

What is a Pocket Neighborhood?

Pocket Neighborhoods are clustered groups of neighboring homes gathered around an open space — such as a garden courtyard, joined backyards, pedestrian street or a reclaimed alley.

These are settings where nearby neighbors can easily know one another, where parents feel at ease with children venturing beyond the front gate, where those with far-flung families find friendship, and where an elder will feel safe and cared for.

The design of pocket neighborhoods will vary from place to place, but there are a few key design essentials that make them work well . . .



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Scale of Sociability

Humans are social creatures.



*Conversation is spontaneous in small groups.
Pocket Neighborhoods are designed around this
fact of our human nature.*

We like to gather in small groups.
We love to chat, tell stories,
reminisce, argue, laugh.

In small groups, conversation is
spontaneous. It's what we do.
This is the Scale of Sociability.

In a large group, say 40 or 100,
anything resembling communi-
cation must be organized. In small
groups, it's effortless.



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Shared Commons

Why is shared outdoor space so important in a pocket neighborhood?

During the daily flow of life through this space, nearby neighbors offer 'nodding hellos' or stop for a chat along the garden walk. These casual conversations can eventually grow into caring relationships and a meaningful sense of community — all fostered by the simple fact of shared space.

The commons has clearly defined boundaries, beginning at the entrance from the street and extending to the gates of the private yards. This creates a clear sense of territory by anyone who enters. A stranger walking into the commons is likely to be addressed with a friendly, "can I help you?" At the same time, a child has a safe zone to play in or have time with a shirt-tail auntie.



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Common Buildings & Gardens

An advantage of living in a pocket neighborhood is having shared buildings and gardens.

The least expensive amenity is a common tool shed. One lawn mower can easily be shared by a few neighbors! Along with a few rakes, shovels and pruners.

An outdoor barbeque or fireplace is another. At the end of the day when the grill is fired up, it's likely to attract an impromptu get together.

A multi-purpose building can host potlucks, meetings, exercise groups and movie nights.

Pocket neighborhoods of any size will enjoy the benefits of a community vegetable garden.

Beyond being amenities, these common facilities foster relationships among neighbors and strengthen their sense of community.



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Room-Sized Porch

A room-sized front porch is a key element in fostering neighborly connections. Its magic comes from the way it is both private and public, belonging to the household while being open to passersby.

Making a good porch is both an art and a science.

Get the location right. Make it part of the primary entrance, connected to the front yard and in view of the street or public walkway.

Make it a living space. While a porch gives charm to a house, it should not be 'faux' porch applied just for looks, or a key-fumbling porch just to get out of the rain. Make it a useable outdoor room, a place to gather for supper, linger with friends, or settle in with a book.

Define the edge. Whether required or not for safety, don't leave out the railing. It defines a critical social boundary. Don't make it too high, though, or it will feel like a cage. 27 to 30 inches is just right for 'perching' and for placing a cup of coffee. And who doesn't like a flowerbox?



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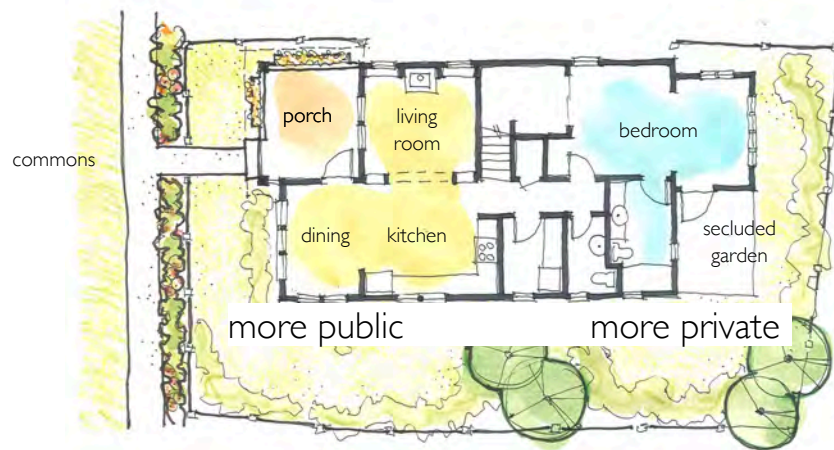
Layers of Personal Space

Community is wonderful, but too much community can be suffocating. On the other hand, with too much privacy, a person can feel cut off. *Layers of Personal Space* helps achieve a balance between privacy and community.

In this photo there are five layers: in from the sidewalk is a border of shrubs and flowers; then a low fence to demarcate the private yard; a covered porch with a low railing and flowerboxes; and then the front door.



These public to private gradients continue inside the house: active living spaces are toward the front and more private personal spaces are toward the back and upstairs. A private garden can be in the sideyard or secluded in back.



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Nested Houses

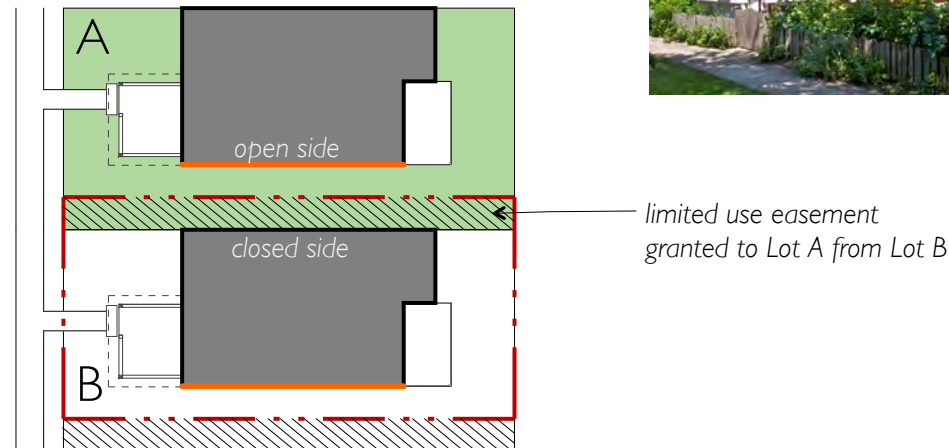
Having a next-door house or apartment peering into your own can be uncomfortable and claustrophobic.

Nested Houses have open and closed sides that 'nest' together: the open side has large windows facing its side yard, while the closed side has high windows and skylights to bring in ample light while preserving privacy.



A five-foot sideyard is useless except to store ladders and rusty bicycles. Make use of a full sideyard extending to the face of the neighboring building through *limited use easements*.

Building code-wise, the setback of the building to the property line is greater than the threshold that triggers fire separation requirements.



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Corraling the Car

In America, nearly everyone has a car. But cars don't need to dominate our pedestrian spaces.

Locate parking to be a good neighbor. Don't let garage doors greet your guests. Shield parked cars from the street and the commons.

When planning a development from scratch, place garages and parking areas off of a lane to the rear. Including mailboxes, gardens and community buildings will make the lane lively.

Consider locating parking remotely so that residents and guests walk from their car door to the front door through the shared commons — a daily activity that fosters interaction. While this may meet resistance, don't let go too quickly. This layout allows more flexible use of the site, limits the dominance of garages and driveways, decreases the amount of hard surface and allows more light into a home.



Eyes on Shared Space

The first line of defense for personal and community security is a strong network of neighbors who know and care for one another.

When the active spaces of houses look onto shared common spaces, including access lanes, a stranger is noticed, an elder who may have fallen will find help and children can play with caring eyes looking on. If daily patterns are askew next door or there is an emergency, help is close by.



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