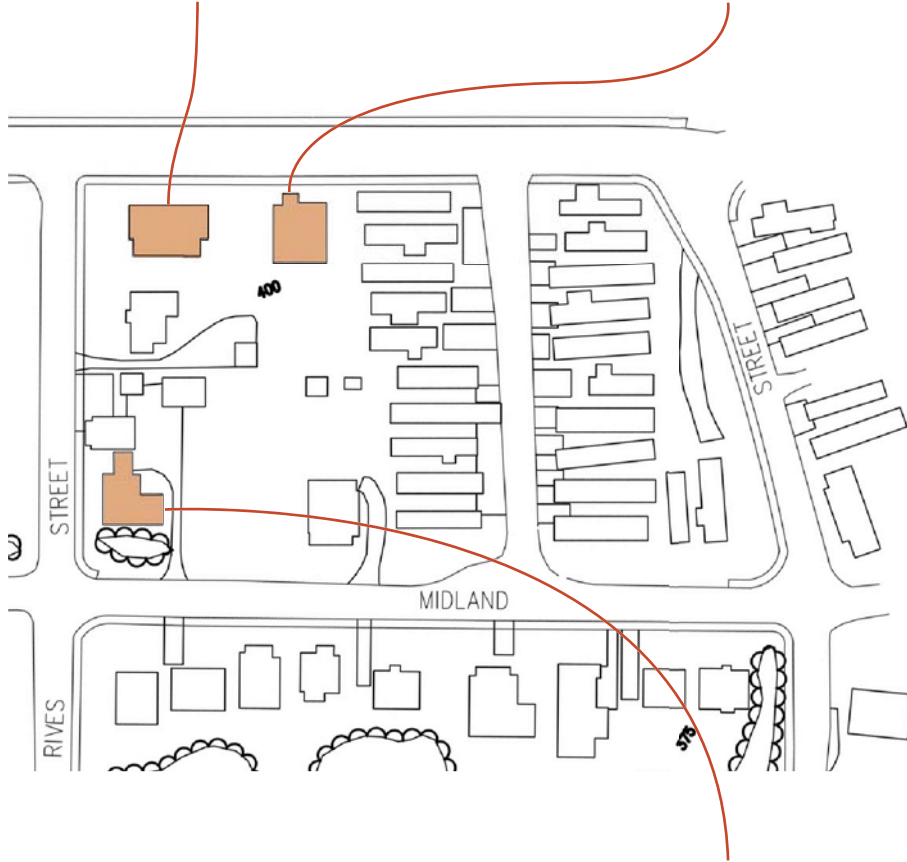


Urban Habitats Competition

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Some existing residential buildings will remain on site

Photos courtesy CCDC

A. Abstract

This project involves the redevelopment of a trailer park purchased by Habitat for Humanity. Entitled “Urban Transitions,” our scheme employs interstitial space to blur the line between public and private property.

The site, home to Sunrise Trailer Court, is in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Charlottesville, Virginia. Four major thoroughfares define the existing block. Carlton Avenue and Nassau Street, to the north and east, are used by local truck traffic. Midland and Rives Streets, to the south and west, primarily serve local residents. An industrial building lies to the north, a trailer park is to the east and single-family residential homes are to the south and west. The heavily traveled streets are addressed by mixed-use buildings with apartments above commercial units, while single-family rowhouses face quieter residential conditions. A private street bisects the block, with smaller laneways providing further access to buildings within the site.

Extroverted by design, buildings open up to adjacent conditions, becoming a significant part of the public realm. Shared zones — laneways, streets, and green areas — are continuous with one another, delineated by objects rather than obstructions. They become places in which to linger rather than through which to simply traverse.

At the neighbourhood’s centre is a public square. Commercial establishments surrounding it spill into the space, further breaking down the division between public and private. It is envisioned as the economic and social hub for this community and its environs.



View north from site to warehouse and cement factory across Carlton Avenue



South, single family detached homes across Midland Street



East, trailer park across Nassau Street



West, detached homes across Rives Street



A tree pinches this oddly-shaped outdoor space ²



Public and private coexist happily in Poundbury ²

B. Precedents

Poundbury, in the southwest of England, is a precedent for its scale, density, and composition. A modern extension to the existing town of Dorchester, it was conceived as a model for future urban development in Britain.¹ Buildings are generally of uniform size with subtle variations to provide a degree of drama. It is a dense urban construction surrounded by broad expanses of fields. Urban Transitions is similarly conceived as a dense block. A particularly influential aspect of the project is its use of irregular spaces to simultaneously conceal and reveal certain conditions. This strategy not only provides interesting sightlines, but also helps control pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow, as well as define public and private zones. This was the inspiration for “soft edges” in Urban Transitions — that is, the use of subtle grade changes and landscape elements rather than markers or barriers to define space.

As states the website of the Prince of Wales, Poundbury’s benefactor:

Much of the housing is situated in mews, lanes, squares and courtyards - yet relates contextually and creates a series of interesting spaces. Roads tend to be irregular both in width and angle, helping to control the speed of vehicles without recourse to humps or traffic signs.¹

In Vancouver’s Gastown, chains provide separation between the street and sidewalk, both of which are paved with the same burgundy brick. This provides a sense of continuity which is absent from typical new developments.

¹ Clarence House 2005

² Wired New York Forum 8 July 2003



Sidewalk in Gastown, 2005

In the development of Seaside, Florida, urban designers Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk created diagrams showing comfortable relationships between buildings and adjacent streets. Specific width-to-height ratios were employed to guide development. Categories of interstitial space were noted and incorporated into Urban Transitions.

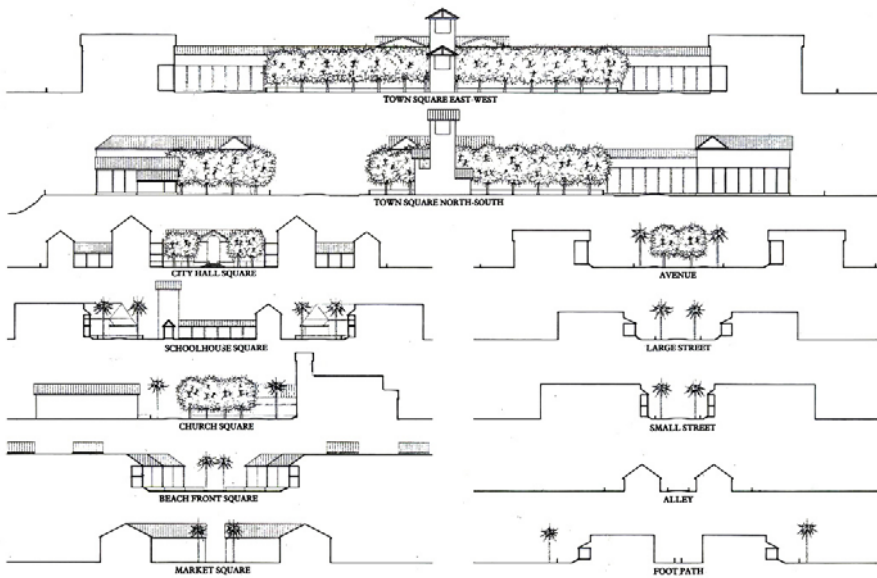
Kwatee House, a previous narrow house project by Andrachuk and Williamson, provided the basis for the planning and siting of new rowhouses. Ideas about circulation, organization within the house, and materiality were borrowed from two new houses at 27th and Ontario Streets, Vancouver, both by BattersbyHowat.

C. Planning

Guided primarily by the desire to provide connections through the community, the existing patterns of organization are respected and used in the new scheme.

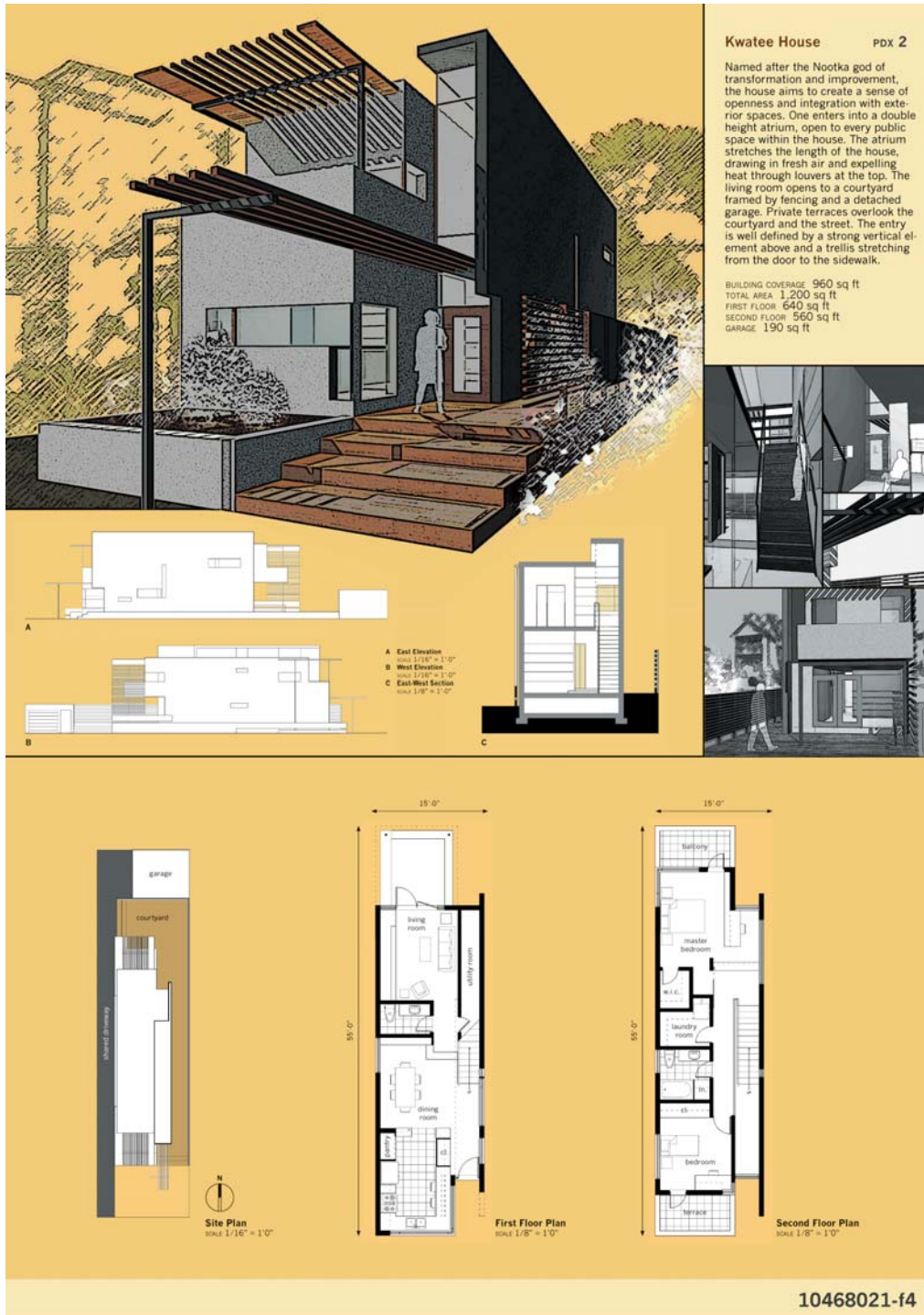
Nodes, or enlarged interstitial spaces, link means of movement. The largest is the “central parkette,” surrounded by mixed use (commercial below, residential above) and single family homes. The other, the main square, is bisected by a road and ringed by mixed use buildings.

The site is mostly pedestrian-oriented, as it was before. However, a main road cuts east-west through the site to provide a connection to an existing



Seaside diagrams by Duany and Plater-Zyberk ³

³ Mohney 36

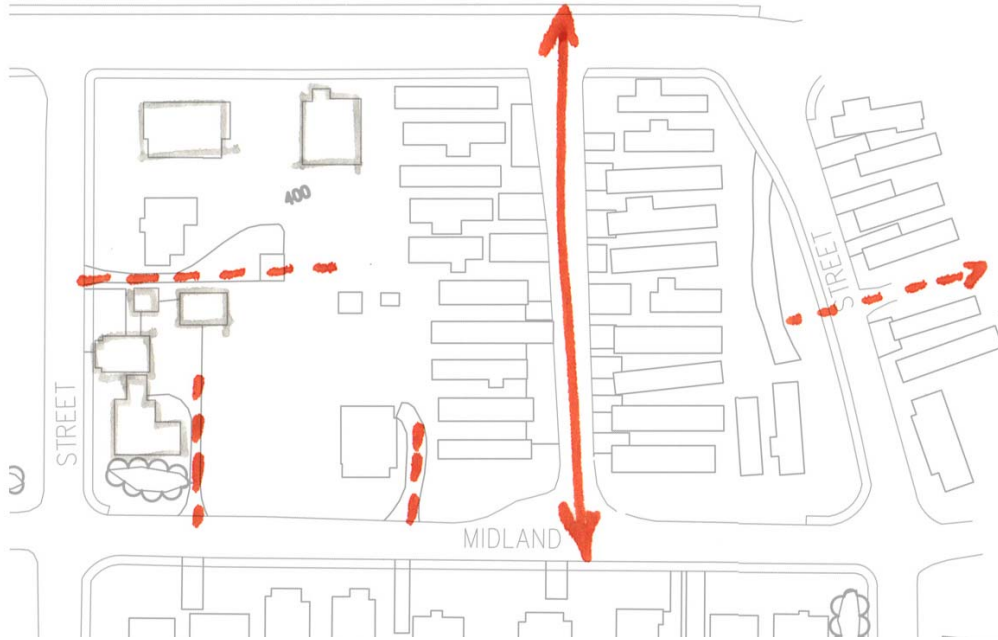


Seaside, Florida
(Doshi 10 April 2001)



Houses by BattersbyHowat, Vancouver, 2005

Kwatee House, 2004



Major north-south connection through site with potential pathways dashed

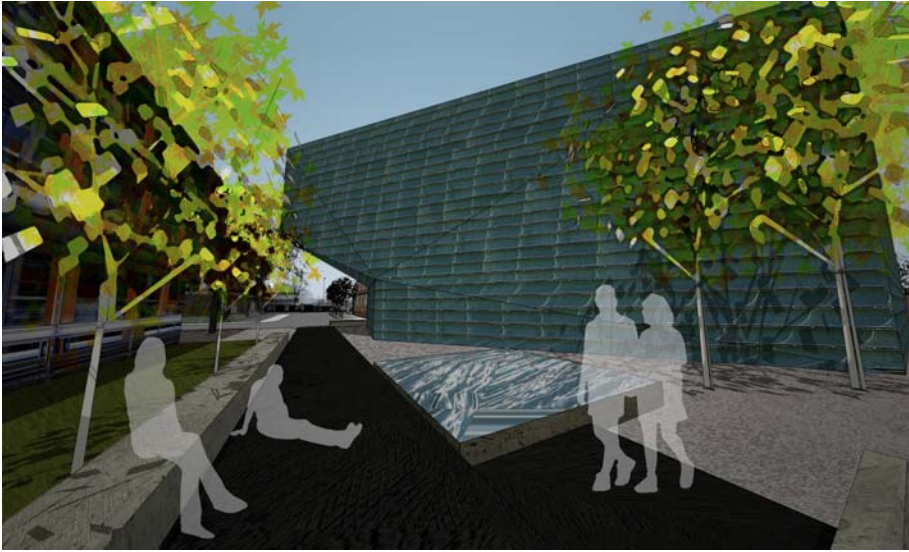


This relationship between trailers provides a basis for the laneway and rowhouse concept



Single-family residential
 Mixed use
 Green space
 Water
 Streets, laneways, pathways, and squares

Site Plan
 NTS



i. Central parkette looking north



ii. "Tree matrix" in main square looking south

road in the adjacent trailer park. Laneways allow for car access to individual homes, though the use of cars is discouraged. The laneways are imagined as informal meeting places for the occupants, places for children to play, etc. It is not meant to be a forced experience — evolution is natural in a neighbourhood and a variety of spaces are provided to accommodate existing and future uses. Single family homes have backyards with gates which completely open up the space to the laneways behind, allowing for a strong connection to the community. Private balconies also overlook the backyard and laneway spaces from each house, providing a place for parents to watch over their children. At the front of each house are a porch and more formal entry. In the mixed use buildings, all residential floors have operable windows in addition to some balconies, allowing people to interact with the events going on in the public spaces below.

D. Scale

Rowhouses at the southern edge of the site relate to existing detached homes across the street. The rowhouses recycle the narrow typology of the mobile homes they replace, contributing to a familiar aesthetic in which the community can continue. The buildings themselves are more transparent than typical homes to encourage a dialogue between the public spaces of the community and the private, individual spaces within it. A group of one-storey rowhouses for elderly residents sits along Nassau Street. Larger buildings create a new urban street wall along Carlton Avenue, where no low-scale residential context exists. Three important existing residential structures have been preserved entirely to provide further linkages to the neighbourhood's history.



iii. Backyards can be used for a variety of outdoor activities



iv. Laneways act as transitional, multi-use spaces between residential units



v. A narrow park between two blocks of rowhouses links the neighbourhood to Midland Street to the south



vi. New east-west street looking east, front of rowhousing at right

E. Environmental Design

Buildings

The orientation of the rowhouses is generally north-south, allowing them to receive abundant light. Open house plans allow for cross-ventilation as well as natural lighting deep within the building. Because the rowhouses are attached, the outside surface area per unit is reduced, resulting in low levels of heat loss and gain. The buildings themselves, as well as several covered walkways, shade major public spaces during the day, providing for a comfortable micro-climate in this muggy southern environment. The position of larger buildings on the northern portion of the site allows light access for all buildings in the neighbourhood. Concrete party walls act as thermal mass for buildings with simple wood structure within.

Landscaping

According to Habitat for Humanity, residents of the trailer park believe the outdoor experience is very important. According to the competition brief, “There used to be a garden on the empty lot on Midland Street. A number of the residents enjoy gardening and would like to have a community garden... They would like a common outdoor area or perhaps a community room.”⁴ These amenities are dispersed throughout the plan, serving single family homes as well as apartments. Additionally, there is room to accommodate a play area for the neighbourhood’s children. Porous groundcover of crushed stone is used for pathways, sidewalks, and streets. This material provides superior drainage, is less expensive and eliminates the barriers

⁴ CCDC 1

between street and sidewalks. There are no major trees on the existing site; new, native species will be planted. Natural grasses will be allowed to grow, with different species being planted in each area depending on predicted foot traffic and sunlight access. Small fish ponds and fountains are located in two small parks for residents and visitors to enjoy.

F. Economic Feasibility

Commercial Activities

Jane Jacobs, discussing primary generators of economic diversity, writes, “No neighborhood or district...no matter how intensely populated for one purpose, can flout the necessity for spreading people through time of day without frustrating its potential for generating diversity.”⁵ These offices, factories, and dwellings which ensure activity throughout the day are all present in the existing neighbourhood, and can be harnessed for its benefit. The economic goal of the new neighbourhood therefore is to attract both residents of the surrounding community and workers from the industrial zone to the north of the site. These two groups should ensure that businesses have a steady base of consumers. Regular use by a variety of people doing different things on different schedules presages success. Bringing commercial activities into the neighbourhood allows outside money to begin to flow into the community. Existing commercial areas are far away and require cars and buses. (The closest produce and livestock markets are a 1/4 mile away.) Creating a commercial node here would ease access problems for residents and employees within a large area. Commercial

⁵ Jacobs 209

activity is intended to give the development some needed diversity and entertainment, while filling the basic needs of the community.

Construction Expenses

Repetition of elements and use of “standardized” materials is of primary interest in single-family homes as they would be built by Habitat crews. This would ease construction and contribute to lower costs for the project.

G. Social Development

Street Life

Relative to surrounding neighbourhoods, the new development is quite dense. The hope is that a concentration of people in the area will replicate and improve the comfortable social situation in the existing trailer park. People will see familiar faces on a daily basis. Social interaction is encouraged in the public spaces by spreading residential units throughout the project. Typical daily requirements — for example, grocery and drug stores, and minor entertainment venues — are located in the mixed use buildings. These are all located within easy walking distance and face the street, bringing pedestrian activity to the neighbourhood.

Safety

Porches on houses and balconies on apartment buildings allow residents to look out and survey the neighbourhood, encouraging interaction and dissuading malefactors from loitering. Residents feel their neighbourhood is safe, due in large part to the constant scrutiny residents have over it.⁶



⁶ CCDC 1-2

The public spaces will be used by residents and visitors alike. Much like a successful business, a park needs patrons visiting on different schedules. Jacobs writes, “Neighborhood parks... need people who are in the immediate vicinity for different purposes from one another, or else the parks will be used only sporadically.”⁷

Public & Private Space

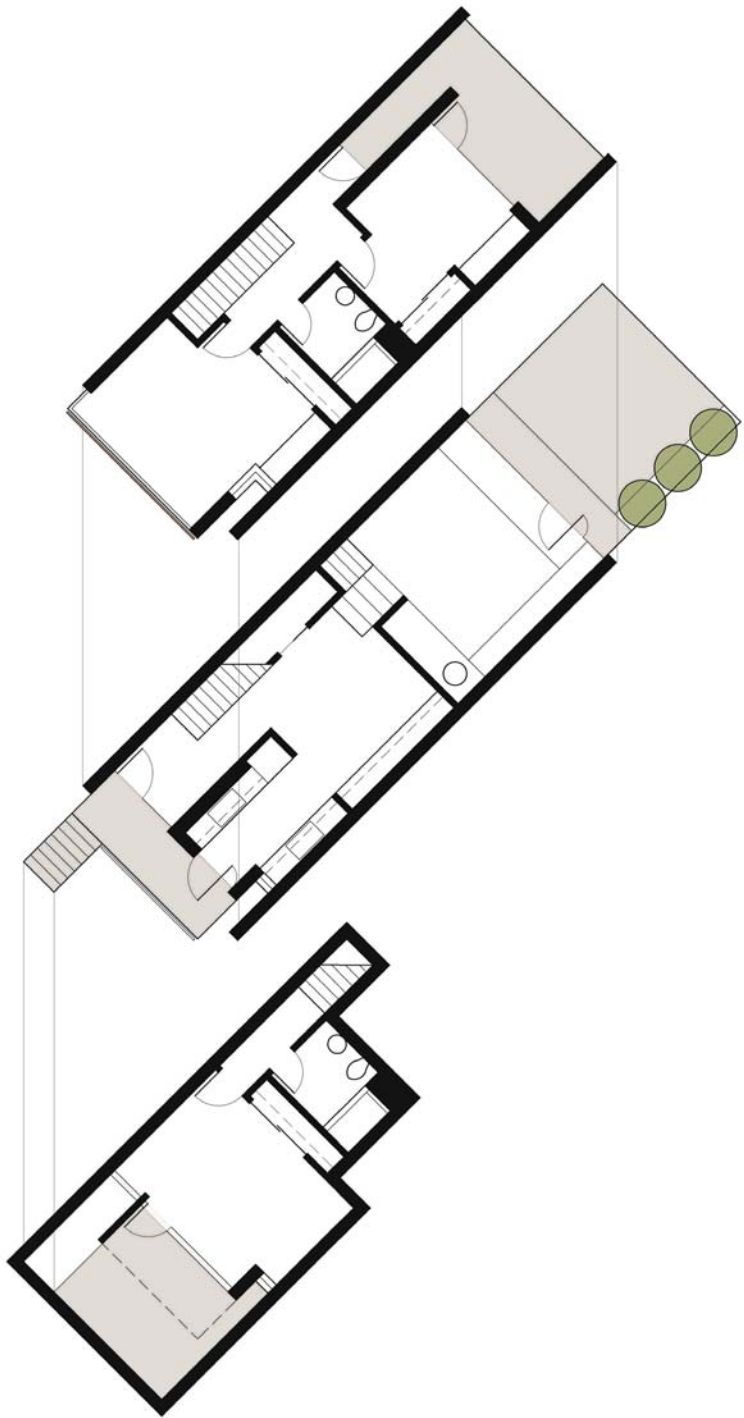
In the existing neighbourhood, the road bisecting the site is for use by residents only. An opposite approach is taken in the redevelopment scheme – the entire block becomes open to the public. There is a diversity of unit types and sizes interspersed throughout the neighbourhood. This does not allow for any separation of the community along economic or social lines.

There is a “hierarchy of community” operating here. On account of the design, residents will associate not only with the block as a whole, but also with a certain parts of the site – a laneway, a block of houses, a single house; or a square, a mixed use building, a floor, an apartment. Residents associate with progressively smaller “zones” which connect their own place of residence with surrounding buildings and the entire neighbourhood.

H. Building Types

Statistics and images of individual buildings follow.

⁷ Jacobs 198



Rowhouses

Height: 2.5 storeys

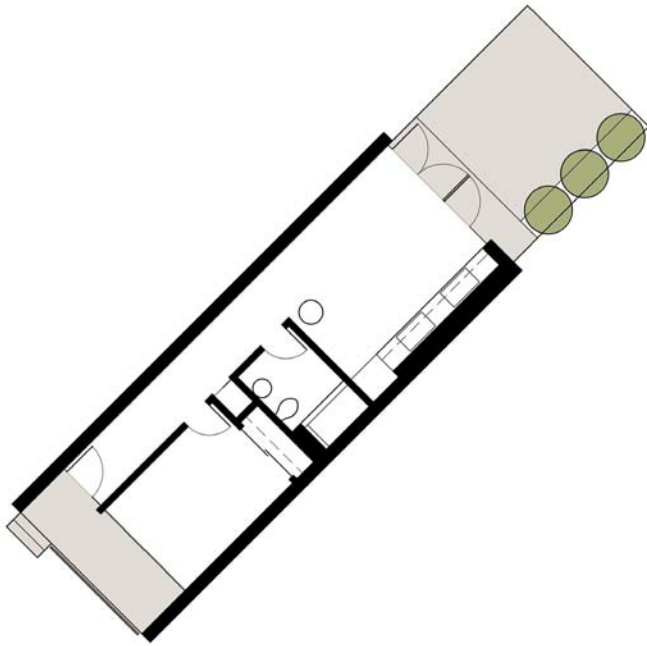
Footprint: 60 m²

Area: 120 m²

Units: 21 (three bedrooms each)



Each three bedroom house features a front porch, living and dining rooms, a rear balcony and backyard. The backyard provides space for a car if the owner's preference is to hide it away rather than leave it in the laneway. Fly-ash concrete party walls provide fire separation and thermal mass with low embodied energy. Light wood framing comprises the interior structure. White gypsum wallboard completes the interior along with double-glazed aluminum frame windows.



Accessible Housing

Height: 1 storey

Footprint: 60 m²

Area: 60 m²

Units: 8 (one bedroom each)



This is a half-size, one storey version of the rowhouse with a large single bedroom, front porch, and living/dining room opening to a backyard for residents who need a fully accessible home.

Building A

Height: 4 storeys

Footprint: 321 m²

Area: 1284 m²

Units: 6 (three bedrooms each)

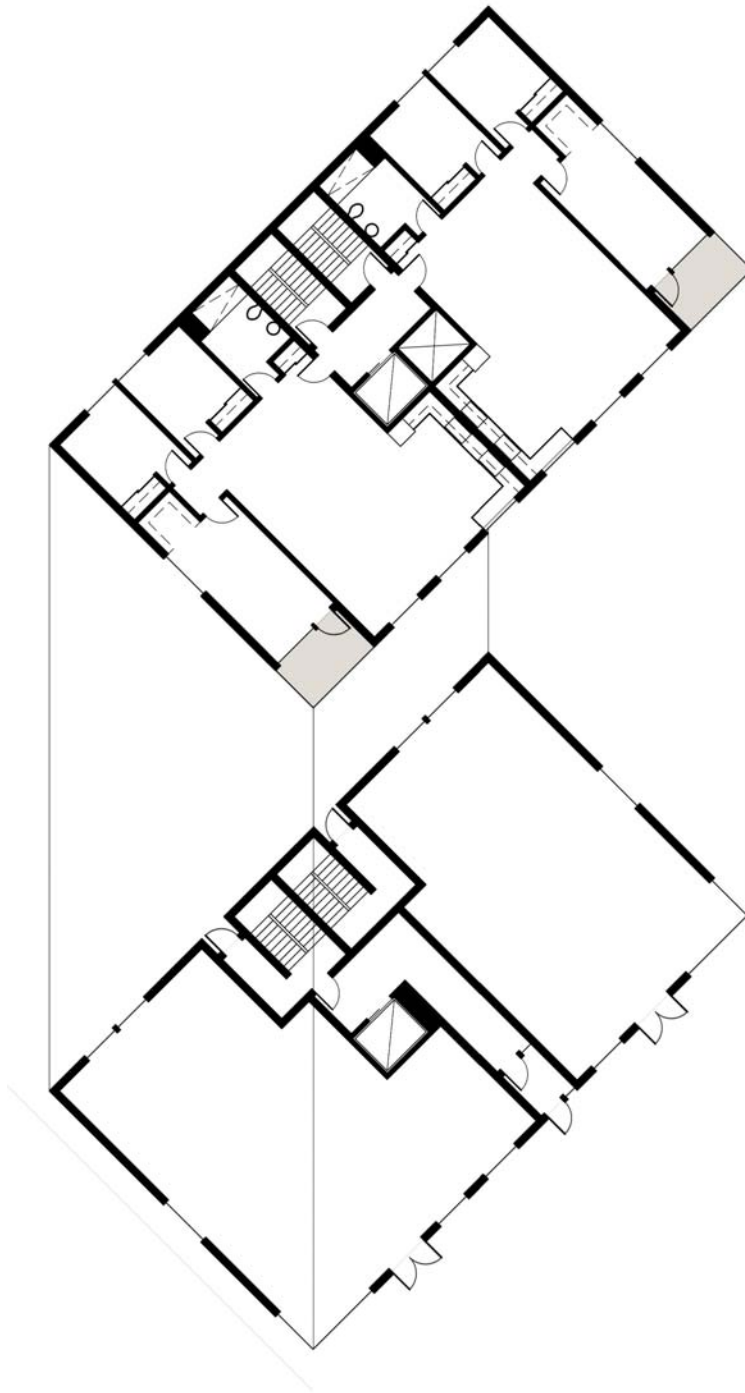
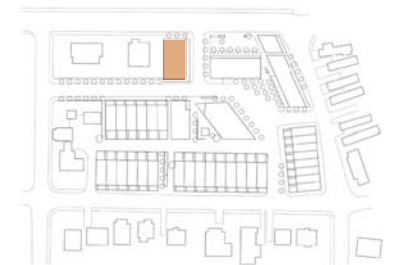


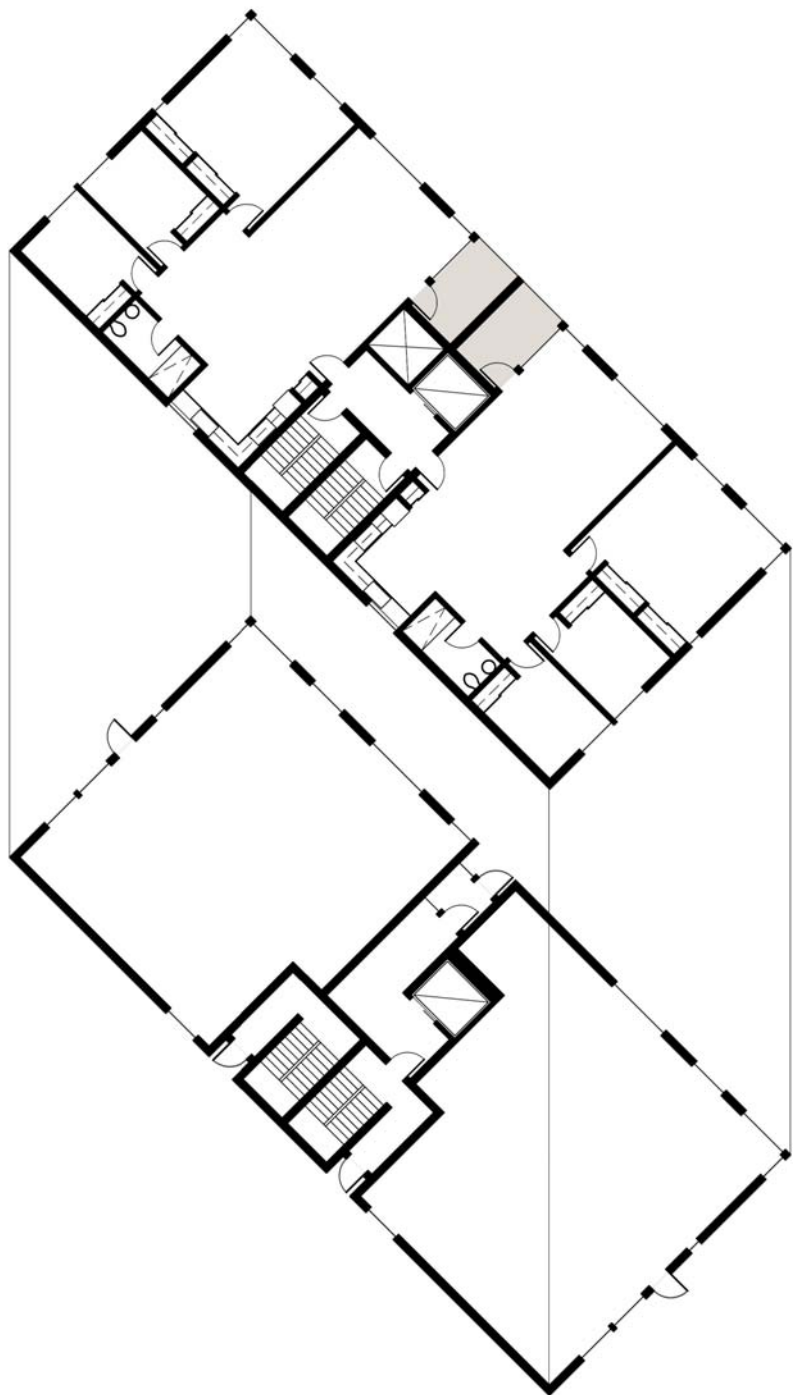
Commercial:

Building A has two commercial units. Both face the small street connecting the central street with Carlton Avenue. Located in the midst of the condominium units and across the street from a large factory, these units are well situated for businesses serving both groups. A pizzeria, hairdresser, or coffee shop would work well here.

Residential:

The three bedroom units in this building are compact, making them more affordable. However, they are large enough to house the average family. This is the only non-free market condominium — it is available only to approved low-income earners.





Building B

Height: 4 storeys

Footprint: 333 m²

Area: 1332 m²

Units: 6 (three bedrooms each)



Commercial:

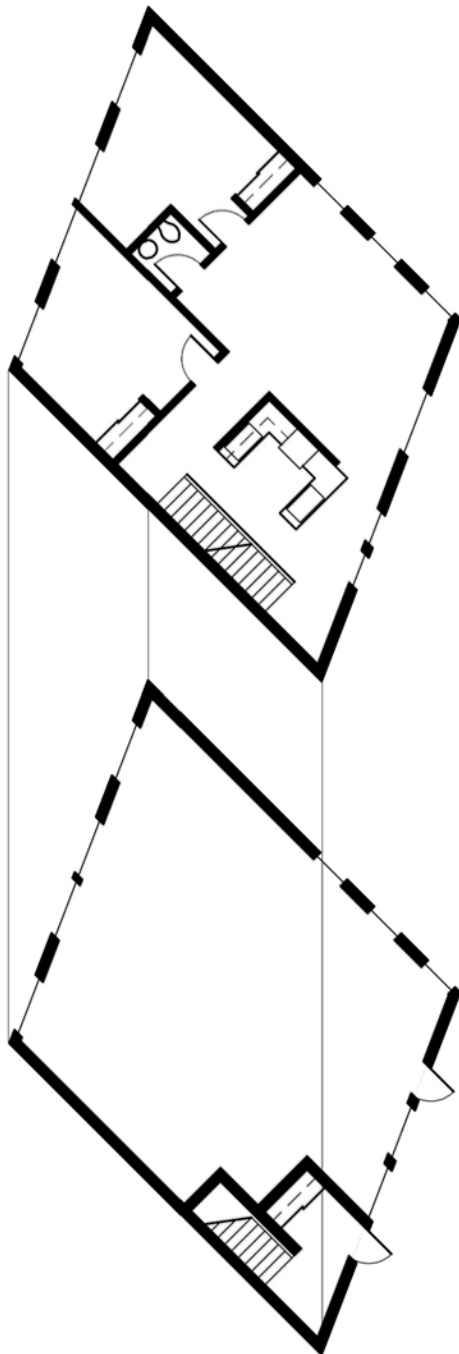
There are two commercial units in building B, facing the Carlton Avenue park and main square. As they are oriented towards busy Carlton, these units are more suitable for businesses not catering exclusively to the local community. They are a suitable size for any shop.

Residential:

The three bedroom units in this building are compact, making them more affordable. They are comparable to the units in building A, though in a more prominent position.

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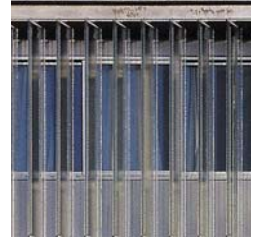
Building C

Height: 3 storeys

Footprint: 108 m²

Area: 324 m²

Units: 1 (three bedrooms each)



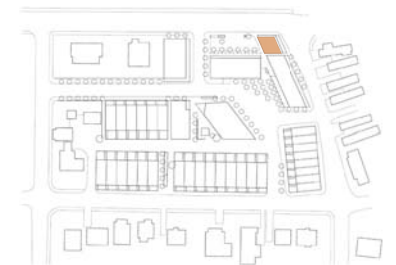
Commercial:

Building C has one commercial unit on its ground floor. At the corner of Nassau and Carlton, it is in a location easily accessible to people outside the community. A convenience store would fit nicely here.

Residential:

There is one unit in building C. A fairly large two-level unit, it is well suited for a family. Being the largest residential unit, and the only one in the building, this is the most expensive and desirable unit.

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Building D

Height: 3 storeys

Footprint: 215 m²

Area: 645 m²

Units: 3 (three bedrooms each)



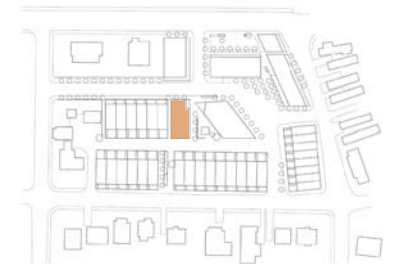
Commercial:

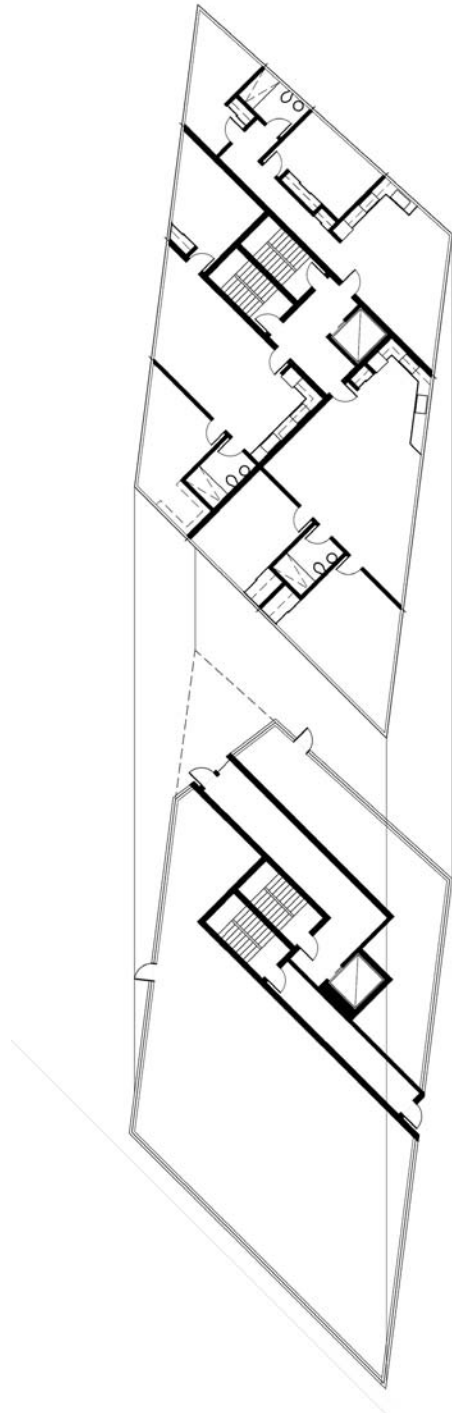
Building D provides three units opening onto a small public space. The commercial units are suitable for small, community-oriented businesses such as a bakery, dry cleaner, café, or video store.

Residential:

The units in building D are two levels each with direct access to the ground floor. They are perfect for families looking for an alternative to traditional houses. Placed at the centre of the community, these units are meant to attract families who wish to participate more fully in the urban experience.

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Building E

Height: 5 storeys

Footprint: 340 m²

Area: 1700 m²

Units: 12 (two bedrooms each)

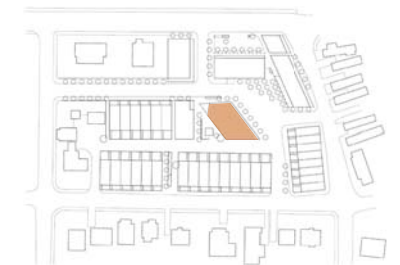


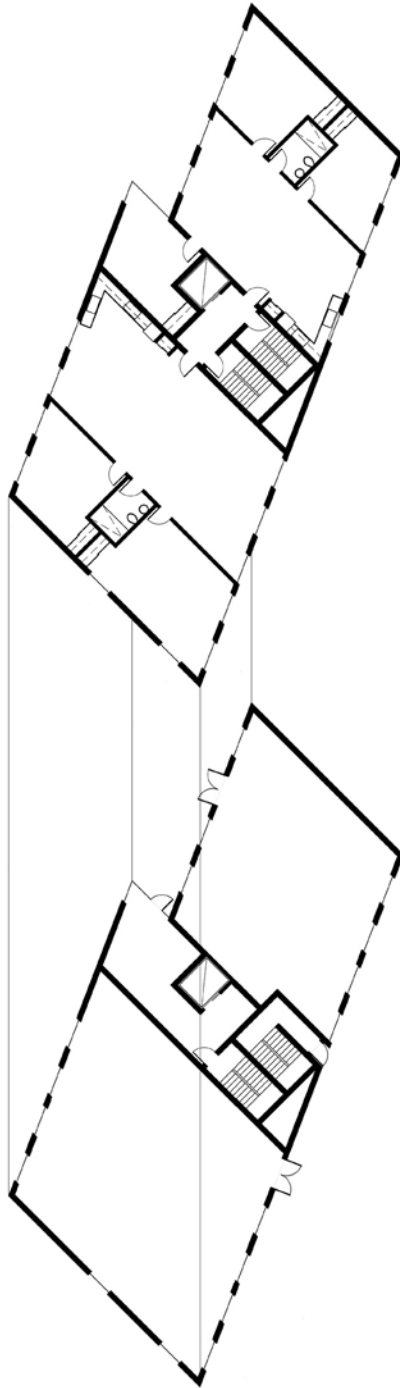
Commercial:

Building E includes two commercial units, one large and one small. The small unit is suitable for a news stand or small specialty store with frontage on the community's main street. The larger space, the largest in the neighbourhood, is perfect for a restaurant with ample space for outdoor seating in the square between buildings D and E.

Residential:

The units in building E are suited for young couples. The two bedroom units are large enough for a couple with a second bedroom for a home office, or younger child. At the centre of the community, this building has an iconic importance overlooking the major spaces in the neighbourhood.





Building F

Height: 4 storeys

Footprint: 374 m²

Area: 1496 m²

Units: 3, 3 (two and three bedrooms each)

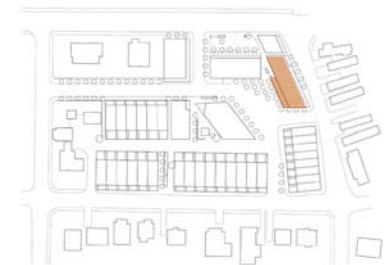


Commercial:

Building F contains two units, both fairly large. Both are accessible from the main square and Nassau Street. The smaller northern unit is well suited for a clothier or other goods shop. The larger southern unit is perfect for a bank, being in a very visible location to both this community and the existing neighbourhood across Nassau Street.

Residential:

Building F has large two and three bedroom units. Facing the main square and Nassau Street, these units have the largest living and dining rooms, making them attractive to families or couples who enjoy an active social life. These are some of the most expensive units.



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Photos by James Andrachuk except where noted.