

Family-Friendly Affordable Housing

A DESIGN GUIDE FOR THE DISTRICT'S
MULTIFAMILY BUILDINGS



The demand for affordable multifamily housing to moderate- and low-income families in the District of Columbia continues to grow. Rising housing costs and need for family-oriented living in multifamily mixed-income environments highlight the urgency of addressing the quality of life for families in these settings. A holistic approach is essential to meet this need, one that emphasizes design quality informed by both research and resident feedback.

In response, the DC Housing Authority (DCHA)—in partnership with the DC Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)—introduces these Guidelines to shape the engagement, programming, and design of affordable multifamily housing tailored to families and their evolving needs. These Guidelines aim to serve as a vital reference for future planning and development of affordable multifamily buildings programmed and supported by DCHA and DHCD. **The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of life and overall experiences for both residents and staff within these properties.**

About the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA)

DCHA provides quality affordable housing to extremely low- through moderate-income households, fosters sustainable communities, and cultivates opportunities for residents to improve their lives. DCHA is among the largest landlords in the District, providing housing to more than 50,000 qualified low-income residents through traditional affordable housing, tenant- and project-based housing vouchers, and mixed-income properties. **Notably, approximately 30% of DCHA residents are children, and approximately**

12% are seniors, many of whom live in multi-generational households. Approximately 40% of DCHA's portfolio consists of multifamily housing units, including walk-ups, mid-rise, and high-rise properties.

About the DC Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

DHCD's mission is to produce and preserve opportunities for affordable housing and economic development while revitalizing underserved communities in the District of Columbia. The agency focuses on three strategic objectives:

- *Producing and preserving quality affordable housing;*
- *Increasing homeownership opportunities; and*
- *Revitalizing neighborhoods, fostering community development, and promoting economic opportunities.*

Through collaboration with DCHA, DHCD's Portfolio and Asset Management Division (PAMD) provides robust oversight and compliance solutions for affordable multifamily housing properties across the District. DHCD's housing portfolio includes more than 35,000 affordable apartments.



A Collaborative Vision

The collaborative efforts of DCHA, DHCD, and the Department of Human Services (DHS) aim to address the affordable housing needs of moderate- and low-income residents despite such development constraints as tight budgets and timelines. These agencies share a unified vision of creating buildings that foster dignity, healing, and community. Achieving this vision requires a shift in how and where housing development teams invest their time and resources, prioritizing a human-centric approach to design.

To support this vision, DCHA engaged David Baker Architects—renowned experts in affordable housing design—along with a team of design and community researchers to develop this guide for a people-centered approach for multifamily housing projects. These Guidelines are intentionally flexible, designed to evolve with ongoing development and post-occupancy research.

A Living Document

We encourage all multifamily housing development teams working on family-focused projects with DCHA and DHCD to incorporate the recommendations set forth in these Guidelines as a complement to their expertise. Additionally, input from designers, developers, residents, and property managers is welcome to ensure this living document continues to reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. Together, we can meet the growing demand for family-friendly affordable housing in the District’s multifamily buildings. By prioritizing innovative and inclusive design, we can ensure that moderate- and low-income families thrive in supportive, multifamily environments for generations to come.



Keith L. Pettigrew
Executive Director, District of Columbia Housing Authority



Colleen Green
Director, District of Columbia Department of Housing and Community Development

Contents

7	INTRODUCTION
17	GUIDELINE 1 Access to Necessities
35	GUIDELINE 2 Community Amenities
57	GUIDELINE 3 Overflow Living
71	GUIDELINE 4 Residential Units
85	GUIDELINE 5 Healthy Environments
109	WRAP-UP

Supporting reports, research, and case studies can be found in the *Family-Friendly Affordable Housing Guidelines Companion*, a separate document provided by DCHA and DCHD.





Introduction



“

**The goal of
the Family-Friendly
Affordable Housing
Guidelines
is to promote
the design of
higher quality
medium- and high-
density housing
for families in
the District.**

”

Purpose and Audience

Together, the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA) and the District of Columbia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) have developed the following Guidelines to promote the design of higher quality residential buildings for families in the District.

The Family-Friendly Affordable Housing Guidelines have been generated as a reference tool for teams engaged in developing, designing, and operating family-friendly affordable housing—both new construction and rehabilitations of DCHA properties.

The intended audience for these Guidelines includes:

- *Representatives of local government and agencies*
- *Developers*
- *Non-profit housing programs*
- *Commercial lenders*
- *Designers (e.g. architects and landscape architects)*
- *Property managers*
- *On-site service providers*
- *Residents of affordable and mixed-income communities*

Meeting the Need for Family Housing

These Guidelines have been commissioned in response to changing household demographics in the District—and around the country. According to Pew Research Center, the number of people living in multigenerational households nationwide quadrupled between 1971 and 2021. At the same time, the number of households in the District with children fell to below 20 percent in 2017 compared to over 30 percent in other major metro areas. This suggests that the District has an inadequate supply of housing and resources to meet the changing needs of families. Both DCHA and DHCD are committed to ensuring that families with young children—and indeed families of all kinds—can remain and thrive in the District.

To address this need, DCHA and DHCD are focusing on medium- and high-density mixed-income developments, which may include a combination of market-rate, affordable (designated for both low- and moderate-income households), and permanent supportive housing units—paired with effective, targeted building services.





Designing with Families in Mind

Mixed-income properties offer housing opportunities to a wide range of families and make for diverse and robust communities. This mix of residents presents a broad spectrum of pressing needs related to physical, mental, social, and economic well-being. The intention is for DCHA and DHCD building designs and programming to be responsive to a range of family structures and mindful of changing family needs.

Importantly, residents at different income levels and with varied backgrounds may require different approaches to on-site services and support. For effective family housing, development teams—developers, designers, and building operators—must consider those needs in shaping both the physical spaces and the activating programming in a building. Family housing poses distinct challenges and opportunities, and a nuanced approach and close attention to the specific needs of families can enhance the livability of these family-oriented properties.

Relevant Terms

For the purposes of these Guidelines, the following definitions apply.



Multifamily Housing: A housing community with multiple residential units that share infrastructure, amenities, and/or services.

Medium- and High-Density Housing: Housing that aggregates multiple residential units in low-, mid-, and high-rise apartment buildings.

Affordable Housing: Housing for which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities.

Mixed-Income Housing: Housing that includes units available to households with a broad range of incomes, including low-income, moderate-income, and market-rate/unrestricted apartments.

These Guidelines take an expansive approach to defining and designing for different family configurations. For example, family households might include two parents raising young children, solo parents, grandparents raising grandchildren (known as “grandfamilies”), an uncle caring for a nephew, adult children moving back in to gain stability or care for aging parents, foster families, and more.

Additionally, families change and grow. Housing residents of various ages, relationships, abilities, and incomes under one roof requires not only sensitivity to the ways families differ but also how overall family needs evolve over time.

For example, the requirements of families with small children—room to play, storage for toys and gear, and child-safety measures—shift as those kids mature into teens, who need privacy and space to study or socialize. Adults—both parents and grown children—may occasionally need to work from home. Seniors may need separate accommodations plus features that

support aging in place.

In addition to responding to seasons of change for families, the Guidelines strive to address other changes that

can impact families' quality of life in multifamily buildings—for example: management changes (agency or staff turnover); technology changes; and environmental changes, such as global health crises and climate impacts (like extreme heat).

“It is important to design for all ages—including both kids and seniors—to support families through their seasons of change.”

The Family Unit

The Guidelines provide specific recommendations for housing that accommodates residents living in groups of two or more, and takes into account family members of any age or generation living together in multifamily, mixed-income housing.

Consider intergenerational families, grandfamilies, blended families, big families, couples, and more.



Team

DCHA and DHCD assembled a skilled team—architects, designers, researchers, housing developers, Housing Authority agents, community development staff, community engagement specialists, and writers—to research, identify, and analyze gaps, needs, and effective strategies across the design and development process to outline a responsive, family-based approach to mixed-income, multifamily housing.

David Baker Architects, a nationally recognized firm specializing in human-centric multifamily housing design, took the lead in distilling and illustrating best practices for these Guidelines, based on the comprehensive research and outreach efforts made by team members and research partners.

Guidelines Team



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HOUSING AUTHORITY
(DCHA)



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (DHCD)



DAVID BAKER ARCHITECTS



AIA|DC AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
WASHINGTON, DC CHAPTER



R. DENISE EVERSON,
E3 CONNECTIONS

Research Partners

- *Karen Kubey, PhD*
- *Neil Donnelly Studio*
- *The Michaels Organization*
- *The Community Builders*
- *True Ground Housing Partners*
- *Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County*
- *KGD Architecture*
- *The residents and staff of Arthur Capper Senior Apartments, Greenleaf Gardens, Metro Towns at Parkside, Plaza West Apartments, The Bixby, and Harlow Navy Yard*

Process

The Guidelines Team undertook a series of activities and research efforts that informed the basis of the Family-Friendly Affordable Housing Guidelines.

Advisory Committee: A committee composed of architects in the AIA|DC and affiliated development professionals provided early guidance on the substance of the project, including suggestions for case studies and regulations to review.

Resident Survey: Consultant Karen Kubey, an urbanist specializing in housing design and social justice, conducted a survey of residents living in four affordable housing developments in the District: Arthur Capper Senior Apartments, Greenleaf Gardens, Metro Towns at Parkside, and Plaza West Apartments.

Resident Focus Groups: David Baker Architects (DBA), R. Denise Everson, DHCD, and DCHA conducted focus groups with 25 residents of The Bixby and Harlow Navy Yard—two mixed-income apartment developments in the District.

Developer Focus Groups: DBA, R. Denise Everson, DHCD, and DCHA conducted focus groups with 15 staff members from three multifamily housing developers—The Michaels Organization, The Community Builders, and True Ground Housing Partners—with significant affordable housing experience.

Case Studies: DCHA and DHCD commissioned a review of case studies of family-friendly multifamily housing, with special attention to unit design for large families, building features suited to families, sustainable design, and projects that include a mix of incomes and diverse family units. Approximately 40 local, national, and international case studies were selected to provide examples that can support positive, healthy, and enriching environments for DCHA and DHCD residents, staff, and visitors in family properties.

Jurisdictional Research: Karen Kubey and DBA conducted additional research into minimum design and construction requirements of neighboring jurisdictions to support DCHA and DHCD in reviewing local regulations for multifamily housing design, particularly for larger residential units.

The case studies and research reports that informed these Guidelines can be found in the Family-Friendly Affordable Housing Guidelines Companion, a separate document provided by DCHA and DHCD.



Contact EngageDCHA@dchousing.org or dhcd@dc.gov to get the Companion document.



Framework

The Family-Friendly Affordable Housing Guidelines cover five distinct areas, each addressing a significant aspect of a project in development.

- 1** **GUIDELINE 1: ACCESS TO NECESSITIES** encourages project teams to consider context and culture beyond site boundaries and looks at ways to bring neighborhood resources and connectivity to residents and staff.
- 2** **GUIDELINE 2: COMMUNITY AMENITIES** explores shared, common residential amenities and best practices for the design, programming, and management of these spaces.
- 3** **GUIDELINE 3: OVERFLOW LIVING** considers how to translate typical needs for families in the multifamily housing environment, establishing an approach for shared spaces that support daily life.
- 4** **GUIDELINE 4: RESIDENTIAL UNITS** looks closely at the details of unit design with families in mind.
- 5** **GUIDELINE 5: ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY** addresses the healthfulness and comfort of all interior spaces, including critical issues related to acoustics, safe materials, and ventilation.

Using the Guidelines

The Guidelines will be most effective if used as a shared tool by the entire design and development team, paired with a team commitment to adapt typical approaches to multifamily housing with family needs as primary.

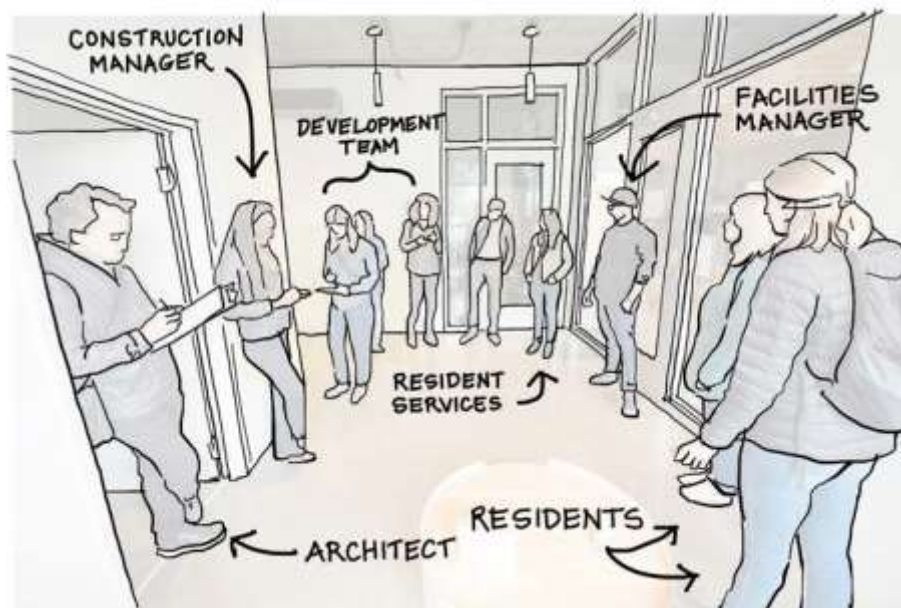
These Guidelines should be referenced early and often throughout the development and design process. This tool will be an important part of building affordable housing that will better serve the needs of the District's rent-burdened households and help support the development of greater equitable urban housing for families.

Recognizing the wide variety of project contexts and building types among DCHA and DHCD's portfolios, the Guidelines have been developed to allow for maximum flexibility and adaptability. DCHA and DHCD intend for the guidelines to be both inspiring and iterative, knowing that new lessons and best practices will emerge as teams test the Guidelines on specific projects.

In particular, the Guidelines are intended for affordable and mixed-income medium- to high-density multifamily projects in the District. Note that developers seeking Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and Housing Production Trust Fund dollars from DHCD should pay special attention to the design considerations outlined here.

Feedback on these guidelines is welcomed and will inform future iterations to ensure this document remains useful and relevant.

Send feedback to EngageDCHA@dchousing.org and dhcd@dc.gov.



Team effort: *Elevating housing to the standard that District families deserve requires insight, patience, collaboration, and commitment from all stakeholders working together.*



For a peek inside the mixed-income properties engaged in the Guidelines community process, visit the following websites:



The Bixby
bixbydc.com

Harlow Navy Yard
harlowdc.com



It's all about the people: Residents and families are the absolute best resource for insight on family housing needs. Led by R. Denise Everson, the Guidelines team sought input from residents of Harlow Navy Yard and The Bixby, two mixed-income communities in Washington, DC.

1



Access to Necessities



“

We love our
neighborhood,
we're
one block
from
everything.



”

Make it easy for residents to meet their daily needs through on-site services and connections to the surrounding neighborhood.

Access to Necessities

To achieve a family-friendly project, it's critical to deeply consider what families might need close by—within a short walk, drive, or bus ride—as well as what resources parents, grandparents, caregivers, and kids might need to access right at home in the building.

When evaluating a site, look beyond the property line to better understand how the site relates and connects to the surrounding neighborhood. Identify and determine ways to maximize anything that the immediate area might offer to residents, identify gaps, and think about what the new project could contribute. It is important to ensure that residents can access the resources and amenities they need physically, financially, and culturally.

The ideal connections are reciprocal, with the building both maximizing advantage of all local resources as well as providing amenities, spaces, or services that can benefit the surrounding community.

There are several overarching strategies for ensuring that families can receive the support they need. Adding or enhancing the physical connections between the building and surrounding neighborhood will improve resident access to existing resources. Providing community-serving spaces and services will establish the new building as a good neighbor and strengthen the neighborhood at large. Forging partnerships to offer on-site programming will allow residents to access critical services from the comfort of home.

Paying attention to these areas will help ensure that families can access the resources that they need to thrive:

Neighborhood Connections

- *Map the Neighborhood*
- *Meet the Neighbors*
- *Create Physical Connections*
- *Plan for Maximum Mobility*

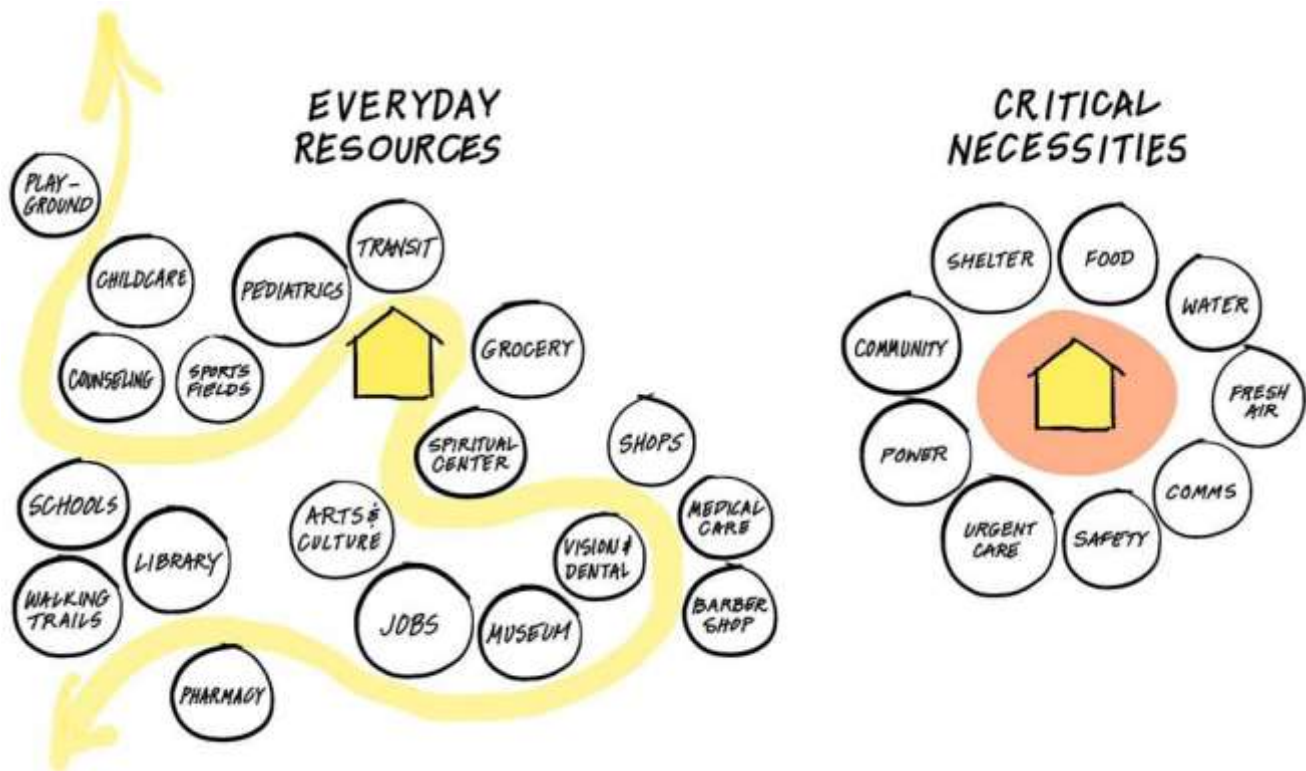
Access to Services

- *Family-Focused Programs*
- *Resident Concierge*
- *Neighborhood Necessities*



Neighborhood Connections

Whether planning for new construction or renovating an existing building, it's important to assess the surrounding neighborhood to understand any assets and any absences of the key spaces and services people need over the course of daily life, from shopping to personal care.



When selecting a site, consider proximity to the building blocks of family life. In a well-resourced neighborhood, teams can focus on connecting residents with area amenities—stores, parks, and appropriate services. In a less-resourced neighborhood, those connections will require creating or facilitating a more robust transportation network for residents plus the provision of more services on site.

What is needed to create a resilient community? Think about residents' typical daily needs as well as what may be required during disruptive events, such as storms or heat waves, power outages, or pandemics.

It's important to consider the affordability and business hours of nearby goods and services, and whether grocery options, restaurants, and other shops match residents' cultural backgrounds and means. Affordability and cultural diversity of amenities are especially critical issues to contend with as the number of affordable housing units in District neighborhoods

with a higher cost of living increases. In focus groups, several residents noted that they loved their neighborhood, but could not afford to shop there—and as a result, they were still very reliant on their cars to access basic necessities, adding an increased time and convenience burden.



Kelly Miller Residences, Washington, DC. A map of the neighborhood surrounding Kelly Miller Residences illustrates walkability and identifies neighborhood amenities available to residents.

Map the Neighborhood

Alongside early community engagement efforts, take time to identify and map the neighborhood amenities that would be especially important to families. This map should take into account an appropriate walkshed: One-quarter mile reflects about a five-minute walk for an able-bodied adult, and a half-mile, 10-minute distance is typically considered “walkable.” However when designing for families, keep in mind that seniors and small children aren’t able to walk as far, as fast, or as frequently. Research or visit the places on the walkshed map, testing for physical, cultural, or cost barriers to access, and update the working map as appropriate.

Meet the Neighbors

Once the site is determined, spend time assessing the site and exploring the surrounding neighborhood to become familiar with the area and learn from the neighbors and neighborhood activity. It's important to understand key elements of how the area functions, and the best way to do that is on the ground, getting the experience firsthand.

Ask—and identify answers to—a series of questions that will reveal a picture of life in the neighborhood. Some examples:

- *How easy is it to get from the site to the grocery store or the nearest metro station?*
- *Where is the nearest bus stop, how frequently does the bus run, and where does it go?*

Seek out active spots where people are hanging out and talk to the neighbors, learning about the site through their experience and expertise.

- *Are there times or places they feel safe or unsafe?*
- *What does their daily routine look like? How do they get around?*
- *Where can they afford to shop or get a haircut? What parts of the area feel loved or neglected?*

The 24-Hour Neighborhood

Be sure to observe how the energy and activity of the neighborhood changes at different times of day. A commercial area that's bustling during the daytime may feel emptied out once work has ended. Downtown businesses might even close after the lunch rush, resulting in a lack of services for residents. Some areas may feel vibrant at night, while others seem more desolated. Consider how ground-floor programming might respond to or impact this day-to-night transition.

"I wish there were more options for childcare nearby."

"I love the park."

"We can't afford to grocery shop here."

"I'd like to see more Black-owned businesses."



"We're one block from everything."

This type of research might include:

- *Keenly observing the neighborhood*
- *Testing some of the routes residents might use between the site and nearby amenities*
- *Chatting with local folks at neighborhood “hot spots” like the barbershop or coffee shop*
- *Surveying neighbors at active street corners and neighborhood hubs*
- *Organizing community meetings with activities designed to reveal neighbors’ daily habits, likes, and dislikes*
- *Holding design workshops with a smaller group of residents at regular points in the design process*

Community engagement takes many forms—not just community meetings—and is not a one-time activity. Be curious about the community and keep coming back to residents, neighbors, and other project stakeholders throughout the design process to gut check ideas and make improvements to design ideas based on feedback.

Create Physical Connections

Urban design strategies can help establish physical links between the site and the surrounding neighborhood. For example, breaking large blocks down to a more human scale, adding new pedestrian walkways and green spaces, and strategic orientation of a building on a site to create public and private spaces.

Look to existing conditions for inspiration. Are there desire paths or cut-throughs that neighbors already use—through alleys or open spaces perhaps—that suggest an opportunity to create a more defined connection? Are there visual connections from the site to nearby neighborhood anchors like a library, recreation center, or school?

As ideas and potential design schemes emerge, engage future residents and neighbors to test out any assumptions about walkability, safety, and comfort. Pay special attention to the particular needs of children and seniors in navigating the site and the neighborhood.



Designing cities that can equally accommodate 8-year-olds and 80-year-olds yields healthy, happy, and sustainable cities accessible to all. The non-profit organization 880 Cities is on a mission to catalyze “cities for people to grow up and grow old in” by advocating for safe and active mobility, welcoming and accessible public spaces, and inclusive city-building processes. They offer diagnostic services, participatory planning support, training, and toolkits to support designers, community members, and developers in creating cities suitable for everyone.

Learn more at 880cities.org.





Park Morton, Washington, DC. This Master Plan was developed through a series of resident engagement events. In response to community input, the Plan includes new and reconnected streets and makes space for a community park ringed with low-scale townhomes.

Possible interventions to increase connectivity and benefit both the building and the surrounding area include:

- *Integrate traffic-calming measures to slow down or reroute car traffic away from typical routes to schools, parks, and other family-oriented amenities.*
- *Create wider sidewalks to better accommodate strollers, walkers, and wheelchairs.*
- *Distribute additional and diverse seating throughout the site for frequent rest stops.*
- *Create clear sightlines to play and activity areas, so caregivers and staff can easily monitor children.*



Plan for Maximum Mobility

While a site may be in a walkable neighborhood, it just might be the case that the price points of nearby goods and services prevent shops from being accessible to or appropriate for residents. Families may find that they need to bypass a local vendor and instead cross town for a store they can better afford, either necessitating that they own a car or arrange rides from friends to complete their errands. Some sites may not be in walkable neighborhoods, requiring additional transportation measures to connect residents with services and amenities.

Connecting the Dots

There are several resources that help increase connectivity in the DC area.

goDCgo: This DDOT initiative supports multifamily property managers and developers with strategies for creating and managing transportation amenities, including commuter survey templates, Capital Bikeshare membership support, transportation maps, and custom “get around guides.” godcgo.com

Capital Bikeshare for All:

This program allows residents of the Washington, DC, area who qualify for certain state or federal assistance programs to enjoy all the benefits of bikeshare for just \$5 a year. capitalbikeshare.com/pricing/for-all


Metro Lift: WMATA (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority) offers 50% off Metrobus and Metrorail trips for DC, Maryland, and Virginia customers enrolled in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). wmata.com/fares/Reduced-Fare-Programs/MetroLift



Develop a site transportation plan that identifies a comprehensive transportation network for residents. Every site will be different, but keep in mind not only proximity to public transportation, but also explore other ways for folks to reliably get around—consider opportunities for bike- and scooter-share programs; bicycle, cart, and stroller storage (*see Guideline 3: Overflow Living*); car-share programs; shuttles; transportation vouchers, and more.

In addition to planning for on-site parking and storage (cars, bicycles, and mobility aids) and incorporating transportation alternatives into site and operational strategies, consider how the building might do its part to improve the pedestrian and transit experience, such as creating a welcoming streetscape that offers shade and seating for waiting riders.

Practical Considerations

Check for planned or potential changes to city infrastructure and transit plans that may impact accessibility of the site. 

The District posts the annual Capital Plan at cfo.dc.gov/page/annual-operating-budget-and-capital-plan.

WMATA posts proposed and revised maps and resources at wmata.com/initiatives/plans/Better-Bus/Resources.cfm#proposed-2025-network.



Jefferson Park, Cambridge, MA. Jefferson Park's new master plan provided a central spine along Clifton Street activated by four landscaped courtyards, which knit the project into the surrounding neighborhood.



GLEIS 21, Vienna, Austria. At the ground floor, this project offers a built-in free library and seating for neighbors to find and enjoy their next read.

Activate the Edges

Beyond strengthening connections and providing services and amenities, a new building has the opportunity to create a positive outward impact. Consider, **“What does this place need to stay vibrant or be brought back to life? How can this building anchor, repair, or support this neighborhood?”** Look beyond the property line to extend the building's influence and enhance the public realm with its physical presence. Think about where the building meets the street and the sidewalk, and how it might offer publicly accessible amenities—like a playground or new bus stop—or upgrades to the streetscape, like street lighting and plantings, seating, shade, art, or other engaging improvements.

Community Anchors

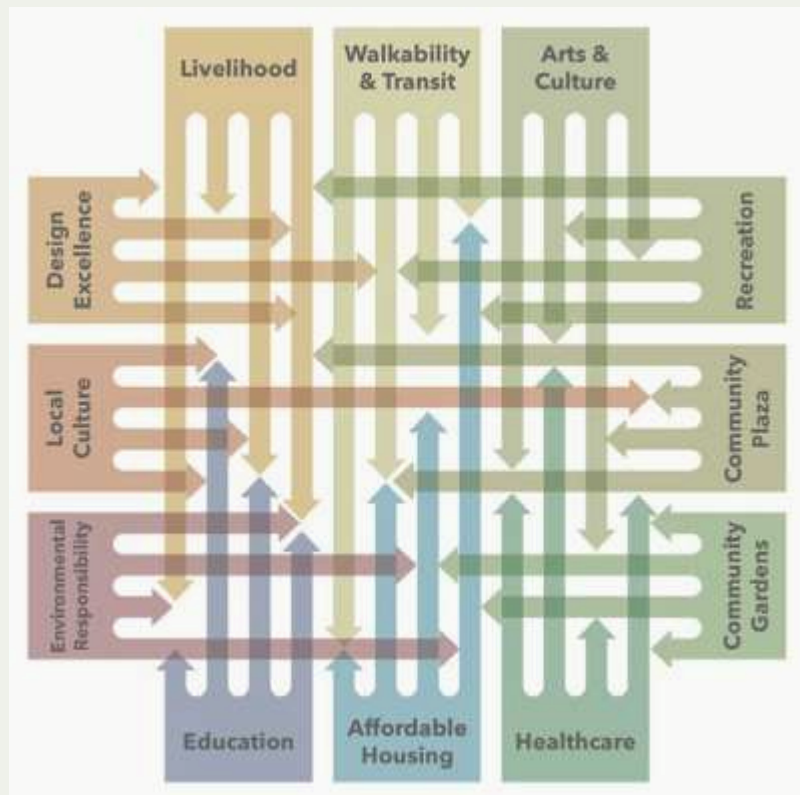
Sendero Verde, East Harlem, NY

ARCHITECT
Handel Architects

DEVELOPER
Jonathan Rose Companies,
L+M Development Partners,
Acacia Network

Occupying a full city block in East Harlem, Sendero Verde weaves together affordable housing, neighborhood retail, social services, extensive shared spaces, and outdoor gardens to create a “community of opportunity.”

By co-locating a range of resident-supporting services and spaces, Sendero Verde aims to remove barriers and break the cycle of poverty that prevents families from thriving. The property integrates Union Settlement—a neighborhood fixture that has been providing the community with youth and senior services since 1895—and the DREAM-operated Sendero Verde Charter School for elementary school-aged kids. Also on site, Promesa provides social services for formerly unhoused residents, including a Resident Social Services director and specialists, occupational therapists, art and dance classes, and 24-hour security for the whole property. These facilities all sit alongside permanent sites for three GreenThumb community gardens, a program of NYC Parks.





Sendero Verde, East Harlem, NY. Sendero Verde Charter School occupies approximately three floors in the Sendero Verde building. Two levels of classrooms and administrative offices top an amenity-rich basement level that includes a gymnasium, fitness room, art room, music room, storage area, server room, and cafeteria.

Ensuring Access to Services

In a typical model, 100-percent affordable housing projects offer on-site services staff, partnerships with nonprofit organizations, and resident access to counselors and other providers. However, in mixed-income properties—where affordable units are integrated into a larger community—programming and services targeted to low-income families aren't always as explicitly available.

This service gap can lead to families missing out on the resources they may need and consequently result in real physical, mental, and social challenges for residents that negatively impact the overall building community.



Resident Concierge

In a mixed-income building, consider providing a plan and a place for a Resident Concierge, an on-site expert to help connect residents with the off-site services that they need and help manage in-house programming. It is important to avoid calling attention to or stigmatizing residents of the affordable units within a larger community. Rather than offering separate designated services, be sure that the Resident Concierge program works equally well for all residents. This role can also work with Property Management to ensure all on-site amenities are available, accessible, and running smoothly for everyone. When planning ground-floor amenities, reserve a centrally located, easily accessible office space to support the effective function of this role.

Family-Focused Programs

Even when families take advantage of the full range of services and programs available to them, they also can require special attention. One resident services team interviewed for these guidelines noted: **“Families tend to isolate themselves. . . . Our focus for families is economic mobility and keeping those kids engaged and connected to school.”**

To fully support families toward these goals, here are just a few aspects to consider:

- *Childcare, including weekends and after-hours support*
- *After-school programs for kids, including tutoring and other extracurricular activities*
- *Physical and mental-health programs, including counseling and domestic violence resources*
- *Health and wellness programs, including healthy cooking demonstrations and fitness classes*
- *Adult education programs, including financial literacy and job training*

Neighborhood Necessities

Consider designating space in the project for on-site neighborhood-serving resources. Many of the amenities that add value for resident families can also benefit nearby users, strengthening the neighborhood network. It's possible to accommodate a mix of spaces in one project, offering some reserved for resident-only programming, some for services offered by outside partners, and some open to the larger community.

Early resident engagement and asset mapping can help uncover both the needs and potential partnerships to activate such spaces.



Resident-Serving Essentials

The Pearl, Silver Spring, MD

ARCHITECT
Design Collective

DEVELOPER
The Tower Companies

Access to fresh, healthy foods and household essentials—cleaning supplies and personal care products—often poses a challenge for residents. Even when housing is located near grocery stores and other retail outlets, creative on-site resources can help residents access good ingredients and supplies and stretch their budgets.

The first multifamily building to achieve Fitwel certification, The Pearl is a transit-oriented, mixed-income community that prioritizes health and wellness for residents. To bring fresh food—and joy—to the site, The Pearl’s management team partnered with Love & Carrots, a small woman-owned company that provides technical assistance for vegetable gardening in the DC area. The team started an on-site urban farm, complete with veggie plots, U-Pick berries, flower-cutting and pollinator gardens, and on-site composting. Building residents are able to sign up for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) vegetable box and access healthy cooking demonstrations and dining events in the community kitchen featuring produce from the urban farm.



The Pearl, Silver Spring, MD. A team member from Love & Carrots harvests kale at the property’s full-scale community urban farm.



The **People's** Pantry, Arlington, VA. Volunteers help with signing up and checking in residents, assisting with shopping, organizing shelves, and managing inventory.

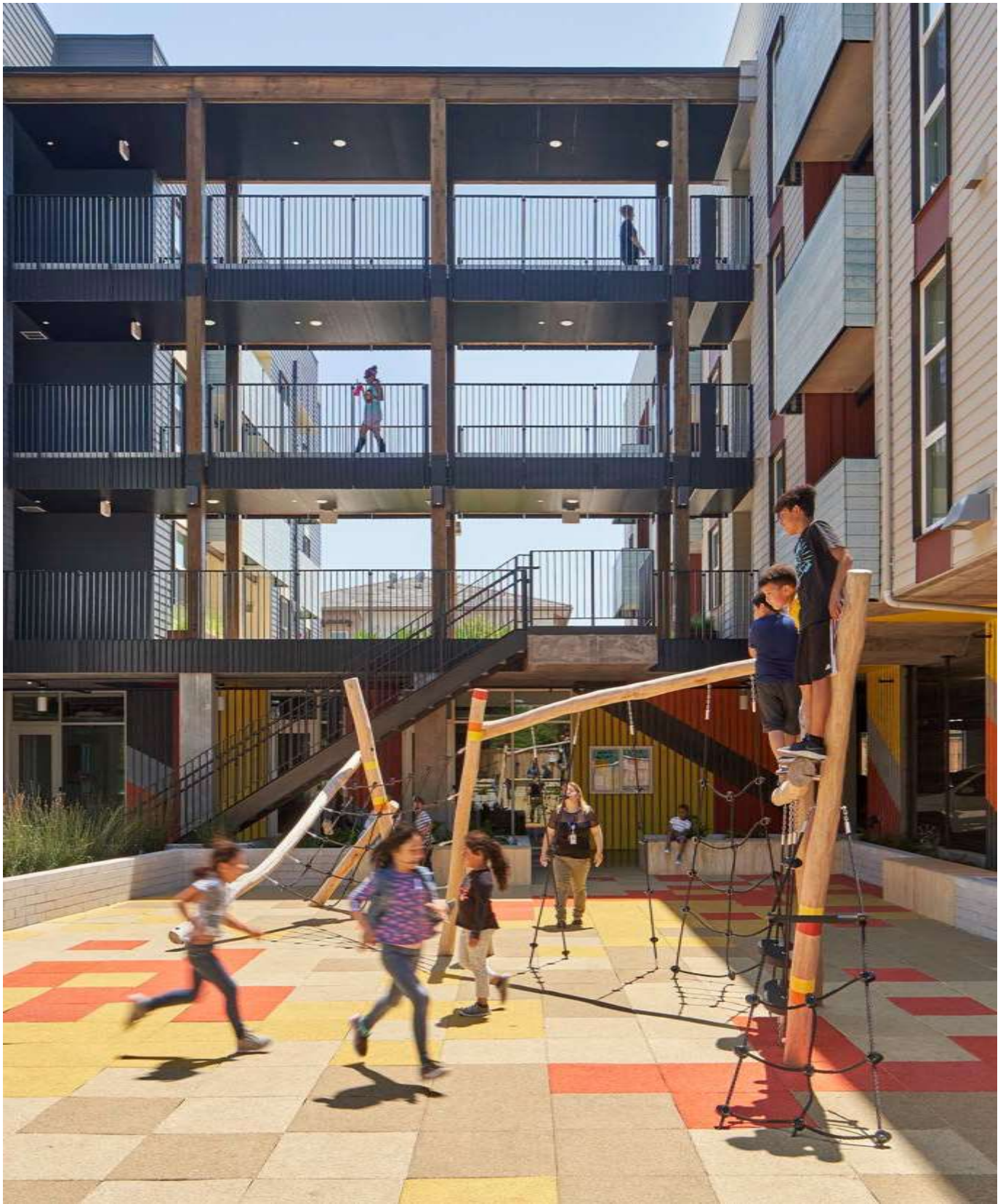
The **People's** Pantry,
Arlington, VA

DEVELOPER
True Ground Housing Partners

The People's Pantry is a resident-oriented grocery pantry developed by the True Ground Housing Partners in response to a maintenance challenge endemic to True Ground projects—the persistent clogging of the laundry machines.

In collaboration with the Resident Council, True Ground determined that the issue was that the buildings' high-efficiency (HE) washing machines—mandated by the tax credit funding model—required special HE detergent, yet HE detergents were found to be both more expensive and less accessible than the resident-preferred powder detergents. In a solution that supports resident budgets and protects the facilities, True Ground established a pantry system that brings not only HE detergent, but also feminine hygiene products and nutritious, culturally diverse food options within easy reach of residents.

Households—including residents from other True Ground properties—receive a monthly credit to shop at The People's Pantry. The non-profit hunger relief organization Share Our Strength provided funding to retrofit and stock the pantry, which complements True Ground's existing partnership with Arlington Food Assistance Center.



Edwina Benner Plaza, Sunnyvale, CA. *The dynamic central play zone is close to the community room, resident lounge, and after-school program.*

2



Community Amenities



“



Adults
and kids
of all ages
need
their own
space.



”

Create robust shared spaces tuned for different uses and ages, where everyone can feel welcome and find a place that suits them.

Community Amenities

Amenity spaces are the public, shared rooms and resources that make a multifamily building function and feel engaging, bountiful, social, and convenient. As a suite of offerings for residents, the right balance of amenity spaces makes for a vibrant, central community hub that supports activities and services and proves vital in supporting families and residential communities to thrive.

Because amenity rooms—particularly central community rooms—are asked to accommodate a mix of needs, they are often designed as large, flexible spaces. When planned programming or uses clash in multipurpose rooms, it can lead to tension, with some residents or groups feeling unwelcome. **However, fine-tuning these spaces goes a long way toward meeting the needs of the diverse folks that reside in family housing—from young families to teens to seniors living intergenerationally.**

While flexibility is important, thoughtful refinement of the community offerings—achieved through placement and pairing, scale and style, and furnishings and finishes—can balance these needs and offer choice, autonomy, and a place for everyone.

When thinking about amenity space design, it's important to consider the following:

Options

- *Intergenerational Needs*
- *Range of Scales and Types*
- *Simultaneous Use*
- *Loud and Quiet Spaces*
- *Embed Infrastructure*
- *Meet Technology Needs*
- *Provide Privacy*
- *Furnish for Flexibility*
- *Durability and Healthy Materials*

Effective Adjacencies

- *Strong Visual Connections*
- *Potent Pairings*
- *Organize by Vibe*
- *Indoor-Outdoor Links*

Availability

- *Ensure Access*
- *Hear all Voices*
- *Circulation as Common Space*
- *Make a Programming Plan*



Community Amenities: Options

As constituents of the building community, residents and families need reliable access to spaces where they can authentically be themselves and engage in the activities and gatherings that make sense for their lives.

While site and budget constraints may limit the overall amount of amenity space available in each project, making the most out of the foundational amenity spaces—paired with thoughtful, nuanced uses based on the building community’s needs—will best support the programming needed for families.

Variety is key. Offering variety starts by asking about what makes a space usable—or conversely, unaccommodating—for a given activity. Room size and furnishings as well as light, sound, technology, openness, and connection to other spaces are all factors that facilitate or discourage certain uses. The only guarantee is that the ways a community will use a space will change over time.



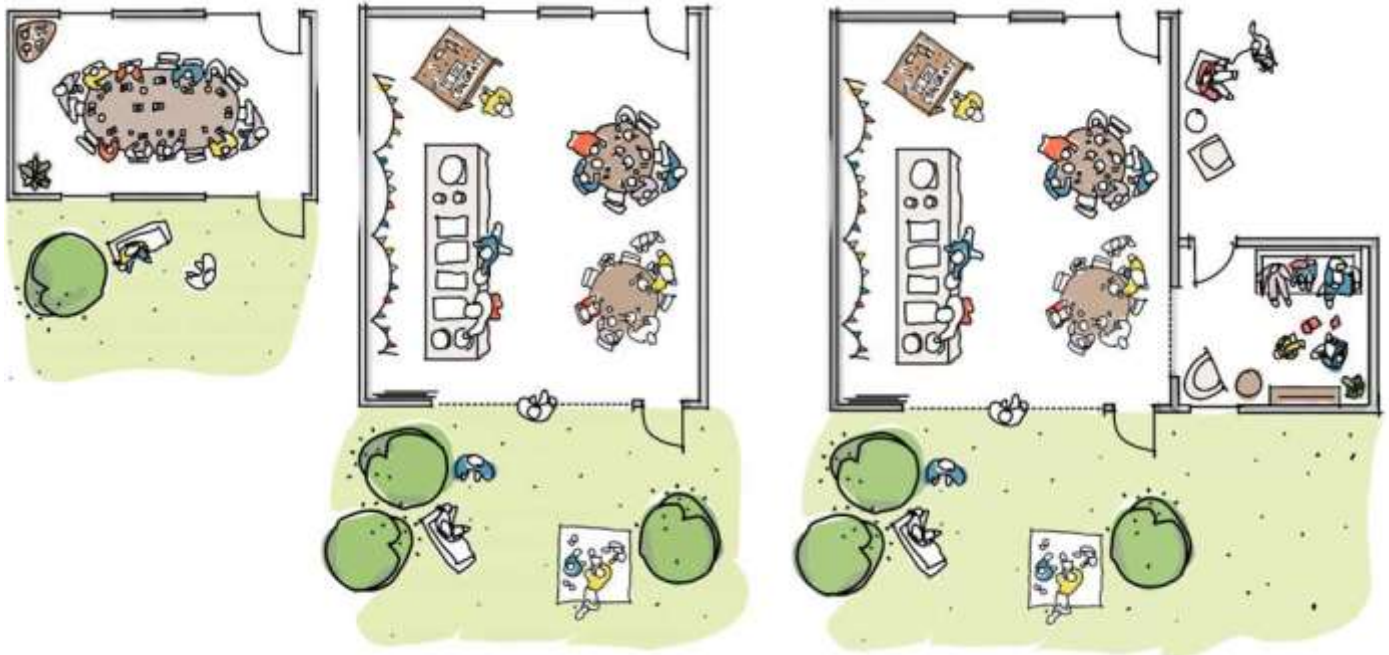
The Rivermark, West Sacramento, CA. Kids play in the flexible community room while parents take a cooking and nutrition class nearby.

Intergenerational Needs

Intergenerational living is one of the benefits of family-serving buildings. However, accommodating the needs of all ages—infants and caregivers, children, teens, adults, and seniors—is no small task. Apartment buildings rarely cater equally well to all ages, frequently leaving teens without a dedicated place to hang out, or failing to offer sensitive residents a place to feel safe outside of their apartment.

If a space is geared too specifically toward a particular activity, like a computer lab set up with permanent workstations, it can end up being underutilized. On the other hand, hoping that a “flexible” room will magically serve multiple interests and abilities doesn’t work either, ending up being dominated by one use or group, or not serving any use well.

The tools that follow will help in successfully balancing the seemingly opposing goals of flexibility and specificity.



There is no such thing as a “one-size-fits-all” community room: *Resident needs and the amount of space available for community uses will vary by project.*

A Range of Scales and Types

Spaces of different sizes naturally include and exclude certain activities without overly constraining them. Make sure there is a balance of room sizes to accommodate varied uses. If there are limited spaces or spaces that are naturally dominated by one age group—like a game room—provide a counterbalancing space to give residents options, which can help ease tensions between age groups.

The important thing is to engage with residents and staff to understand what activities are most important to them, which will help determine the size and variety of shared spaces needed.



Tahanan Supportive Housing, San Francisco. *The community room can be divided into smaller event spaces using a divider that runs along a track in the ceiling, with both sides retaining direct access to the courtyard.*

Support Simultaneous Use

Provide multiple spaces that can be used at once by different groups, and think about how to accommodate simultaneous uses in larger rooms to promote inclusion and minimize conflicts.

Break up larger spaces—both indoor and outdoor—into smaller seating areas that are more intimate, less intimidating, and less noisy. Many residents appreciate peripheral seating options in courtyards and community zones that allow for people-watching and light social engagement.

For pet-friendly buildings, make sure there is a place for pets in the outdoor space—such as a dog run or relief area—safely away from play zones and seating to accommodate residents who may not want to engage with animals.

Amenity Mix



The 555, Washington, DC. *The rooftop community room supports indoor activities with comfortable seating, a small kitchen, and ample views.*

Community amenities can range and vary wildly, depending on the neighborhood, the site, the building scale, the programming goals, and the resident mix. Think about the particular building’s resident and staff needs to strike the right balance between flexibility and specificity of use.

Determine whether the building needs a child-specific amenity like a day-care, after-school care, or particular age-appropriate play areas. Kids need zones where they can be noisy, get dirty, get down on the ground, and reach—or not reach—certain elements of the space. Beyond designated kid spaces, include play areas and equipment in the courtyard, and also consider providing informal opportunities for play throughout the building, such as sculptural seating.



The 555, Washington, DC. *The roof deck can accommodate overflow from the community room or serve as a separate space for an outdoor activity.*



Grandfamilies library at Plaza West, Washington, DC



Playground at Thrive, Denver



Fitness room at the Dr. George W. Davis Senior Building, San Francisco



Rooftop garden at Via Verde, The Bronx, New York

Older kids and teens need a place to hang out together or perhaps play rougher than the little ones can handle. Adults often appreciate outdoor spaces like porches and roof decks where they can gather to socialize or enjoy a view. Community gardens add to the charm of courtyards and roof decks and support intergenerational interaction. Game rooms are another space loved by seniors, teens, and children alike and come in handy when the weather is bad. Ensure that the fitness room has equipment and space for varied age and ability levels so that everyone can benefit.

Balance Loud and Quiet Uses

To manage the tone and energy level of the room, consider whether the space should be highly visible and beckoning—encouraging participation—or if it needs to support more focused meetings or private gatherings. Also consider what type of connection and visibility are most effective for staff to be able to support the full, intended use of each amenity area, whether that is glazing that allows direct visual connection between spaces, controlled access to protect room inventory, or a way to manage use hours. The primary goal is to create a system that maximizes and maintains the community benefits of each amenity.

Include spaces that are meant for quiet use, such as tutoring or coworking. These can be designated lounges or uses, such as a library or study room. Similarly, create spaces that can accommodate louder and more boisterous activities without being too disruptive to building life. Supplement these more public spaces with small huddle rooms that flexibly allow for loud or sound-sensitive activities—such as noisy music lessons or private phone or video calls.

There is likely a natural relationship between room size and the level of light and sound control, so be intentional. A small study room should have thoughtful acoustic treatments so that it can be used for music practice or telehealth appointments. Mid-sized rooms should provide natural light for some events, but also offer a high degree of lighting control so the room can be darkened, for example for a computer class or movie night. To mitigate noise, employ acoustic ceiling materials, carpet tiles, soft seating, and window coverings.

Meet Technology Needs

The development team should work with building management to ensure that offices, conference rooms, and other staff spaces have the appropriate technology in place to support meetings, one-on-one virtual conversations, and other engagements. This includes webcams, speakers, Wi-Fi, and power outlets.

Preserve Privacy

Beyond reliable Wi-Fi and easily accessed outlets, ensure that designated rooms have the means for both visual and audio privacy—operable shades, acoustic treatments, and other mitigating features—so that residents can feel secure holding private conversations, consultations, or telehealth calls.



Dr. George W. Davis Senior Building, San Francisco.



Embed Infrastructure

Being forward-thinking about storage for supplies as well as around electrical, data, and plumbing connections can set a room up to support a robust diversity of amenity options. For example, instead of a static computer lab, consider a mid-sized learning center that is equipped to easily support the use of laptop computers for a software or job-training class, but is furnished and located so that it can equally serve as a game room for teens or seniors after hours.

Outlets: Place outlets generously to accommodate the envisioned furniture layout options and to allow for use and charging of laptops and cellphones in amenity rooms. Make sure there are sufficient outlets that remain easily accessible regardless of how the room is furnished or arranged. Providing extra data ports and outlets will allow any room to be adapted for adult learning, after-school programming, or a coworking space.

Televisions, Monitors, and Projectors: Ensure that each room has sufficient wall space and convenient outlets to accommodate large screens. Consider monitor size, height, controls, relationship to the room orientation or intended seating arrangement. Consider sources of natural light that will affect screen legibility as well as placement of screens in relation to the potential seating arrangements.

Sinks and Floor Drains: Provide a flexible room with a sink and floor drain to accommodate art classes, a DIY workspace, or a kid zone for childcare activities.

Safety and Security: Install adequate lighting at the approach and entry to the building, and ensure that staff have clear sightlines to the front door and key community spaces. Install security cameras to give full coverage of shared spaces, and ensure that the camera system remains functional and is monitored assiduously.



Furnish for Flexibility

Each room will inevitably host—as it should—a wide range of events for residents and staff. To support this, each room should be designed to be able to be arranged and furnished flexibly—accommodating multiple layouts—and all specified furniture should meet the identified variety of needs.

When designing amenity rooms, visualize them with multiple furniture layouts to explore the ways a room could accommodate various events—from the occasional building-wide holiday meal to monthly, weekly, or daily programming, to casual freeform use.

To support furniture flexibility, provide ample space for storage of furniture directly adjacent to the amenity spaces. This direct proximity helps both building staff and residents and is invaluable to supporting successful programming and consistent, effective use of the spaces.

Work with service providers to determine how much lockable cabinet space is needed for on-site programs and services to securely store materials and supplies. Provide a large storage closet for movable furniture, such as folding tables and stacking chairs.

GLEIS 21, Vienna, Austria. A flexible room on the ground floor of this social housing project can accommodate community meetings, movie screenings, music classes, and more. Adjustable lighting and curtain tracks allow the room to be adapted effectively for various uses.



Thrive, Denver. Finishes used in the community room make for an interior environment that is both playful and durable, including hexagonal plywood boxes used to create seating, shelving, and informal play areas.

Durable and Healthy Materials

Well-used common spaces face a lot of wear and tear, especially in family buildings. From kids at play to energetic teens to seniors with wheelchairs or walkers, a building's floors, walls, doors, and furniture need to stand up to a lot of activity. Using simple, durable and common materials that are easy to clean, keep looking nice, and replace as needed will help common rooms stay fresh and functional. For example, if using carpet, consider carpet tiles that can be replaced individually from back-up inventory. Remember that kids come in close contact with floors and furniture in common space, so specify healthy no-VOC materials and finishes where possible.

Community Amenities: Effective Adjacencies

In addition to variety, the placement and pairing of amenity spaces is important in family buildings. Thoughtful, functional adjacencies can ease management, ensure that amenity spaces are easy and pleasant to use, and improve daily life for residents.

Strong Visual Connections

Locate and design amenity spaces so that there are direct visual links into and between the rooms, as well as a line of sight from management offices or reception desks. If staff can easily see into the amenity rooms—keeping an eye on activities without interrupting—it allows for more consistent use by resident groups. If residents, particularly parents, can peer into amenity rooms from a distance, it allows different age groups to have more autonomy and independence.

Potent Pairings

Group complementary programming and provide enough variety in types of spaces to separate programs that are incompatible. Begin by setting up logical adjacencies: Placing the community room near the front door draws residents and visitors into activities; connecting the laundry room with a play area allows parents to get tasks done while kids run and climb.

Dynamic adjacencies allow for all ages to engage fully with the community space and put people who would not necessarily use the same space at the same time—seniors and kids for example—in lively proximity to each other. Strategic pairings of spaces and resources streamline the tasks of daily life and give the community a boost.

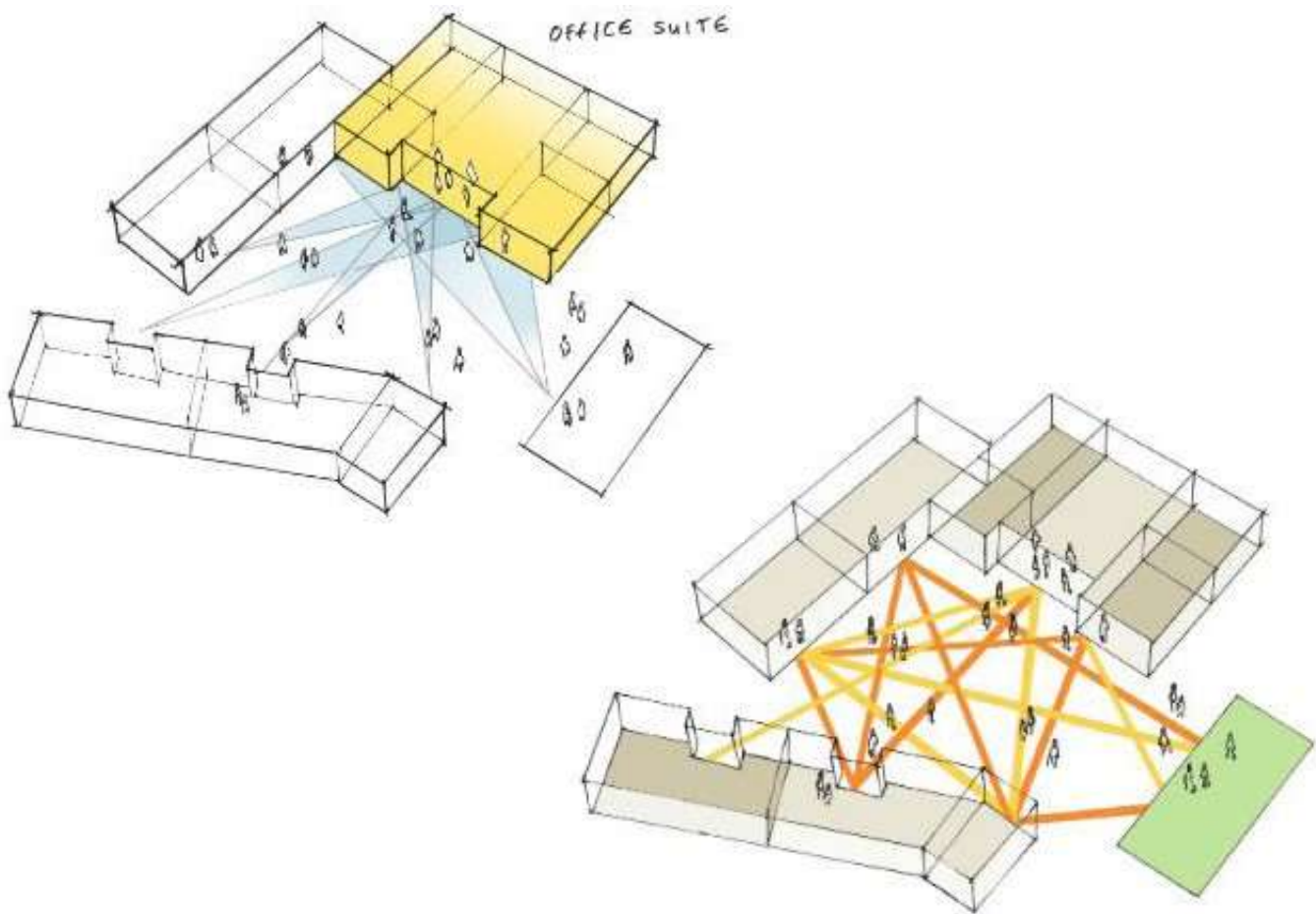


Organize by Vibe

Create separation between amenity spaces designated for quieter uses—such as libraries and homework rooms—from more dynamic spaces like a TV lounge, game room, or large community room. If it is not possible or practical to put a lot of distance between these spaces, consider the orientation of doors, windows, and shared walls to mitigate noise issues.

Indoor-Outdoor Links

Whenever possible connect amenity rooms either physically or visually to courtyards and other outdoor spaces. If the design includes a roof deck—popular for outdoor meals, events, and watching fireworks—be sure to include a restroom at the roof level.





Station Center Family Housing, Union City, CA. A range of amenities ring a central courtyard, allowing families and staff to engage independently in different activities at the same time, while remaining in close proximity.

Community Amenities: Availability

Ensure Access

DCHA research and other post-occupancy evaluations have revealed that the greatest barrier to successful amenity spaces is the issue of access—rooms are often locked or otherwise unavailable, including being inaccessible due to a rental cost for use.

In corresponding feedback, building management teams report that they struggle to manage amenity spaces due to understaffing or insufficient visibility into the spaces, which often results in a need to lock amenities when they are not able to be monitored. The issues of amenity availability, programming, management, and maintenance are complex, yet important to address and overcome where possible. Functioning amenity space is a critical part of a building's ecosystem.

The consistent availability of usable amenities reduces residents' reliance on their apartments, which can allow those units to be a little smaller. **When basing funding on smaller units and higher numbers of units, it's critical to complement that choice with ample amenity space: The success of one is reliant on the success of the other.** Decisions made about amenities have holistic impacts on the ecosystem of the building. If there is not a management plan and commitment to preserving the availability of amenity spaces, the development team may need to plan for larger units.

Additionally, ensured access to amenity spaces gives residents more resources as well as a sense of belonging within the community. Ideally, the residents will regard the entire building—not just their own apartment—as their home, and this largely hinges on the reliable opportunity to use the promised amenity spaces.

Hear All Voices

In the preliminary design of amenities spaces, stakeholder buy-in is key. By engaging residents early in the process, the development and design team is able to gain a better understanding of the programming needs and desires of the community, which can then guide decisions about the types and sizes of amenity spaces to prioritize and include.

Interviews with property management and maintenance staff further give the design team critical information about staff operations and management challenges, which helps the team create appropriate types of spaces, provide convenient adjacencies, and ensure sufficient visibility for effective management.



Hearing from all of the users of the building in the early design process ensures that the team has clarity on resident and staff goals and is able to anticipate and address concerns that may have impact after the building is in operation. With care—and input from both residents and management staff—it is possible to balance a building’s needs for social connection and security to create spaces that can be both well used and well managed.





222 Taylor, San Francisco

Make a Programming Plan

Formalizing a Staffing and Management Plan is a valuable way to document both the intention and the practical considerations for maintaining and preserving resident access to building amenities. Such guiding documents should be developed early, record the intended use of all amenity spaces, and include all relevant notes about the early engagement process with residents and staff that led to the decisions around amenity offerings. The Plan should include basic troubleshooting information for each of the spaces to support staff and prevent any potential barriers to keeping the space open. Most importantly, the significance of the Plan should be conveyed to all staff, and the document should be shared to ensure that all staff understand the importance of and commit to the functionality of amenity spaces.

Residents, staff, and management companies change over the life of a building. The Staffing and Management Plan should be easily accessed and passed on to new teams in order to keep the initial intentions in focus as they make any necessary adjustments for their team.

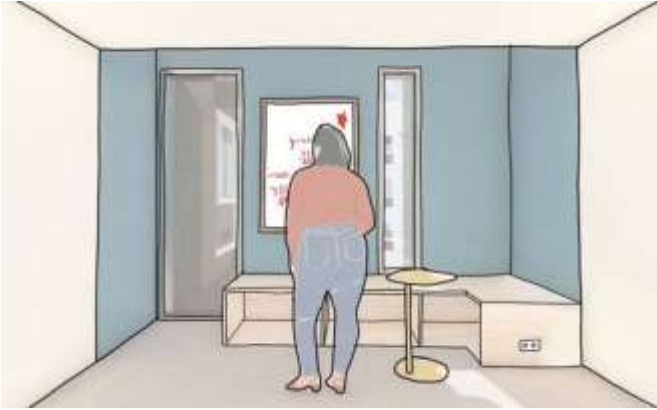
Resources for Sustainability



Enterprise Green Communities is a program that offers a green rating system, certification program, and helpful technical resources for integrating sustainable, healthy practices into building operations and maintenance.

Tools for ongoing resident engagement—manuals, management plans, and maintenance schedules—are available at greencommunitiesonline.org/resources.



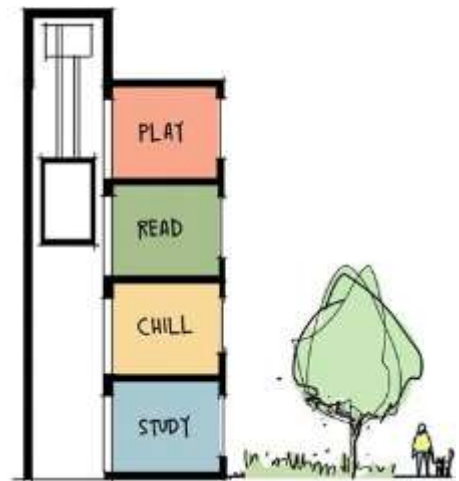


Maximize spaces: Each elevator lobby can offer something different. Think about how these shared areas might be programmed with a different use or tone at each floor to provide variety for residents.

Circulation as Shared Space

Circulation is the way people move through and interact with a building—entries, corridors, bridges, staircases, and elevators. These zones, which can account for up to a quarter of the building area, are shared space that can be used to benefit and support the community throughout.

People spend a lot of time in circulation spaces, whether walking or waiting—or ideally, meeting and greeting—and these zones work best when they are bright, airy, comfortable, and interesting. Relatively simple design interventions can maximize these spaces and offer the added benefits of breaking up long hallways, fostering a sense of place, and creating opportunities for people to informally enter the social flow of the building.



Leverage opportunities at the entry lobby, mail rooms, and elevators to make space for residents to pause or gather, and keep age and ability ranges in mind. For example, adding sculptural seating in an entry can provide visual interest while allowing seniors to sit and rest or kids to climb and play.

Especially in family buildings, elevators get heavy use. Thoughtful lobbies and landing lounges by the elevator on each level—with tables, comfy chairs, and windows framing views—make the wait more pleasant and offer a neutral shared space to meet as people enter or leave that floor. These small extra spaces can host additional programming elements, like a Little Free Library, a café table and chairs for a coffee date, or a private nook to make a phone call.

Thoughtful community-oriented uses distributed throughout the building will become ingrained in daily life. They are inherent to the network of shared space and—as they are not subject to more formal issues of access and management—are always available for resident use.

3



Overflow Living



“

My family
comes to
see me
more in this
building
because
there is
more to do
here.



”

Provide thoughtful spaces that “extend the home” for key family activities, events, and other needs.

Overflow Living

Standard building amenities support external activities that generally take place outside of the home within a larger community, such as hitting the gym, attending a community meeting, or visiting the library or playground. However, there is an internal type of activity that would take place at home, if only there were sufficient space, that is a critical part of a rich family life—such as holiday meals with extended family, movie nights, school projects, and messy or noisy projects.

Overflow living spaces include rooms or facilities that help with the following:

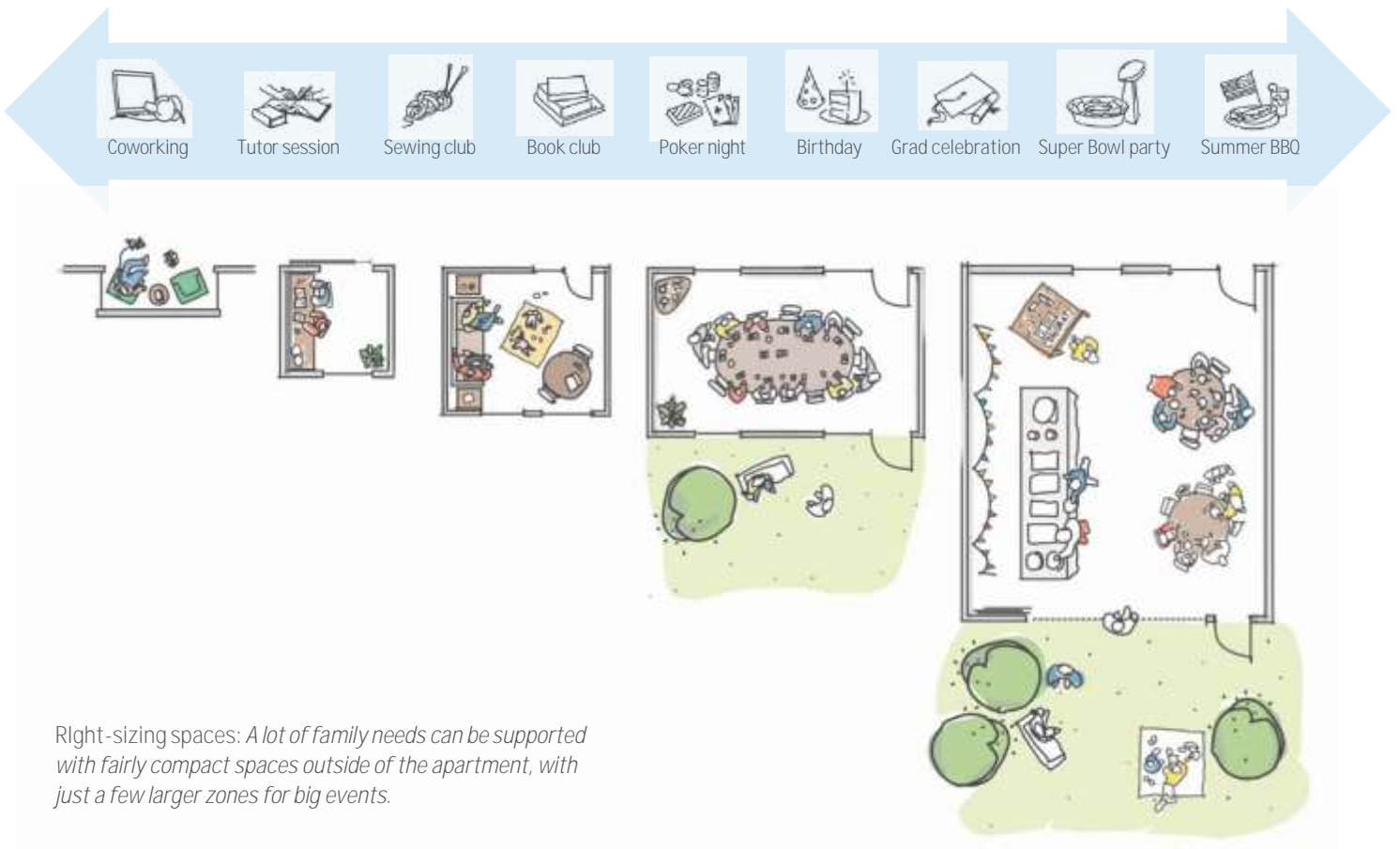
- *Gatherings and Get Togethers*
- *Extended Family Stays*
- *Working and Learning from Home*
- *Supplemental and Seasonal Storage*
- *Bicycles and Other Mobility Devices*
- *Pet Care*
- *Hobbies and Projects*
- *Laundry*
- *Access to the Outdoors*



In multifamily housing, where square footage is at a premium and apartments are maximized to support daily living, such activities can be accommodated with “in-between” spaces—inside the community but outside of the home—to cater to periodic family needs and foster connection, resilience, and ease of living.

In interviews, one resident noted that her family comes to visit more often now that she is in a building with generous amenities, which allow her to host them outside of her apartment: **“I love bringing my family to the common room because it has space and games for my kids and grandkids.”**

Gatherings and Get Togethers



Right-sizing spaces: A lot of family needs can be supported with fairly compact spaces outside of the apartment, with just a few larger zones for big events.

It is important for families and friends to come together to visit, bond, and celebrate, yet apartments aren't always able to accommodate big groups or events. Community rooms with kitchens and dining areas can give residents the opportunity to host meals and share milestones.

Placing these social spaces separate from more public communal spaces will lend family events a sense of privacy. **Multiple small facilities in a variety of sizes on residential floors will result in more availability to residents than one large common room.** Small rooms set up simply as lounges can also help residents socialize with each other or with visitors outside of their units. For each, provide a flexible layout and an ample furniture and furniture storage space to accommodate a range of events.

Indoor-outdoor spaces are helpful too: Designate a courtyard or outdoor area for shared gathering, perhaps with a grill patio and other infrastructure to support picnics and BBQs.

Extended Family Stays



Bay View Suites, Mountain View, CA. Hotel-style units can be simple and efficient in their design. These units leverage built-ins to provide space for a queen-size bed and a small seating area.

To accommodate longer visits, reimagine the guest room. While not an everyday need, guest accommodations make it possible for residents to host family and friends on occasion. Having this type of space available supports important social connections and allows residents the opportunity to have overnight guests without disruption to their home life. Designated low-cost hotel-style units in the building allow residents to support visitors for short-term or longer stays as needed, such as family members traveling from across the country or overseas, caretakers staying on-site during illness or crisis, or guests in transition that may need temporary housing.



Working and Learning from Home



Edwina Benner Plaza, Sunnyvale, CA. Pairing a computer lab with other community spaces makes it easier for families to do multiple tasks at the same time and helps building management keep an eye on shared facilities.



Via Verde, Bronx, NY. Several of Via Verde's townhouse units incorporate a built-in desk next to the primary living area to give residents a designated work space at home.

As we have moved to a more flexible work and school system, there is an increased need for places that can support adults and kids for at-home and hybrid schedules. Flex spaces in units or functional common work spaces can support both “working from home” and “learning from home.” In units, consider adding nooks or notches for a work space or providing built-in desks in larger rooms. Alternately, ensure bedrooms are sized to accommodate desks.

In building common areas, provide computer labs, quiet library spaces, or coworking rooms that support residents with computers with printing capacity, work stations, ample outlets, data connections, wifi, and if possible, sound-isolated rooms or booths to allow for phone calls and virtual meetings. In developer interviews, “coworking for all ages” was identified as an increasing trend. One developer noted that in buildings with libraries or learning centers, children in the building often form homework study groups.

Practical Considerations

Charging electronic devices is critical for home work and study. Include sufficient outlets to accommodate multiple devices charging at the same time.

Distribute outlets thoughtfully to accommodate various and changing furniture layouts and work setups.

Leverage Laundry



Elisabetta, Denver. This "laundry lounge" provides a comfortable spot for residents to pass time while using the washing machines and dryers.

A communal laundry room is the interstitial option between in-unit laundry and an outside laundromat. A spacious, well-resourced central laundry room or per-floor rooms can support families and minimize maintenance challenges. Provide ample counter space, a sink, and a higher number of laundry machines for family buildings, which will increase access and utility as well as reduce wear on limited machines. In our post-occupancy walks, participants gave frequent feedback about the challenge of out-of-service machines, whether from overuse, misuse, or jammed coin slots.

Consider how the laundry room can fit into the network of social space in the building. Create bright, daylit laundry rooms that take advantage of views, have access to fresh air, and connect to compatible uses—when possible, place them near compatible uses, like resident lounges, TV or computer rooms, play areas, or fitness centers.

Practical Considerations

Evaluate the cost of coin-operated laundry versus the cost of repair and impact of disabled machines.

If providing coin-operated laundry, **install a change machine** for convenience.

Supplemental and Seasonal Storage



Prioritize proximity: As an alternate option to a traditional bulk locker in a common storage room, placing dedicated space for bulky storage directly next to each apartment allows families easy access to pantry items, seasonal clothing, sports equipment, and outdoor toys like scooters and wagons.

Families in particular often need more storage than an apartment offers. Residents frequently reported that storage was a challenge—whether for pantry, freezer, linen closet, or deep storage items. Many residents need to shop in bulk to stay on budget, but find it difficult to store and use bulk products easily. Keep bulk purchasing and family scale in mind when designing in-unit cabinets and closets.

Also, identify opportunities to utilize building space to provide storage outside of homes. Take advantage of corridor space to provide easily accessible storage closets adjacent to each unit, or offer a common shared storage room with closets or lockers—either floor-by-floor, per wing, or per building. The closer, cleaner, and brighter the better. Provide secure space for large household items, occasional-use items—like suitcases and seasonal decorations—and documents or family mementos. These items do not need to be stored in or near the home as long as they can be placed in a secure, clean, easily accessible spot.

Practical Considerations

The corridor closet is just one way to meet bulk storage requirements for a project. Another method includes providing shared storage rooms, where each unit receives a lockable storage locker.

If possible, **provide a closet that is at least 30" deep** to accommodate the largest bulk items, like suitcases or bulk paper goods.

Install heavy-duty shelving to support boxes of books or family mementos.

Places for Pets

Taking care of family pets can be a messy business. Designate some of the building's sheltered outdoor space for a dog run and a pet relief area with clear means to dispose of pet waste, which will help keep the shared community courtyards clean and calm. Support pet owners with a well-provisioned dog-wash area to make it safe and easy to keep pets clean and pest-free.

Potrero 1010, San Francisco. *This retail-style pet spa is conveniently located on the park next to the dog run.*



Hobbies and Projects

Families need space where they can spread out and assemble furniture, re-pot plants, and work on school or art projects. Consider providing a multi-use DIY (“do it yourself”) room that can be used for home or creative projects. Provide ample tables, counters, lighting, and a large sink for easy cleanup. Consider resourcing a tool library for residents to check out basic tools or supplies.

Potrero 1010, San Francisco. *This prominently placed DIY space includes a stand and tools specifically for fixing bicycles.*



Practical Considerations

Provide lockable storage to accommodate the tool library or other shared supplies.

Install a durable floor and floor drain to make cleaning the space easier for maintenance teams.

Dr. George W. Davis Senior Building, San Francisco. *Flexible classroom spaces are linked to the community center and host a wide range of programs, including resident art workshops and craft sessions.*

Common Goods Library

Caesura, Brooklyn, NY

ARCHITECT
Dattner Architects with
Bernheimer Architecture

DEVELOPER
Jonathan Rose Companies

Caesura is a mixed-use, mixed-income apartment building combining affordable and market-rate homes with cultural uses that serve the larger neighborhood, such as dance rehearsal studios and a home base for the non-profit Center for Fiction.



Caesura, Brooklyn, NY. *Just as the Common Goods Library offers shared items, Caesura's lounge provides community space that accommodates a range of activities—from study to socializing to play—outside of the apartments.*

In addition to providing communal spaces for residents—ranging from a bike room to a fitness center and yoga studio to a social lounge—the building offers a Commons Goods Library, a lending library for useful and playful objects.

This easily accessible shared resource is stocked and maintained with a thoughtful assortment of items that residents might use occasionally but don't necessarily need to own independently or to store in their homes. Kitchen appliances, tools, games, art supplies, and musical equipment are among the offerings in the collection, which can be curated to meet diverse resident needs.

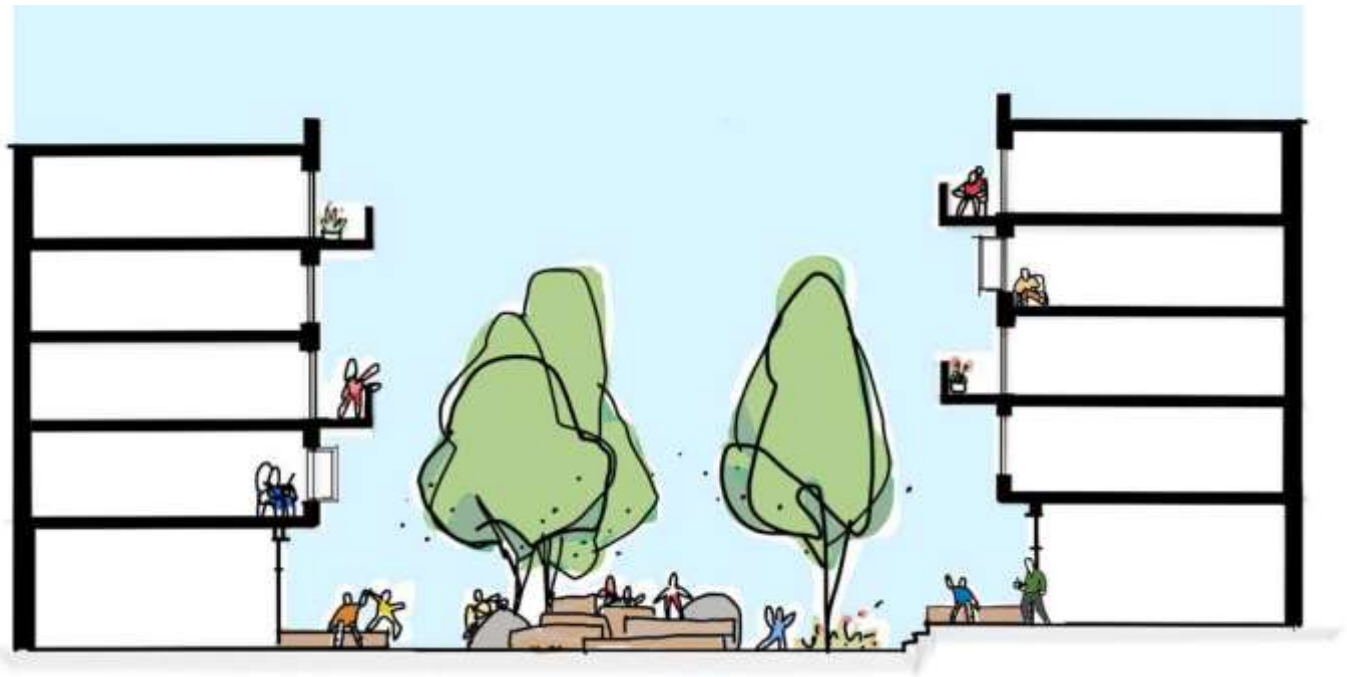


Caesura, Brooklyn, NY. This Common Goods Library takes the tool-share concept and runs with it, offering a range of objects of interest to residents.

At Caesura, the Common Goods Library is located in a amenity closet with fob access for residents. To support property management, consider locating a similar Common Goods Library near staff offices. An alternate design option could be to store the library goods in locked cabinetry in lieu of a closet.

While individual projects and management teams may require different approaches to this concept, the important idea is to find some way that shared items can be offered as an amenity, making life easier for residents and building a collective resource.

Get Outside



Link with nature: Strategically placed windows, balconies, and ground-floor units with direct access to courtyards are all great ways to increase residents' exposure to the outdoors.

Access to outdoor and natural spaces has been shown to have a significant positive impact on people, including reduced stress, better sleep, greater happiness, better physical and general health, and improved immune function. The more time kids spend in nature, the better able they are to concentrate and to self-regulate their emotions and behavior. This benefit is known as biophilia.

It is important to reinforce the sense that the building's outdoor spaces are part of the residents' homes and are available for their use. There are several strategies that help increase the connections between residences and outdoor space. Where possible, provide units with at-grade access to courtyards to give children and families easy, informal opportunities for play. Include private or shared balconies that overlook outdoor community spaces or views outward around the property. Be thoughtful with window layouts in apartments—and in corridors and common spaces—to take full advantage of view opportunities. Connect flexible common spaces to courtyards via wide or extendable doorways to allow for indoor-outdoor events and activities.

Biophilic design is an approach to architecture that attempts to address the human desire or tendency to commune with nature, playing on this innate connection to bring natural elements or references into a space to make it more resonant with the senses. Biophilic features include natural materials; organic patterns; daylight quality and color; air movement and other sensory cues; access to a sense of time or weather; and clear sightlines.



4



Residential Units



“

I wish we
had more
options
and choice
in what
units we
live in.



”

Offer varied and flexible apartment layouts to accommodate a range of families and times of life.

Residential Units

Amid robust shared spaces and welcoming amenities, the apartments truly form the foundation of home for residents, providing refuge and a sense of autonomy, stability, and security. Primary challenges noted in multifamily buildings include providing a sufficient range of choice of unit type to accommodate diverse families, and ensuring that the homes on offer could meet family needs in terms of storage and flexibility.

The reality is that these desires are in tension with the cost per square foot that needs to be met to ensure a successful development. Architects must creatively leverage every inch, maximizing space to accommodate families with efficient, flexible homes that address their needs.

When thinking about unit design, it's important to consider the following:

Diversity in Unit Types

- *Simple, Distinct Options*
- *Sufficient Small Units*
- *Townhomes and Live-Work Units*
- *Expandable Units*
- *Bonus Space*

Details within Units

- *Slack Space*
- *Layouts for Living*
- *Creative Storage Solutions*
- *Flexible Furnishings*
- *Support for Diverse Abilities and Aging in Place*



Residential Units: Diversity

Simple, Distinct Options

It is relatively easy to provide a measure of choice for residents by offering just two alternative two-bedroom unit plans. Different layouts will support or resonate with different types of families. For example, residents with young children report preferring side-by-side bedrooms, while another resident noted that she lives comfortably with her adult son in a unit with bedrooms on opposite sides of the home.

Where possible, add a second bathroom to two-bedroom units. Up to four people may live together in this size unit. While an additional bathroom requires a small increase in overall unit square footage, many residents noted that they appreciated the additional ease and privacy.



Sufficient Small Units

As family needs change, the scale of the home they need changes. Consider providing a greater number of smaller units per building. An abundance of smaller units in the building—from studios to two-bedrooms—allows families to downsize while remaining in their community.

This variety also supports families with members who want to live close together—possibly even as next-door neighbors—but not necessarily share a unit, such as parents with adult children, grandparents, or extended family.



Powerhouse Apartments, Philadelphia



Lucy Parsons Apartments, Chicago

Townhomes and Live-Work Units

Adding integrated townhomes—multi-level units that are built into the base floors of a larger apartment building—is a great way to provide an alternate type of larger unit. This unit type is incredibly compact in plan, taking up little site square footage, and offers a distinct home style that is ideal for some families.

Technically part of the larger building, these two- to three-level homes activate the project edges with stoops and private entries. Placing townhomes on courtyards or amenity zones allows children easier access to the outdoors, allowing for free play while parents can watch from stoops or porches. A row of townhomes can also be used to line or “wrap” an embedded garage, hiding the garage structure from view and keeping the streetscape lively. Designing townhomes as live-work or flex units—meaning, creating separation between private space and an open-plan living area—can also provide opportunities for residents to run small home businesses.

Expandable Units

Expandable units are created by linking a pair of adjacent apartments internally, in the style of a hotel suite. Linked units—some combination of studios, one-bedrooms and two-bedrooms—can function as one larger family home or be separated back into their component units. This style of housing supports intergenerational living and can easily be reconfigured as separate units as a family's needs evolve.

In another approach, expandable units could also operate as a co-housing model—linking separate living spaces to shared storage or laundry facilities.

Developers may find that this approach offers critical flexibility, allowing them to build a higher number of smaller units yet still accommodate large households.



Unit Variety

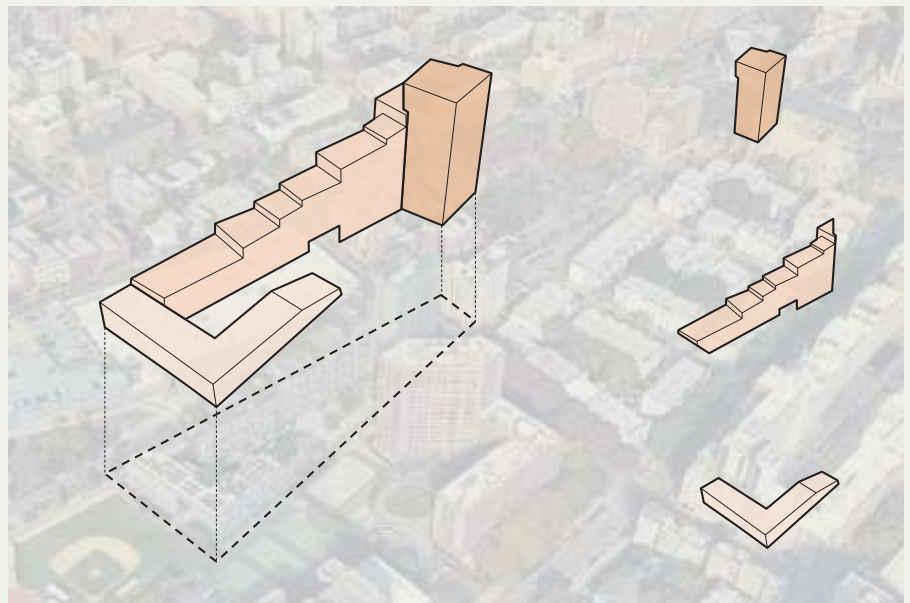
Via Verde, Bronx, NY

ARCHITECT
Dattner Architects

DEVELOPER
Jonathan Rose Companies

Via Verde is an affordable, sustainable residential development designed for healthy, urban living in the South Bronx. This design deploys three distinct unit types that utilize the site to its fullest potential and provide a mix of homes to suit a range of families.

At the north edge of the site, a 20-story tower with typical apartments maximizes density—and offers broad city views and a dramatic penthouse roof deck.



The middle portion of the site is configured as a mid-rise building, with a series of stacked townhomes along a traditional double-loaded corridor. These homes connect directly to the development's vast network of cascading open space, locating a high number of households adjacent to building amenities, such as the playground, urban farm, rooftop gardens, and amphitheater.

To the southwest, as the site narrows, a single row of ground-floor walk-up and townhome-style units well-suited for large families activate the street edge.

Bonus Space

Deep residential unit bars create the opportunity to provide bonus rooms. These units allow for extra interior spaces that draw light through interior windows or transoms. These types of spaces may not be allowable for every project due to financing complexity or site conditions, but rooms lit in this manner are commonly found in market-rate residential developments and historic walk-up apartments. Versatile for families, these bonus rooms can be used as a home office, playroom, extra storage, or other uses.



“Puzzle” units—layouts that nest together in an otherwise standard footprint—are a helpful tool for increasing overall unit density on a site where building length is restricted, while also providing a flexible bonus space.



“Sleepingnook” units carve out a space within the floor plan to create separation. This studio leverages transparency, delineating a sleeping area with a glass sliding door to let in light and create the feeling of a one-bedroom layout.



Historic walkups are known for having a small bonus room (usually 8' x 8') underneath the stairs.



"Gooseneck" units allows a typical 2-bedroom unit to be narrower by leveraging a niche or alcove in one bedroom. These spaces allow light into the bedroom and also serve as perfect places for desks, dressers, and other furniture. In order to be furnishable and ADA compliant, the "gooseneck" should have a minimum width of 5'.

Residential Units: Details and Dimensions

Slack Space

A common complaint from residents was that their furniture didn't seem to fit properly in living rooms and bedrooms, and as a result they perceived their units to be "too small." However, these typical units were in fact adequately sized. The location of columns, doors, and other details of the plan limited furniture layouts, and this inflexibility translated into much less usable space.

To increase flexibility, locate doors 18" to 24" away from walls, to provide room on the side for small furniture or storage. With bedroom doors in particular, place them to ensure that the living room will retain at least two clear walls that can accommodate furniture. Make sure that there is space in the living room for a reasonable and comfortable configuration of seating and a TV.



Draw Furniture Early and with Variety

When designing units, don't assume or prescribe a single furniture layout. Households move in with extremely diverse and varied furniture, in type, size, and amount.

Preserve visible furniture in all architectural drawings throughout the design process so that room flexibility remains at the top of mind during coordination and when discussing details with engineers.



Edwina Benner Plaza, Sunnyvale, CA. Consider window locations in bedrooms to provide flexibility for furnishing.

Layouts for Living

The current and popular trend of the open floor plan provides the most flexibility for families. However, in larger units—with three or more bedrooms—this can result in up to 10 people attempting to use a standard-size living room at the same time. To mitigate crowding, ensure that bedrooms in larger units have ample space for desks and other items to accommodate work, study, or hobbies away from the busy shared living space.

Practical Considerations

When designing units, think about the **maximum number of family members** that may live in the home. As a rule of thumb, assume two people per bedroom, which in a four-bedroom apartment could result in as many as eight residents.

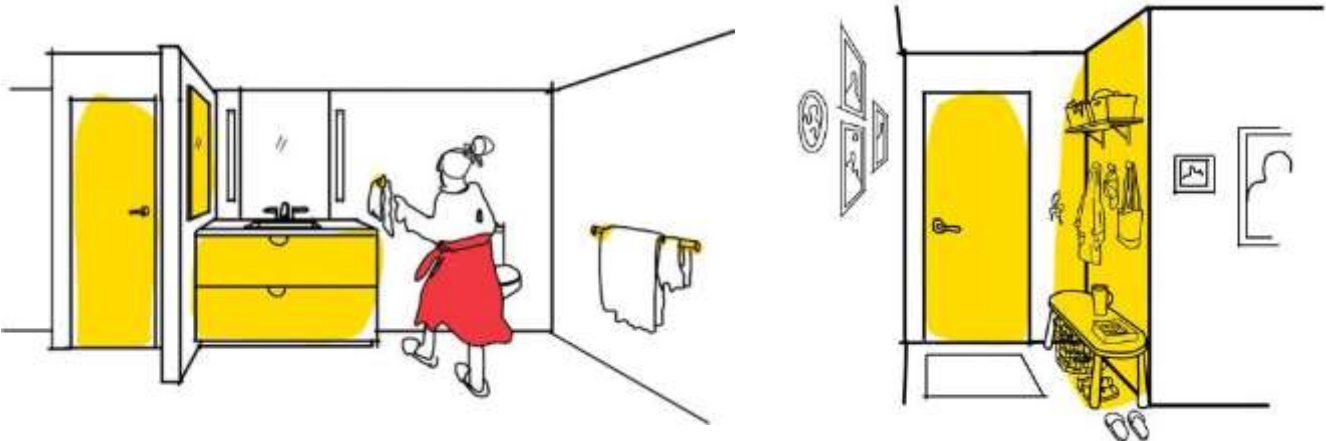
Reference *The District of Columbia Housing Authority Admissions and Continued Occupancy Plan* for more information.
dchousing.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ACOP_2.14.23.pdf



Creative Storage Solutions

Residents frequently reported challenges with storage, whether it was finding room for bulk purchases—cited as important to maintaining their budget—or storing daily household items.

When designing units, providing a range of storage types is as or more important than meeting an overall capacity requirement. Organized and varied storage space can help with efficiency, decreasing the overall square footage required for storage use.



- **Coat Closet:** Space in or near the entry for jackets, boots, and umbrellas
- **Kitchen Cabinetry:** Room for dishware, glassware, and cutlery, including at least one stack of drawers
- **Pantry:** Storage for dry goods, canned goods, and kitchen staples
- **Linen Closet:** Ample space with adjustable shelving
- **Medicine Cabinet:** Storage for medications and small toiletries
- **Bathroom Storage:** Cupboards or drawers for toiletries and cleaning supplies
- **Bedroom Closets:** One in each bedroom
-

Flexible Furnishings

When asked about their units, nearly every resident had a different opinion about the room layout and the kitchen design. Some preferred kitchen islands, others wanted space for a table in the kitchen. Some preferred open floor plans, others more divided floor plans. To preserve choice, offer flexible furnishings and storage components—such as optional kitchen islands, wardrobes, and units with adjustable shelving—and allow residents to select from a few distinct options when they move in to customize the apartment to their needs.



Pacific Cannery Lofts, Oakland, CA.



Onizuka Crossing, Sunnyvale, CA.

Support for Diverse Abilities and Aging in Place

It is challenging and often cost prohibitive to provide a building where all units meet all accessibility requirements. However there are several inclusive design strategies that can increase the flexibility of units to support ease of use and aging in place and can help building management maximize accessibility without adding significant cost. Integrating these features can lessen the distinction between accessible units and standard units and can instead move toward units that are usable for everyone.

The Kelsey is a pioneering disability-forward housing advocate based in California that offers the *Inclusive Design Standards*, a resource with more than 300 elements that can be leveraged to positively affect accessible building design.

Created in partnership with architects, designers, and advocates and informed by The Kelsey's housing pipeline, the *Inclusive Design Standards* aim to equip developers, builders, and designers with frameworks for accessible housing creation.

Consider these recommended unit features to enhance adaptability.

- **Unit orientation:** Provide both left- and right-hand dwelling units to support residents with different dominant sides—particularly in kitchens where a resident may need to approach from a particular side, or bathrooms where a resident may need to transfer to a shower or tub seat
- **Provide sufficient accessible general storage,** including full-height cabinets in kitchens so that ample storage remains when base cabinets are removed at sinks as well as work surfaces to accommodate mobility devices
- **Specify adjustable shelving in closets**
- **Tactile interfaces:** Select appliances with buttons and dials rather than touchpads and screens to support residents with no or low vision
- **Use single-lever faucets** at kitchens and bathrooms and lever door hardware throughout to provide easier control for people with less dexterity
- **Provide in-wall backing for grab bars** in bathrooms at toilets, tubs, and showers—whether or not grab bars are actually installed
- **Install off-set shower controls.** These hotel-style fixtures are easier for wheelchair users to manipulate and also economically elevate the bathroom design for everyone



Beyond the innumerable positive impacts that can be realized by integrating inclusive design, using the ***Inclusive Design Standards*** by The Kelsey and Erick Mikiten creates an opportunity to receive maximum points in the DHCD Qualified Application Plan for 9% and 4% Tax Credit Applications.

Download the *Inclusive Design Standards* at thekelsey.org/design/.

**Inclusive
Design
Standards**



5



Healthy Environments



“

I like my
big windows,
but I have
to cover
them up
so my
neighbors
cannot



see in.

”

Create quality indoor and outdoor environments to support well-being, autonomy, and growth.

Healthy Environments

It makes sense that people’s genetics, habits, and behaviors impact their longevity and quality of life. It is now understood that a person’s ZIP code can also affect life expectancy—meaning where someone lives can be as significant as who they are and how they live. Numerous studies have unpacked the complex social and environmental factors that contribute to this pattern, and it is clear that the home environment comes into play. People’s health is directly impacted by their surrounding conditions as well as by environmental qualities inside their own homes. These impacts can be both positive, such as access to nature, and negative, such as exposure to pollution.

Decisions made in the design, construction, and maintenance of the spaces where people live, sleep, work, and play intersect with environmental determinants of health. That is, ensuring adequate ventilation, minimizing exposure to pollution, and providing access to the outdoors are all decisions that need to be made and preserved actively throughout the design process.

Such choices affect all residents and disproportionately impact people with medical conditions or immunity challenges and kids with growing bodies. And yet, aspects that govern the quality of the home environment are among the most easily overlooked essentials of multifamily housing design. Why are such fundamental priorities so often set aside? Two primary causes: Certain aspects of environmental quality are difficult to codify and regulate, making them hard to keep as a top goal during the design and construction process; and these efforts are often perceived as challenging or costly.

However, prioritizing resident and staff wellness simply requires the clear and close attention of a well-informed design team. The following priorities will particularly benefit multifamily housing, although these principles can apply positively to all types of residential design.

- *Connection to Nature*
- *Quality Acoustics*
- *Healthy Air*
- *Control and Understanding*

The Child Opportunity Index

The Child Opportunity Index (COI) tracks how ZIP codes impact personal health outcomes. The COI is a composite index of children’s neighborhood opportunity that contains data for every neighborhood in the United States by year from 2012 through 2021. It maps 44 indicators of opportunity, including social and economic factors.

See more at diversitydatakids.org/child-opportunity-index.



Connection to Nature

Studies in public housing have shown that people living in buildings with visual and physical access to green space experience less mental fatigue and social tension, more positive relationships, and better personal resilience and life management. For children, regular exposure to natural environments reduces stress and enhances concentration, self-regulation, and creativity.

In multifamily housing, access to an open, available courtyard with generous plantings is a must, even if it is a small space. When placed at a residential entry, such an open space can serve as a “decompression court,” offering a transition between the urban and home environment and sending calming signals to the nervous system.

“Nature” doesn’t have to mean only plants—or plants. Biophilic design also includes exposure to daily and seasonal cycles experienced through sensations—daylight, views, sounds, and operable windows—which is highly effective and should be a guiding design principle.

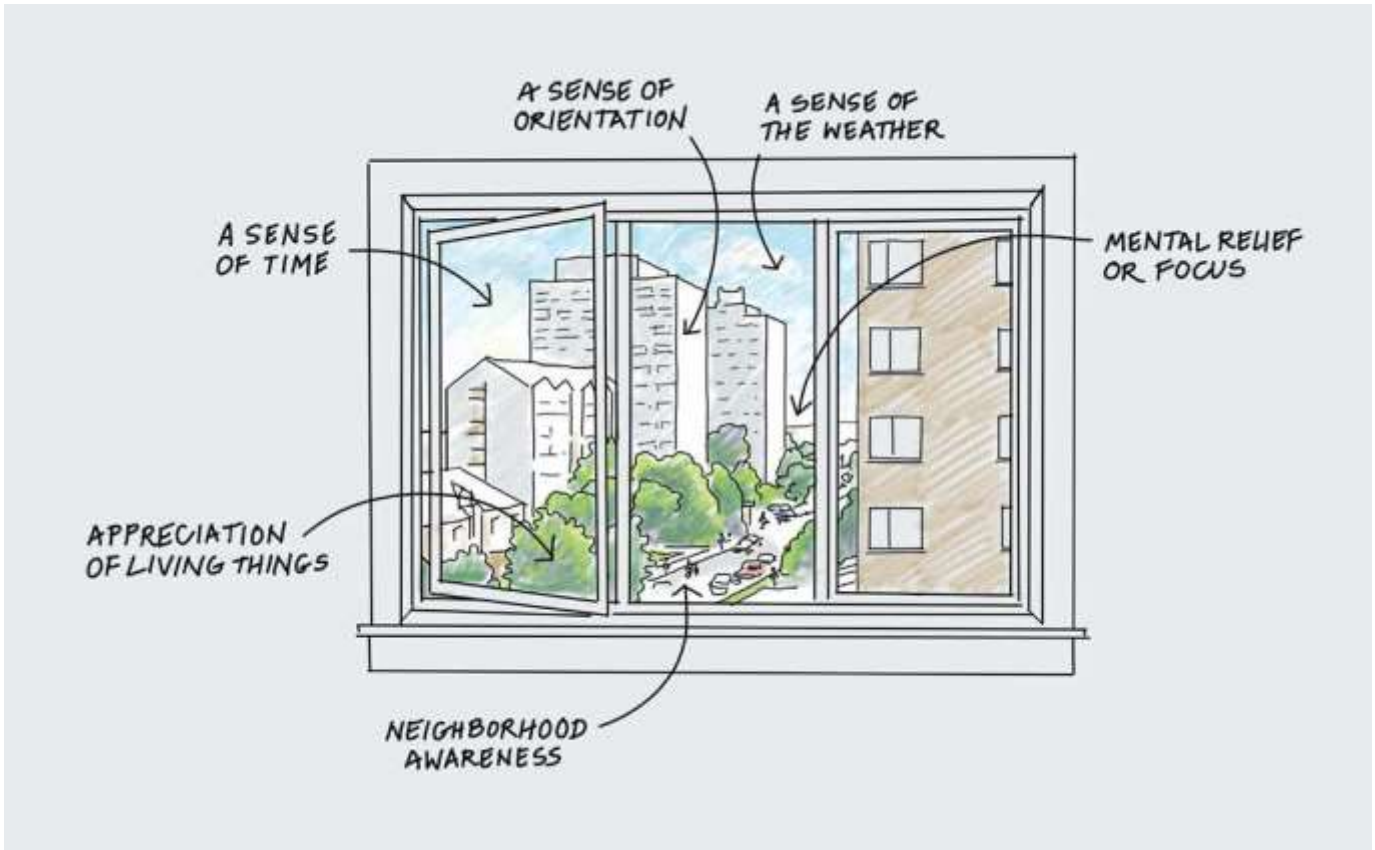
Creating Restorative Communities

Developed by Shopworks Architecture, “Creating Restorative Communities” is a report that dives into the benefits of biophilic design in housing through a compilation of available evidence. Download the report at shopworksarc.com/tid/.

SHOPWORKS
architecture



3200 Water Street, Washington, DC.
Residents look out from their homes onto a roof deck planted with a pollinator garden.



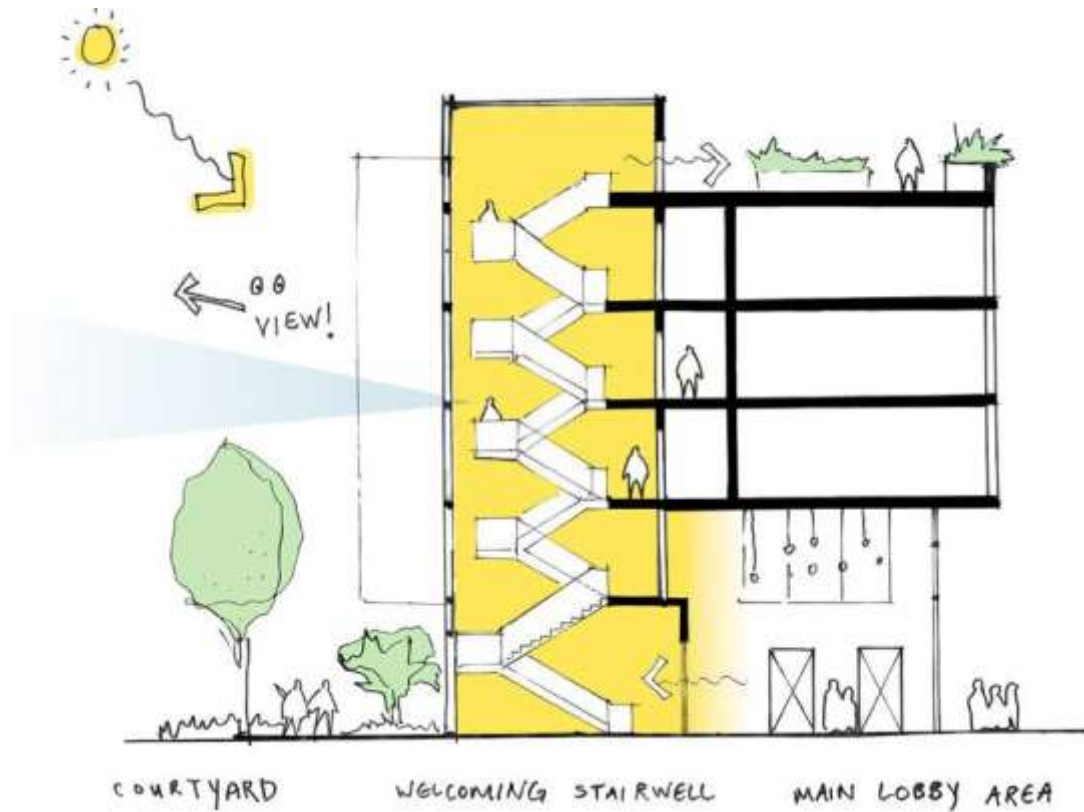
Views

Good views provide confirmed benefits, including improved emotional satisfaction, health and healing, and cognitive performance (such as schoolwork and decision-making). What constitutes a good view? Although that answer can be subjective, researchers define view quality in terms of visual content, access, and clarity—in other words, what is visible, how much is visible, and how clearly it can be seen.

An infill housing project doesn't always have the ability to provide the kind of stunning cityscapes or ocean views that might first come to mind when considering views. However, it is possible to seek out and identify views and to direct windows to highlight or deemphasize particular scenes. Sometimes this could also mean turning inward to provide access to natural scenes that may otherwise be absent from the site and surroundings.

Window as place: Consider a view from your home. What are the things that draw you in or improve your enjoyment of your space?





Daylight

In addition to ensuring direct and visual access to the outdoors, bring more light into common areas, especially circulation spaces, such as hallways and stairs. Consider adding windows at the ends of corridors and providing larger window openings throughout. Daylit corridors and stairs provide views and light and also help with orientation—helping people understand where they are in space—which is often obscured in double-loaded corridor apartment buildings. Adding generous glazing to a well-located exit stair creates a dynamic and inviting place that encourages physical activity and engagement.

Isle House, San Francisco



Onizuka Crossing, Sunnyvale, CA.



Opening to the Outdoors

Look to strategically locate open space to maximize indoor-outdoor connections. Links between amenity spaces and outdoor spaces allow for activities to overflow and for kids to play outside while parents are engaged in a task or activity nearby.

Don't limit this approach to community rooms: Auxiliary spaces like laundry rooms are often tucked away, but locating them next to active community spaces allow them to be bright, feel safe, and make the tasks of daily life easier and more pleasant.

When physical linkages are not possible, visual connections are the next best thing.

Blue Oak Landing, Vallejo, CA

Enlightened Circulation

Potrero 1010, San Francisco

ARCHITECT
David Baker Architects

DEVELOPER
Equity Residential

Potrero 1010 turns an environmental liability into an asset for residents through design

Potrero 1010 is a mixed-income community that occupies a formerly industrial site alongside an elevated highway that passes through the city of San Francisco. Understanding the threat posed by the constant noise and particulate matter created by the highway traffic, the design team chose to protect the building's units by creating a single-loaded corridor at this edge, orienting homes toward the interior of the site and adding windows and balconies that overlook lush green courtyards.





Potrero 1010, San Francisco

However, the design does not merely “turn its back” on the highway frontage. The team took full advantage of the opportunity, opting to make the corridor’s outer wall glass, which affords all residents dramatic views of the city as they enter and leave their homes.

Taking the design move one step further, they added supergraphics that identify and elevate the building when viewed from afar—including by drivers on the highway—through the glass facade.



Organic Materials

555 Larkin, San Francisco

Borrowing nature’s designs—such as incorporating salvaged live-edge wood in a reception desk or lobby bench—can be a wonderful way to create a special aesthetic and tactile experience that lends a building identity and creates a sense of place.

Natural Play

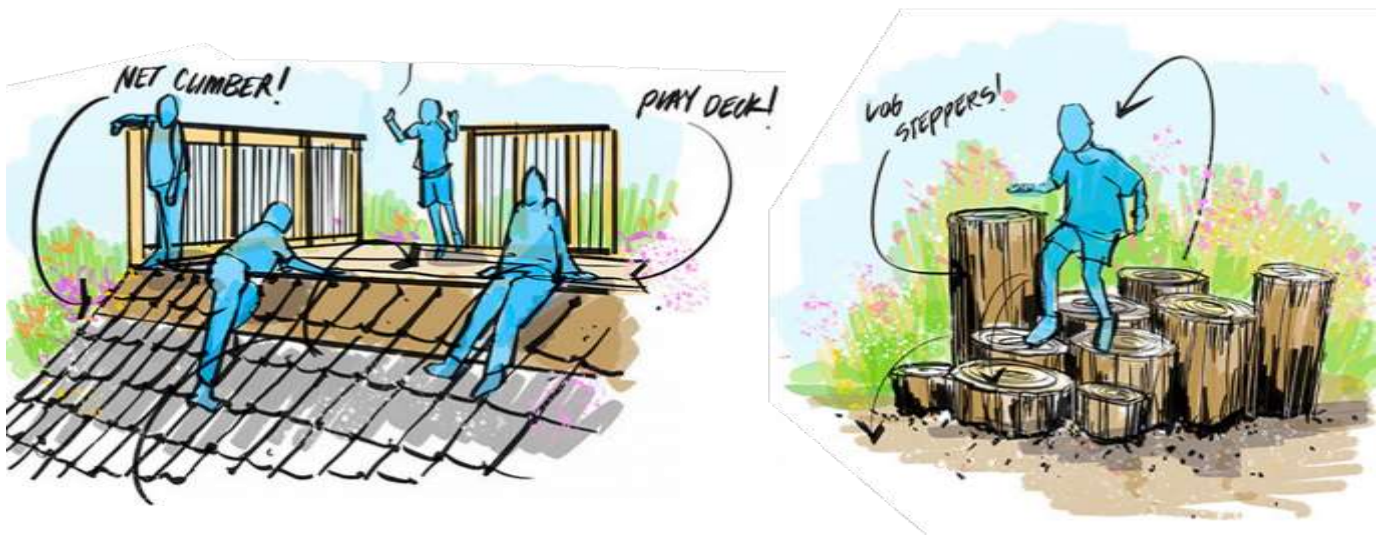
Play areas present a major opportunity to highlight natural materials in family housing. Direct interaction with natural elements is highly beneficial for kids’ brain development. In contrast, plastic elements and surfacing deprive children of more creative sensory play experiences, are commonly laced with toxins, and amplify surface heat.

It’s true that allowing kids to play in sand and wood chips requires smart planning to contain these messy materials and may not be manageable at every project. Cork-based and rubber surfacing (without recycled content, which often contains toxins) may offer



tidier alternatives, while being healthier and cooler than plastic elements. In lieu of standard catalog-order play structures, climbable natural elements are always worth considering—they are healthier, more distinctive, more interesting, and more aesthetic.

Dan Ryan Woods Nature Play Garden, Chicago



Healthy Air

Family activities can be hard on indoor air quality. Cooking, vacuuming, showering, personal-care products, and houseplants all impact indoor air in apartments and hallways. The chief concerns for providing healthy indoor air include eliminating volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from finishes during construction and maintenance; preserving a good

general air-exchange rate; and setting up systems that remove moisture and harmful particles where they are produced.

Healthy Materials

Durability and cost are sometimes perceived as being at odds with healthier alternatives for the materials, finishes, and adhesives used in residential construction. Sadly, many compounds present in finishes, as well as in the consumer products brought in by residents, have been found to pose chronic, acute risks to developing brains and bodies, including lower IQ, hyperactivity, hormone disruption, and cancer over long-term exposures. And in family buildings, kids touch everything. The most insidious, under-regulated toxins to watch for include antimicrobials, flame retardants, formaldehyde, solvents, VOCs, and PFAs (synthetic materials known as “forever chemicals” because they don’t break down in the environment).



Material Choices

Some key product categories of high concern have appropriate alternatives for well-used family housing: Zero-VOC paint and flooring adhesives; carpet without PFAs or antimicrobial treatments; countertop and concrete sealers free of PFAs; and vinyl products without plasticizers, PFAs, or recycled content (which often has PCBs and other toxins that are difficult to trace).

Set specific development standards based on these resources, which offer particular relevance for housing:



General Ventilation

The preferred system for balanced ventilation is a central energy recovery ventilator (ERV). With an ERV, the movement of supply and exhaust air is equalized and the temperature and humidity are controlled passively. Central systems are generally preferred because replacing filters at each unit adds cost and complexity to operations.

A more affordable—but more complex—approach relies on continuously operating bath exhaust fans, which must be balanced with supply air coming from a central roof-mounted supply fan or DOAS (dedicated outdoor air system) unit or fed directly into an apartment’s fan coil. For designs with continuous bath exhaust, provide whisper quiet fans with a boost speed and humidistat control to ensure that bathroom moisture is removed quickly and that residents can perceive the fan operating.

Ventilation systems should always be tested and commissioned to ensure sufficient air flow and proper balancing.

Range Hoods

For family housing, prioritize good range hoods paired with electric cooktops. Cooking produces a lot of particulates, the most harmful form of air pollution. For a range hood to work effectively—and for residents to want to use them—they must be quiet and cover as much of the front two burners as possible.

Practical Considerations

Range hood models should be ENERGY STAR rated, have at least two speeds, and be no louder than three sones at 100cfm of air flow—about as loud as a face-to-face conversation. Sones are a unit of sound similar to decibels.



Acoustics

The auditory environment of the home is very important to people. Good acoustic design takes on heightened importance in buildings with families—with kids running down the halls or letting out their wiggles in the apartment above, multiple activities going on at the same time, diverse lifestyles, and everyone’s right to privacy.



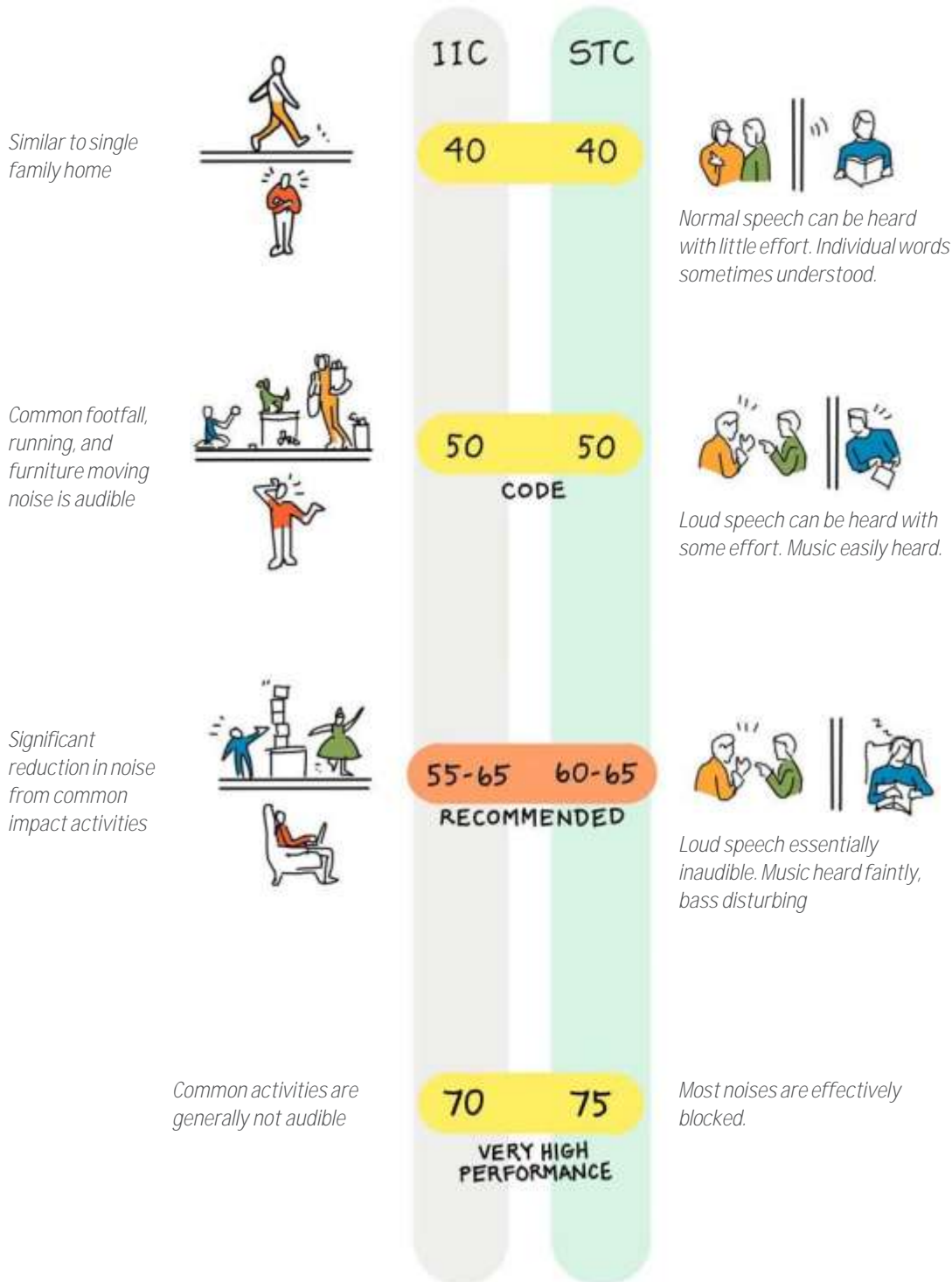
Acoustic design in family housing includes addressing:

- **Sound transmission:** *Noises traveling through the walls or floor*
- **Impact noise:** *Such as footsteps or dropped items*
- **Single-event noise:** *Like a car horn or airplane overhead*
- **Reverberation:** *Noise bouncing from surface to surface*

Features that mitigate all of these types of sounds do add some cost, but being strategic with investments to address the highest priorities can secure good return for a modest investment.

Set Standards for Wall Assemblies

Code requirements for sound transfer at apartment shared walls and corridor walls are insufficient to provide acoustic privacy. For each building, the development team should be intentional and set effective requirements for typical wall assemblies, plus



those at other critical locations facing unique conditions, such as laundry rooms and mechanical rooms placed near dwellings (when that can't be avoided) and in the partitions at resident service offices. Sound transmission and impact-noise attenuation need to be looked at and addressed separately. Acceptable sound performance can often be achieved in framed walls without using resilient channels, which add cost and complexity.



Noise in the Commons

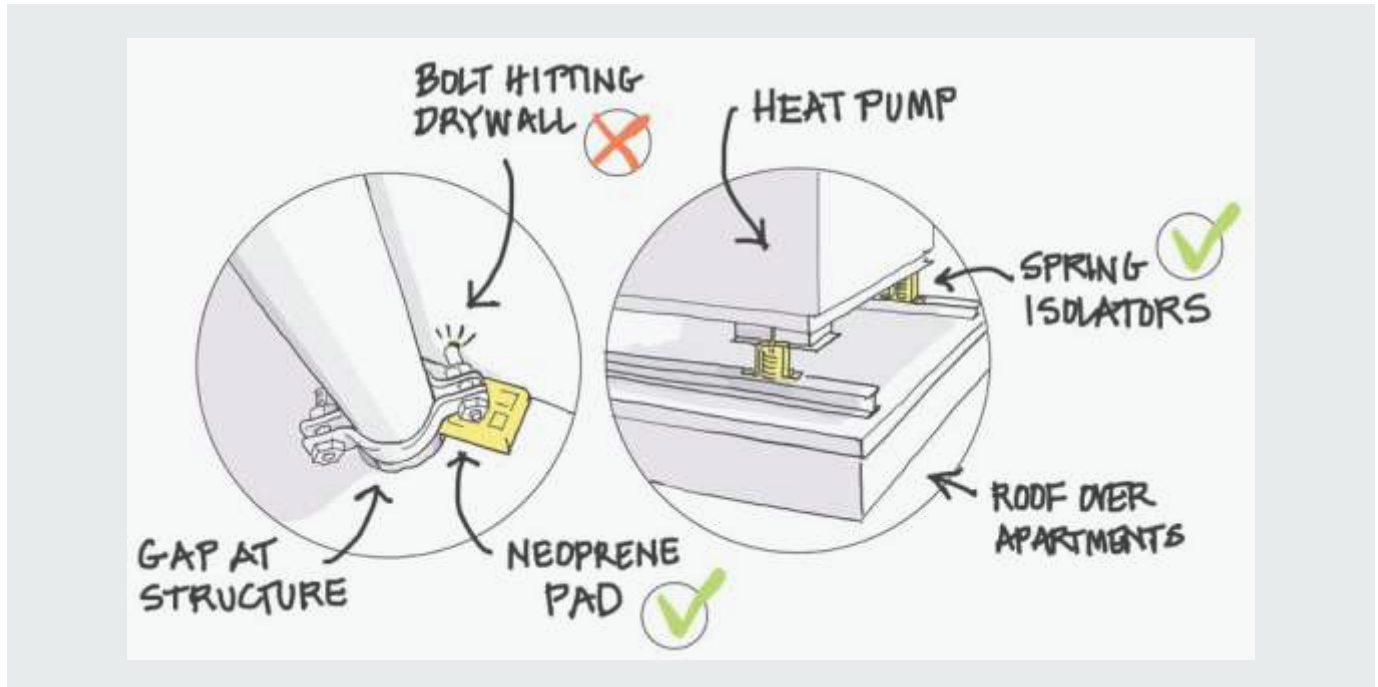
True disappointment comes when a building’s community room or lobby is unpleasant because it over-amplifies lively conversation and exuberant kids. To keep noise manageable in these common spaces, look into the many options for acoustic ceiling treatments that limit reverberation—sound from bouncing from surface to surface. These can even add aesthetic or artistic interest to the space. Even a simple black duct liner or spray-applied wood fiber at the underside of a floor slab can provide an enormous sound benefit at very little cost.

“Quiet” to most people does not mean an absence of sound, but an ability to control unwanted noise. Low-cost strategies that add pleasurable sound—like a good level of music in a waiting area for resident services or a courtyard sculpture that makes sound from patterns of wind or rain—are a great way to support well-being and comfort. In interviews with property managers, many noted that amplified music in appropriate areas lifted the mood and increased a sense of auditory privacy in offices and reception areas.

Tahanan Supportive Housing,
San Francisco

Isolate Ducts and Pipes

Some of the worst acoustic failures in multifamily buildings are from sound traveling along runs of pipe and ductwork, which is easily preventable. Many people think of costly assembly upgrades when they think of acoustic design, but a fix for this case simply includes inserting a bend or jogging branches of ductwork; taking care when units are mirrored; and using neoprene isolators to ensure separation between pipes and structure.



Hire an Acoustic Consultant

Acoustic engineers who are well-versed in housing can be very affordable and well worth the investment. A major source of unnecessary acoustic failures is simply the lack of oversight of detailing in drawings and during construction. For example, there are many no-cost details—such as ensuring electrical boxes are not back-to-back and giving waste lines a clear quarter-inch gap as they pass through a hole in the sill plate—that represent major avoidable failures if not executed effectively and consistently.

Construction dos and don'ts: Paying close attention to assemblies and using these simple strategies make a big difference in acoustic comfort.



Control and Understanding

It has been found that when people have personal control over their environment, they not only feel more at ease, but they physically perceive a broader range of conditions to be comfortable. This means that they are less frustrated by heat, cold, noise, or other ambient conditions. Outside of building science, it is also plain common sense that a sense of “home” is related to a sense of control and autonomy.

A prerequisite to control is understanding. The more able a resident is to intuitively understand or easily figure what something in the apartment is for and how to operate, the more likely they are to have a feeling of ease. Conversely, at worst, systems that aren't easy to understand can create stress, especially for people that have had challenging experiences related to privacy or institutional trust.

“It’s hot in the back and cold in the front of the office. The heat pumps are on all the time.”

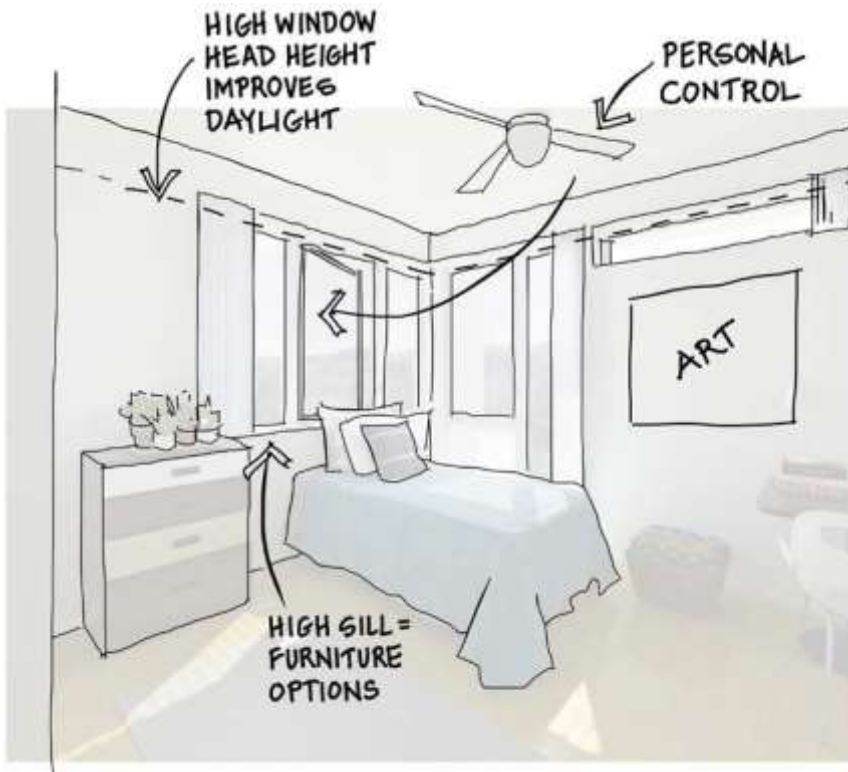
“I don’t understand the thermostat.”

“I keep [the fan] turned off because I don’t know where the air comes from or what it costs.”

“My bath fan won’t stop running—I can’t sleep.”

“We can’t open our windows enough.”



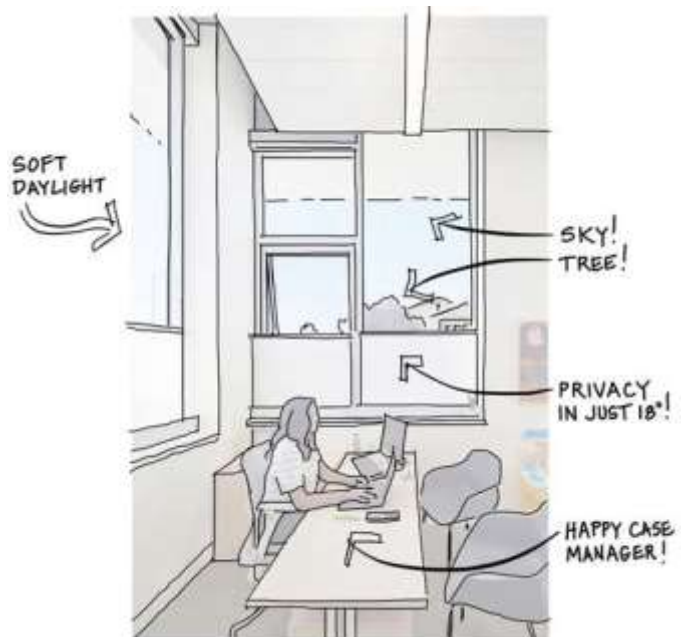


Flexible Furnishings

To allow for autonomy and variety, a bedroom plan should always allow for more than one furniture arrangement. Appliances and systems like packaged heat pumps that take up valuable floor area at exterior walls and affect window placement and sill height should all be carefully considered to maintain this flexibility.

Bottom-Up Blinds

Residents interviewed expressed that they loved daylight and wanted more control of light and privacy. If the window design doesn't thoughtfully balance various functions—views, transparency, fresh air, and privacy—then privacy frequently takes precedence. With windows obscured, a glazed wall is no more than a very expensive opaque partition. The added cost of installing bottom-up shades at offices, amenity rooms, and apartments close to shared space is worth it in the long run. This strategy allows for people to control their privacy at the active level while preserving openness at the top.



Ceiling Fans

A major theme from resident interviews is a desire for “air circulation,” even in buildings with adequate air supply. In addition to making the body feel cooler and saving energy by limiting the need for air conditioning, the air movement generated by ceiling fans enhances a person’s feeling about the quality of the air and about environmental control generally.

Legible Thermostats

Over and over, post-occupancy interviews reveal that residents struggle to understand the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems in their apartment, especially the thermostat. Instead of providing endless functionality, it’s better to keep it simple and easy to use. Limit thermostat controls to on-off and up-down control of temperature. Also, consider pre-programming thermostats to improve efficiency (such as adding a nighttime set-back)—but be sure to clearly explain the programming to residents.

Mystery Fans and Vents

Most people don’t know what engineers know about the science behind air flow in buildings. It’s no surprise it’s so mystifying: Sometimes air is used to move heat, sometimes it exhausts pollution, and other times the movement is a supply of fresh air. Also, this activity all happens out of sight, behind drywall. When the purpose of a fan or vent in an apartment is not obvious, people turn systems off or cover or block the vent. Additionally, they may resort to their own—less healthy—strategies, like using an air purifier or a space heater—or simply live with a mild sense of discomfort or unease. Be mindful of this issue, which can be addressed with a range of solutions, from prioritizing visible and simple systems to providing basic education or signage.

Practical Considerations

A reliable way to follow through on IEQ goals is to pursue a green building certification, like LEED or Enterprise Green Communities. These rating systems offer performance standards for environmental conditions and—more importantly—are quite handy for holding the design team and all contractors accountable to the design intent.



Vera Cruz Village, Richgrove, CA

Appliances and “Doohickeys”

It is not uncommon to walk into an apartment and see wall-mounted boxes or switches without clear function or placed in illogical locations. Other avoidable annoyances: Appliance controls that are hard to figure out (such as concealed dishwasher buttons); features that are disabled (such as a refrigerator that can’t open wide enough to remove the crisper drawer). Set aside time for a functionality review during design and a “box walk”—an on-site systematic inspection of installed appliances and systems—in a first-in-place unit during construction to head off these avoidable hindrances.

Practical Considerations

Sometimes the biggest impact HVAC has on residents’ control is through their energy bills. Be aware of any decisions that may reduce upfront cost but pass on a higher life-cycle cost to residents.

Resident Support Packages

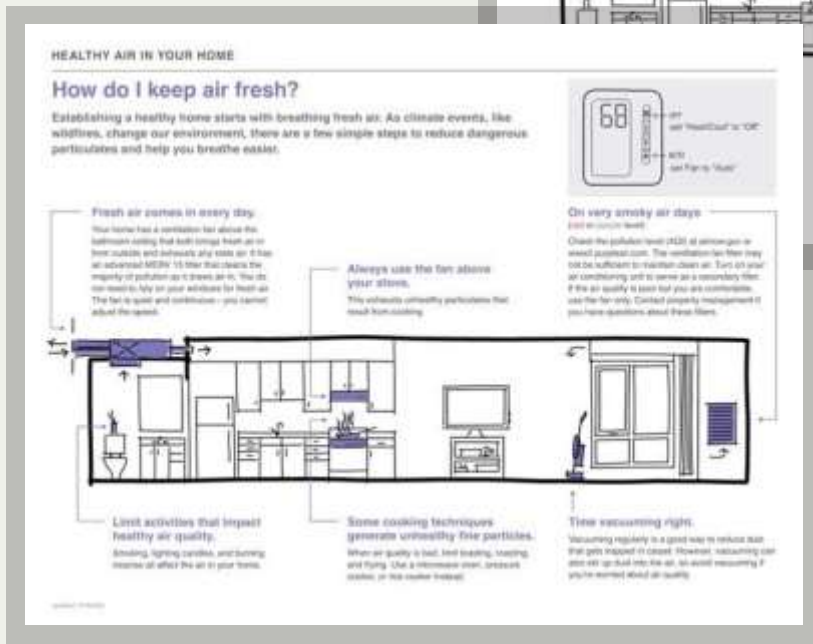
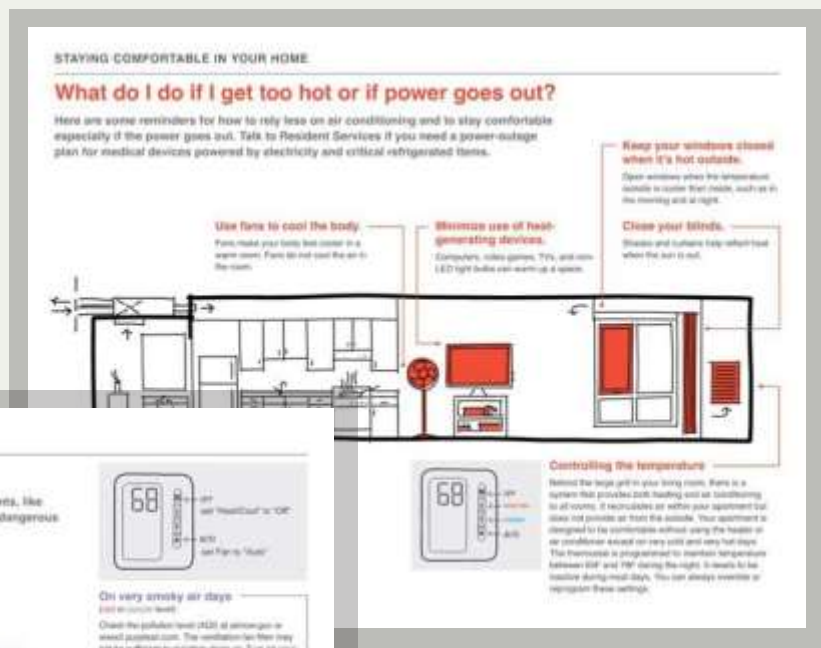
Coliseum Place, Oakland, CA

ARCHITECT
David Baker Architects

DEVELOPER
Resources for Community Development

One-page “explainers” inform residents about how to use features in their apartment to increase convenience, health, resilience, and comfort.

When they sign the lease and move in, new residents generally learn about their apartment through an orientation with property management, in which they are typically shown appliance manuals and informed of a series of housekeeping policies. It is better—if rare—for residents to be given information about their apartment through the lens of what benefits their personal sense of control, comfort, and health. When done right, this personalized approach empowers residents to fully inhabit their home and, in particular, helps them to know what to do in the face of disruptions like heat waves and power outages.



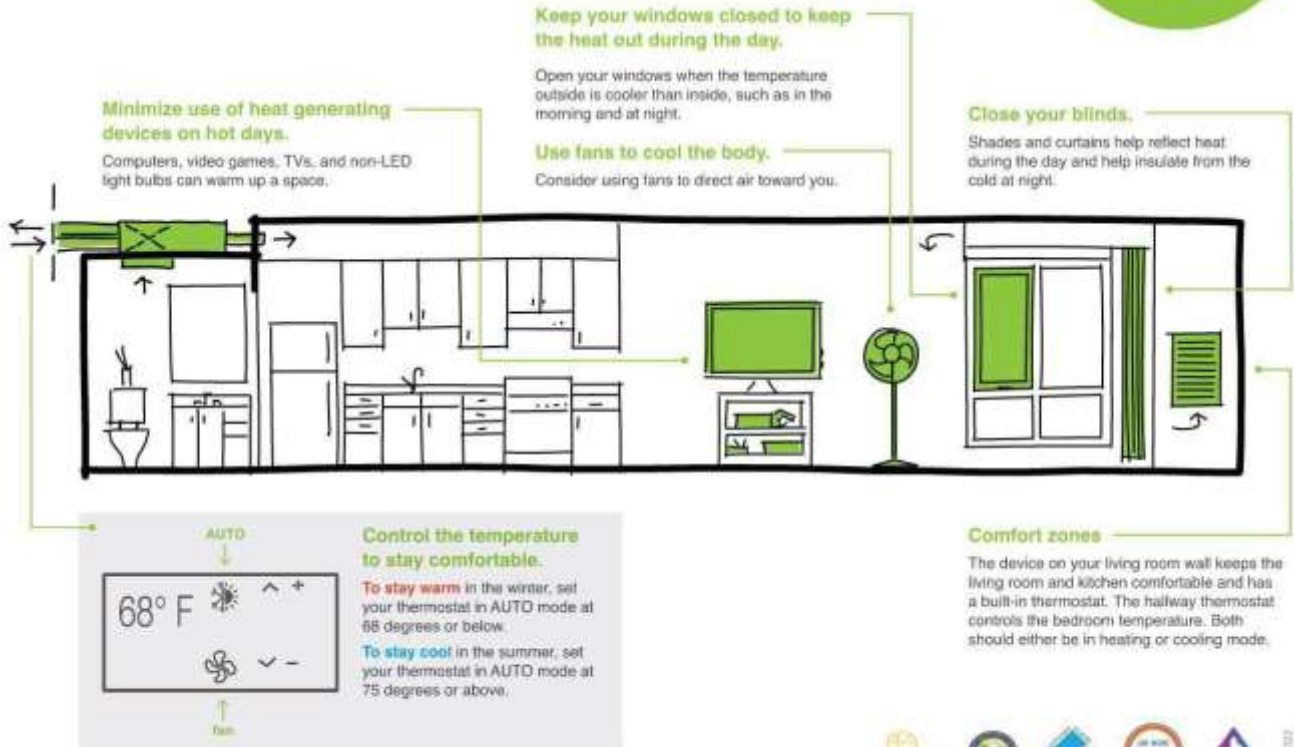
A handbook for the home: *When creating resident information packets, consider all the different conditions that residents may experience. DC-based projects may require seasonal instructions to guide residents as to how to best manage their homes during a cold, damp winter as well as through a humid summer.*

What should I do if I get too hot or too cold?

Take these steps to reduce energy use and to stay more comfortable if the power goes out. During an outage, call 2-1-1 for assistance finding local resources.

Why don't I receive a gas bill anymore?

Your new electric heating system doesn't use gas. It is much more efficient than your old gas heater.



Resident Support Packages are best when designed simply, graphically, and in multiple languages. They can be created to convey all of the following topics, and more.

- Energy and Comfort
- Severe Weather Events/Resilience
- Waste Management
- Healthy Cleaning and Home Care
- Other Home Features



Right to Repair, Replace, and Maintain

Take some time to determine which apartment features it is possible for residents to maintain or handle on their own, versus requiring maintenance staff. While the list might be short, it is good to allow for these opportunities where possible. When people have freedom to make choices or take action—such as replacing their own light bulbs or adjusting their window treatments—they experience a more positive feeling of home and belonging.

In turn, any feature in the units that creates confusion for residents eventually becomes a burden for maintenance staff—from fire-sprinkler heads to door fobs to air filters. One technician interviewed noted: **“The number one call we receive in family buildings is for kids getting locked out of their apartments after school.”** Maintenance staff are a building’s first responders, so simplifying and improving resident understanding and control translates to smoother operations and stronger relationships.

Likewise, any systems serviced by staff should always be straightforward enough to be maintained or replaced without relying on third parties or proprietary parts.



Wrap-Up



Together, DCHA and DHCD encourage teams to engage with the Affordable Family Housing Design Guidelines with a curious stance and an open mind, and to adapt their principles and potential as needed for each project.

The case studies and research reports that informed these Guidelines can be found in the *Family-Friendly Affordable Housing Guidelines Companion*, a separate document provided by DCHA and DHCD.



Feedback on the Guidelines is welcomed and will inform future iterations to ensure that this document remains useful and relevant.

To access the Companion document or to provide feedback on these Guidelines, contact EngageDCHA@dchousing.org or dhcd@dc.gov.

No two housing projects are the same, and developers and designers are increasingly challenged by the complex affordable housing funding environment; rigorous federal, state, and local requirements; and the nuances of designing and operating mixed-income, intergenerational communities.

Taking a systematic approach to considering family needs through the lenses of access to necessities, community amenities, overflow living, residential units, and healthy environments will go a long way toward providing effective housing tuned for families.

By centering resident and staff needs in the design and decision-making process, teams can ensure the creation of future- and family-forward housing amidst competing priorities.

These guidelines are just that—guidance. DCHA and DHCD staff anticipate using these tools in dialogue with residents, property staff, and developers to shape and evaluate the potential and success of affordable housing for families.

The hope is that they serve as inspiration and a shared point of focus, help teams outline and maintain priorities, and spark thoughtful conversation about making decisions with family needs in mind.

Affordable Family Housing Design Checklist

While every project is different and brings its own unique and specific challenges, this broad checklist can help a design and development team ensure that all of the key points in these Guidelines—identified and vetted as effective for supporting families—have been given thorough consideration. Consider reviewing it as a team at various stages throughout the process.

1

Guideline 1: Access to Necessities

- Get to know the site and the neighbors
- Analyze existing neighborhood amenities
- Look for ways to partner with existing community services
- Identify opportunities for new and repaired site connections

2

Guideline 2: Community Amenities

- Work with residents and staff to determine the amenities for the project
- Explore security needs, sightlines, and adjacencies for ground-floor spaces
- Make an operation plan for residents and staff to keep amenities open

3

Guideline 3: Overflow Living

- Identify spaces to support residents' informal gatherings and milestone celebrations
- Develop a plan for building-wide resident and staff storage
- Identify strategies to allow residents to work and learn from home

4

Guideline 4: Residential Units

- Address variety in unit types
- Check the flexibility of unit plans to accommodate furniture layouts
- Identify Inclusive Design Strategies
- Develop a storage plan

5

Guideline 5: Environmental Quality

- Define opportunities to connect to nature
 - Develop an acoustic plan
 - Promote healthy, fresh air
 - Foster resident understanding and control of systems
-

Credits

Images

For more information about images, contact info@dbarchitect.com.

Diagrams

David Baker Architects
Handel Architects

Jonathan Rose Companies
Site Design Group, Ltd

Illustrations

Human figures by Stephanie Cheung/small.family

Photographs

Photographs have been generously provided by

880 Cities	Jonathan Rose Companies
Abacus Architects + Planners	The Kelsey
AIA DC	Karen Kubey
Bernheimer Architecture	LBBA Architects
Capital Bikeshare	Lester Ali Photography
The Community Builders	Living Future
Sarah Crowley	Love & Carrots
Bruce Damonte	Maxwell MacKenzie
Dattner Architects	Mary Parker Photography
David Baker Architects	Maxwell MacKenzie
District of Columbia	Perkins Eastman
Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)	Richard Powers Photography
District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA)	Scott Shigley for Site Design Group, Ltd.
Enterprise Green Communities	Shopworks Architecture
R. Denise Everson, E3 Connections	Stumptown Media
Frank Schlesinger Associates	David Sundberg
FXCollaborative	Torti Gallas + Partners
Green Science Policy Institute	True Ground Housing Partnership
Grimshaw Architects	Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
Habitable	Metro Lift Program
Handel Architects	
Hickock Cole	
Marlene Hildebrandt	



