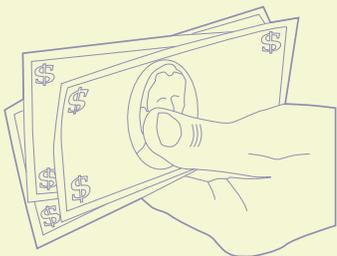
The same ASU study found a number of factors that had little to no effect on the success or failure of affordable housing developments. Though anecdotes may say otherwise, the findings indicate that these factors have little to no influence on the success of a housing development.

Ownership



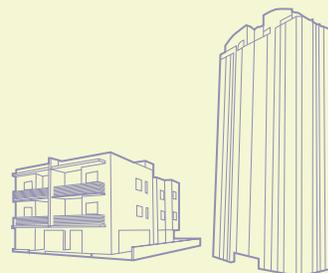
Owned, rented, or leased, the type of ownership associated with a development does not appear to have any direct influence on surrounding real estate values.

Subsidization



Surrounding property values seem to be unaffected by the program assisting in the development, purchase, leasing, and rentals of affordable home developments.

Structure



No one type of development, townhouse, big house, apartment or high rise seems to improve or worsen conditions more than another type, as long as it fits within the context mentioned above.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

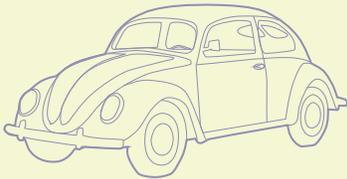
Alongside concerns about a housing development's impact on the local real estate market, concerns about the aesthetics of a development are often voiced by community members and decision makers alike.

Many developments have earned a poor reputation through vinyl facades, non-existent landscaping, and poor upkeep. Yet there are many examples of how affordable housing can be designed in order to have a high quality appearance

appropriate to the town and the region, attractive to potential residents and current neighbors, and still be constructed on a limited budget.

The following pages in this document contain examples of a few design considerations that improve the aesthetics, safety, and functionality of any multi-family dwelling. Read on for details and illustrations of how affordable housing can be a beautiful addition to any community.

Parking Design



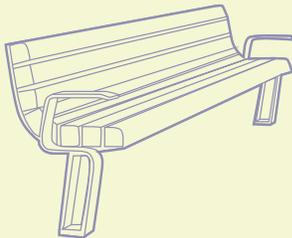
DO

- create small, separated parking lots
- avoid ped/auto conflicts
- put cars behind homes

DON'T

- create monolithic parking lots
- overlap ped/auto routes
- put parking on street

Open Space Design



DO

- integrate open space
- develop many types of open space
- consider visibility

DON'T

- pave the entire area
- make homogenous parks & plazas

Privacy



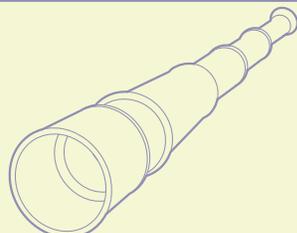
DO

- provide a range of private spaces
- allow for secluded outdoor spaces

DON'T

- provide access to non-residents
- expose public spaces to street

Visibility



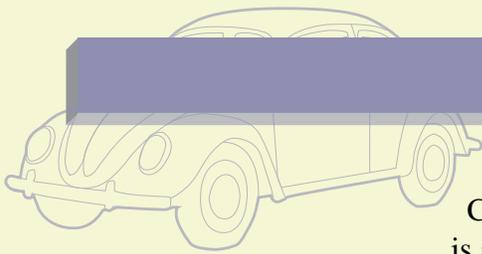
DO

- provide views of parking, walkways and parks to residents
- provide good lighting

DON'T

- create dark or hidden walkways
- over-expose semi-private areas

PARKING DESIGN



Convenient parking is a prerequisite of any modern design. However, a development that focuses too much on automotive accommodations risks creating a space that does not accommodate its human occupants when they are outside their vehicles - a place we all like to be.

A well thought out multi-family dwelling considers the following elements:

- Break up and distribute large parking lots into smaller pieces.
- Separate automotive access routes from pedestrian routes as much as possible.
- Hide parking lots underneath, behind, or on the sides of the building to avoid a shopping mall - like streetscape.

Break up Large Lots

Due to the need to provide a parking space for nearly every adult resident of affordable housing developments, it is easy to approve a design where all the parking needs are taken care of by paving two acres of a four acre site and dedicating the space to automotive parking.

However, when comparing the large, 100 lot parking lot to a series of five 20-car lots, the multiple, small lot approach has a number of advantages.

A number of smaller parking lots allow residents to park closer to their homes, eases problems associated with storm water runoff, creates a more pleasant atmosphere for residents to walk through, and reduces the heat island effect that a large parking area will create during summer.

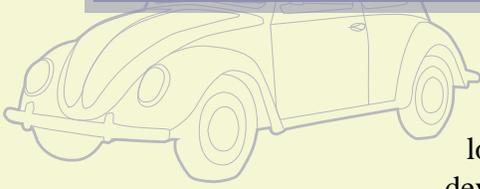


Expansive parking lots store cars, but create an oppressive landscape. It is a risk-prone area for children, pedestrians and an eyesore for neighbors.



Shade structures, landscaping and street trees create parking lots that are much more visually appealing and a smaller parking lot size makes each space more appealing and accessible.

Pedestrian Vs. Automotive



When looking at potential parking lot designs for a development, it is important that the design creates circulation pathways that separate automotive circulation from pedestrian circulation and children's play areas.



Providing an obvious circulation path for pedestrians makes a parking area safer for everyone.
image credit: activecommutedpx.com



When pedestrians must cross parking lots, a simple striped crossing in the parking lot is a visual indicator of pedestrian's presence, and serves as a cue for drivers to be more aware of those crossing the lot.
image credit: alexmclean.com

Streetscape Appearance

People love the prices they find at big box stores. But people don't love the way the parking lot looks at big box stores. Appropriately designed housing developments should hide the parking areas from street view and place them inside, behind, or underneath the buildings.

Good streetscape design creates an inviting place for people to walk and socialize, and doesn't create large street side parking lots or garages.

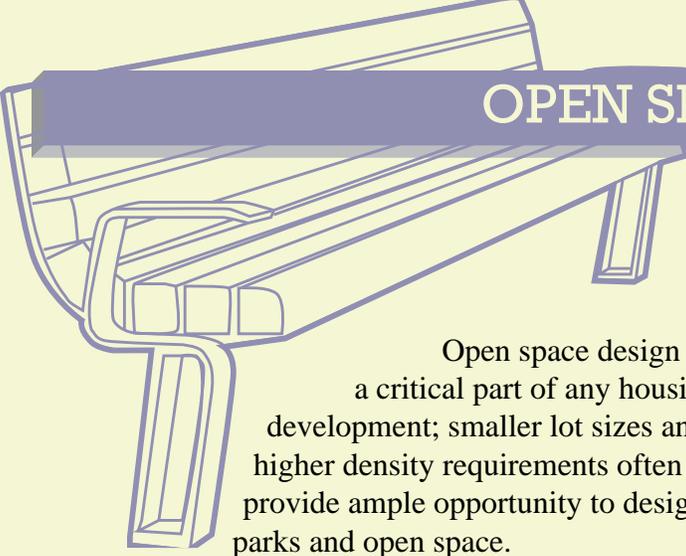


A parking lot that directly faces the street does little for a unit's appearance.



By putting parking lots within or behind buildings, designs can maintain a more pedestrian friendly appearance while providing easy access to personal transportation for residents.

OPEN SPACE DESIGN



Open space design is a critical part of any housing development; smaller lot sizes and higher density requirements often provide ample opportunity to design parks and open space.

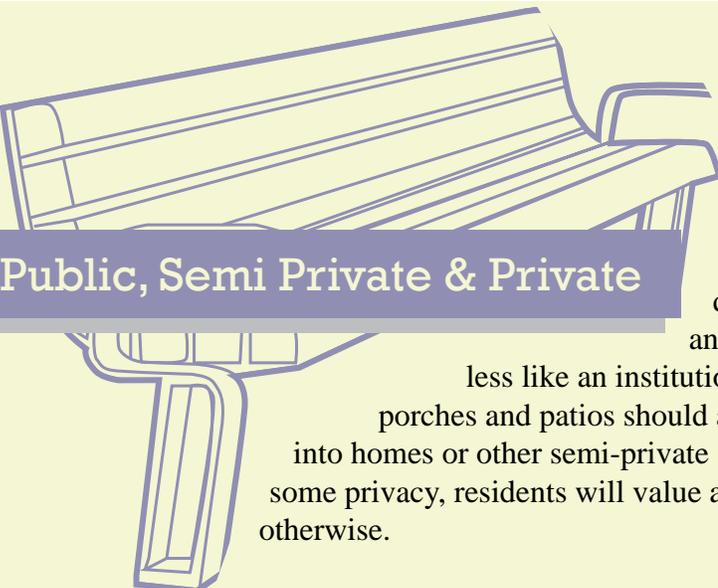
All residents should have access to open space, both public courtyards and private patios and gardens. Semi-public spaces 'owned' by all residents within a development contribute to a sense of ownership and responsibility for one's surroundings. Play areas, public seating, shade trees and outdoor gathering spaces should all be considered as part of the total design.

Some key considerations when developing open space as part of a housing development are as follows:

- Integrate parks and open space throughout the development footprint.
- Provide a wide variety of spaces and recreation options
- Create a gradient of privacy, from fully private homes, to semi-private porches & patios, to public lawns and courtyards.

On small scale developments, a single courtyard or park might be sufficient. However, in larger developments, a well designed development should provide a variety of public and semi-private open spaces placed throughout the development, located to allow ease of access for all residents.

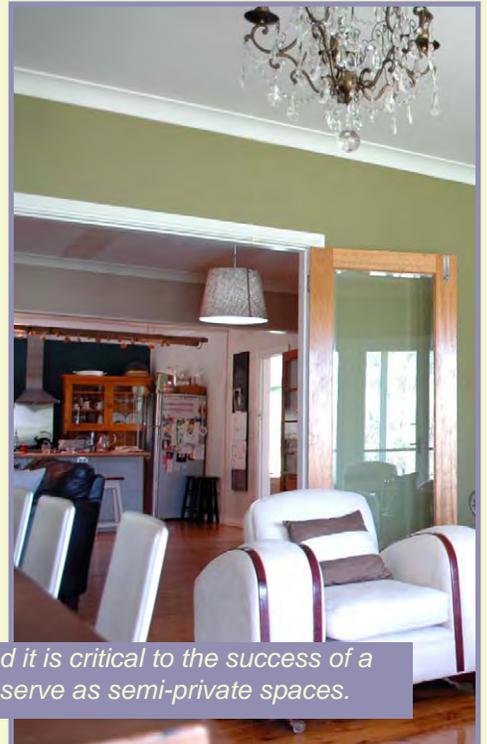
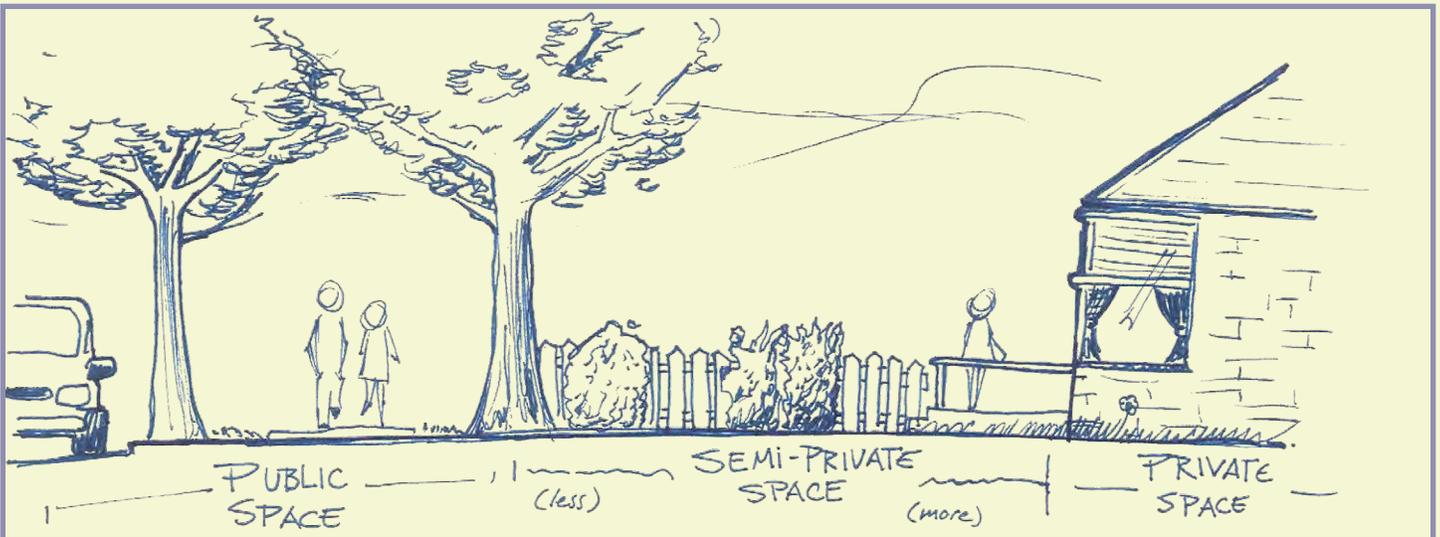




Public, Semi Private & Private

Public spaces and private spaces are nearly always developed, but it is the overlooked courtyards, porches and patios that make a space truly feel like home, and less like an institution. The correct placement of these spaces is critical; porches and patios should allow for views of public areas without direct views into homes or other semi-private spaces. By preserving outdoor space that retains some privacy, residents will value and care for their homes much better than they would otherwise.

These semi private spaces such as patios, porches, yards and deck often make the difference between cheap looking house and a lovely looking home.



Sidewalks & streets are public spaces, home interiors are private spaces, and it is critical to the success of a housing development to incorporate the middle zone - patios & porches that serve as semi-private spaces.

(image credits grantconstruction.com & homesteadinterior.com.au)

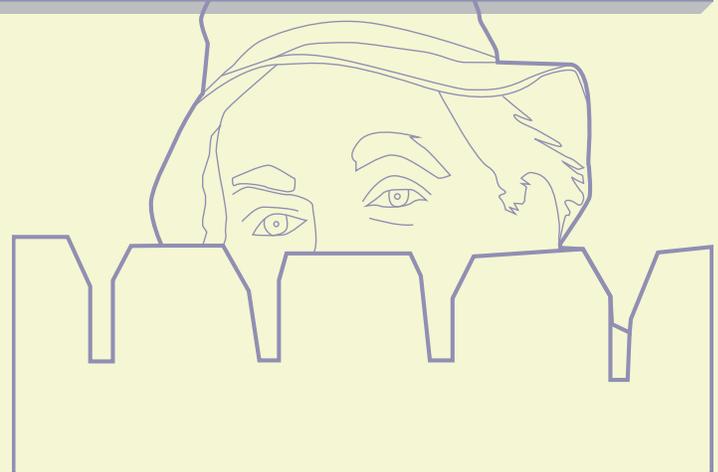
PRIVACY

Due to the proximity of multiple families in a development, the preservation of privacy for individuals and families in affordable housing developments becomes an important aspect of the design. Provision of private, semi private, and public spaces goes a long way towards addressing this need.

If privacy concerns are not properly addressed, residents will either cease to utilize a space, or modify the design even if that means incurring property damage.

In one post-occupancy study of two Oakland, California affordable housing developments, personal privacy was reported as highly valued. Where site designers had provided through access to streets on either side of the development, residents welded gates shut to block through access, restricting access to residents only.

In this same study, it was found that open spaces seen as private or semi-private, such as porches, backyards, and courtyards received a great deal of use, and those that were public with open

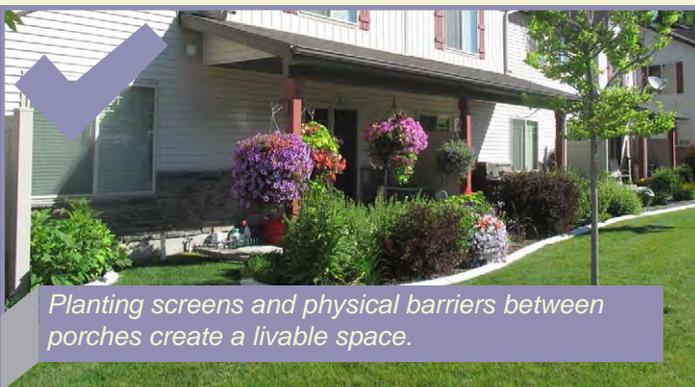


access to the street were practically vacant.¹

Based on post-occupancy evaluation of multi-family residences, there are a number of design criteria that appear to improve resident privacy and, in turn, their satisfaction and pride in the development.

- Avoid through-access between multiple streets
- Avoid creating yards and homes that have sight lines into one another.
- Avoid creating parks visible from beyond the development
- Provide semi-private and semi-public spaces for residential use

¹ Dryden, Amy "A Post Occupancy Evaluation of Low-Income Housing - Do Users Values and Preferences Overlap with Sustainable Design Practices?" Washington State University, 2004



Planting screens and physical barriers between porches create a livable space.

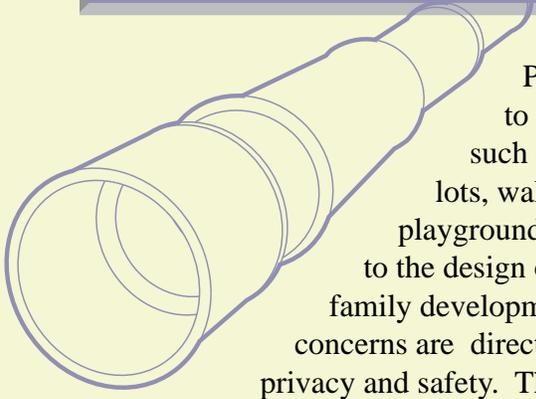


Lacking physical dividers to their backyards, these residents use the space for little more than storage.



These homes directly facing each other do not allow for good privacy.

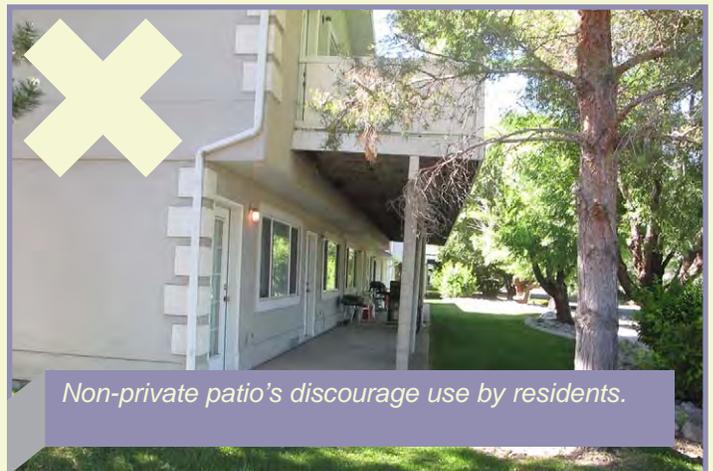
VISIBILITY



Providing visibility to public spaces such as parking lots, walkways and playgrounds is important to the design of quality multi-family developments. Visibility concerns are directly related to privacy and safety. The more publicly visible a walkway or courtyard is, the less

likely it will ever become a location conducive to criminal activity.

Equally important is the screening of off-site views into backyards, homes, and other private areas. When privacy is not protected for these areas, they go largely unused. In the case of porches, patios, and yards, lack of use equals poor maintenance and aesthetics that can reduce the neighborhood's overall aesthetic and property values.



DESIGN TYPOLOGIES

For residents and neighbors alike, the architecture and outside appearance of a development is one of the most important aspects of project approval.

Though the bland and cheap high-rise apartment paneled in only vinyl siding and surrounded by chain link fence is often feared, it is not the only option.

Designs whose architecture is specific to the region and neighborhood can be created so the development blends into the streetscape.

A multi-family housing project doesn't have to look like a dense and crowded apartment complex. Designs such as the 'Big House' create a multi-family dwelling that has an outward appearance very similar

to a larger single family residence.

Disguised density is another technique utilized to create an affordable housing development that presents a series of well-spaced townhomes to the street, but within the development's internals, the density steps up and more families can be accommodated without impacting the immediate neighborhood aesthetics.

The following pages are intended as visual references to illustrate how place specific architecture, big house design, townhome and disguised density approaches can create beautiful affordable housing projects.

Place Specific Architecture

Geographic regions, local communities, and individual neighborhoods all have unique architectural styles. When considering the design of an affordable housing project, seek an architectural style that blends into the surrounding streetscape rather than clashes against it.



Southwest, East Coast, and Intermountain West - all regions have a type of home design that 'just fits' with their surroundings (image credit l to r: realestateground.com/examiner.com(DM Smith)/utahspresenthistory.bogspot.com).

Townhomes

In some situations, the massing of a large, multi-story apartment block may be inappropriate, and a development of homes on smaller lots than the typical single-family home may be able to achieve the goals of affordable housing. Single-family homes can be placed on lots as narrow as 36' versus the standard 50'.

Connected units can be designed with single story elements such as garages separating the two

story living quarters in order to give a sense of amplified spacing and increased privacy between the homes. Architectural elements of porches and second floor patios can add interest and improve safety by providing increased numbers of eyes on the street. Designs which place garage entry and front door entry on opposite sides of the home do an excellent job of creating a pleasant pedestrian street environment.



Big House Designs

'Big House' refers to a design which places multiple apartments within a structure built to resemble a large, single-family home. Typically, a single big house can accommodate up to three or four residences, such as the images on the right of this page. The left hand photo depicts a larger unit, which accommodates 14 separate units.

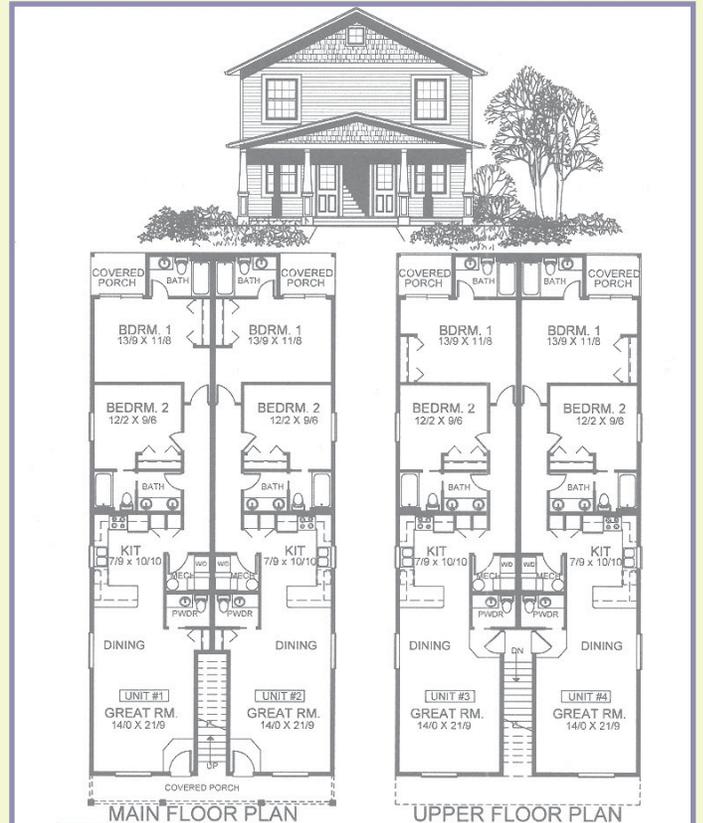
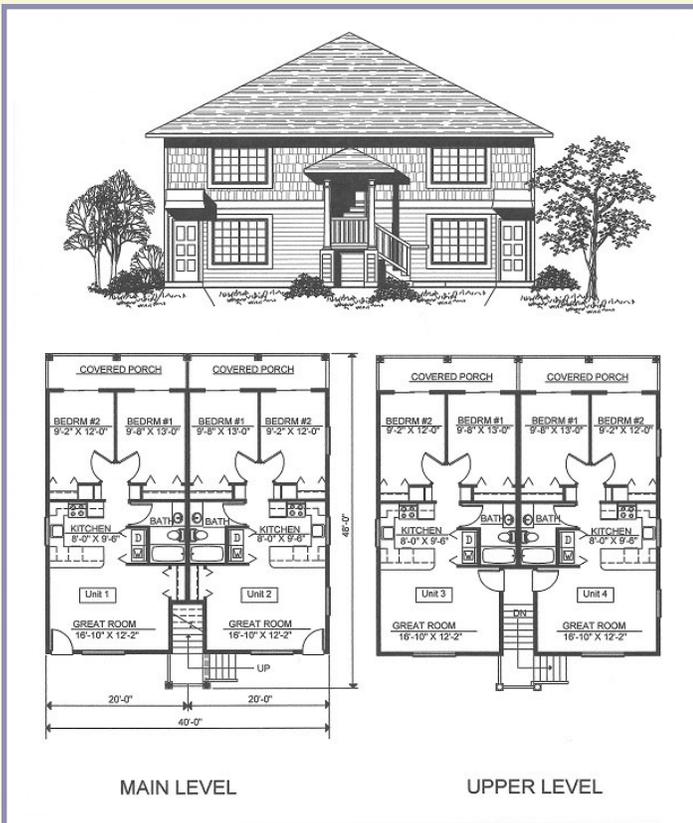
The intent is to create affordable housing whose overall appearance blends very nicely into single-family home residential areas. This approach may be particularly applicable for rural and suburban regions of Utah, where the predominant residential architecture type is single-family homes on separated lots.



*This bighouse houses 14 senior care units.
(photos credit: stardust.asu.edu)*



*This design houses four separate residences.
(photos credit: stardust.asu.edu)*

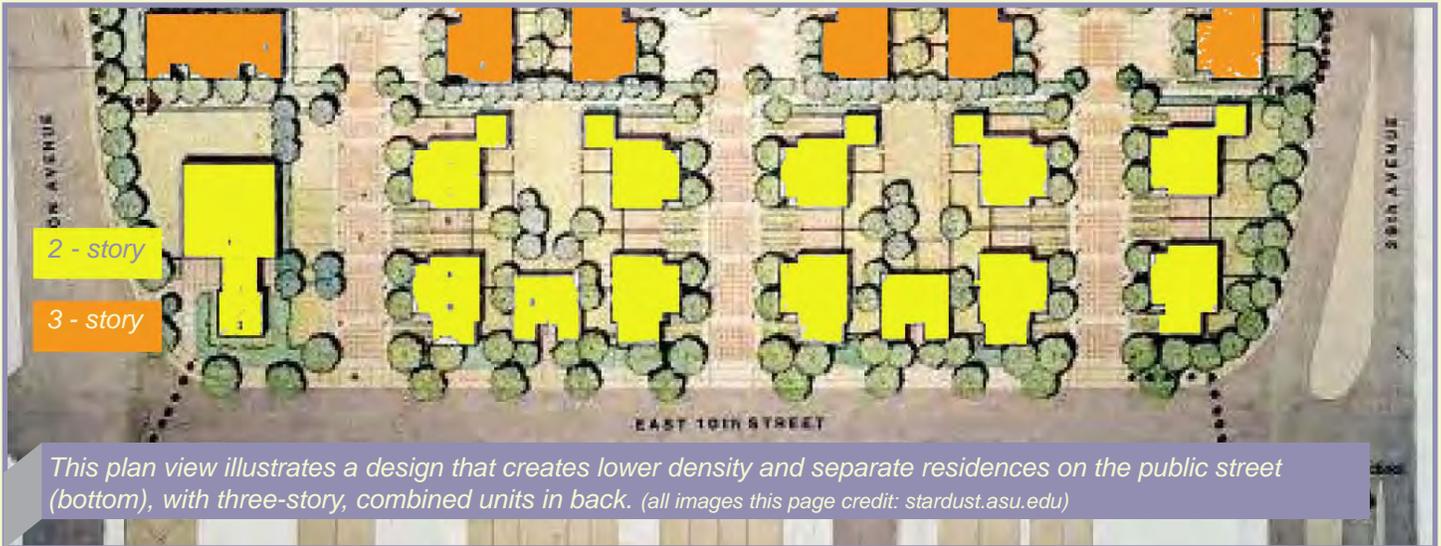


These Architectural Plans show how a 4-family and 2 family home can be constructed utilizing the big house principals (image credit: www.stocktondesign.com).

Disguised Density

As the streetscape is the public domain of any housing development, one approach to developing affordable housing that will fit in with the neighborhood aesthetic is to create an appearance of separated homes and reduced density on the street, while massing a greater number of residences to the rear of the development.

This approach can serve to address neighborhood concerns regarding aesthetic impacts of a development, while still meeting the density demands of affordable housing.



Separated two-story residences face the public street.



Three-story residences make up the interior of the space.



Document created by Bear River Association of Governments, 2012. All photos credit Dayton Crites unless otherwise noted.