

Referred from the October 5, 2021 Council meeting

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Report to Council From the Office of Councillor Amy Lubik

Date: May 15, 2021
Subject: Developing Social and Mental Health Wellbeing Guidelines for Buildings in Port Moody

Purpose

To propose that the City of Port Moody develop design guidelines for new multi-family developments that support social and mental well-being and would be integrated into or accompany the sustainability checklist.

Recommendations

WHEREAS Council has prioritized “healthy city” considerations for the evolution of Port Moody, and has often cited and shared ideas aimed at supporting social cohesion and mental wellbeing in our community;

AND WHEREAS developers welcome and benefit from getting clarity up front about goals and expectations in this regard before proposals go to Council;

AND WHEREAS Port Moody has established an advisory panel of design experts well suited to help us in proposing and assessing healthy-city guidelines

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct the Advisory Design Panel to strike a working group that, working in collaboration with staff, shall draft for Council consideration a set of proposed guidelines to enhance social cohesion and support general resident wellbeing and mental health in the design of new multi-family buildings, including townhouse developments, smaller multi-family unit buildings, and high-rises, as recommended in the report dated May 15, 2021 from Councillor Amy Lubik regarding Developing Social and Mental Health Wellbeing Guidelines for Buildings in Port Moody.

Background

Port Moody is evolving, as is our understanding of how to create a welcoming and inclusive community and what actions can be taken to encourage built environments that support this goal. Port Moody Council has prioritized the creation of a “Healthy Community” and identified support for social inclusion, sense of community connection, and resident mental health and wellbeing at the core of this priority. In order to achieve these outcomes we have moved the

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levers on inclusion in a variety of ways. We have asked that a healthy community lens be applied to our pending OCP update; we have supported grants that provide support for working with other community groups to promote inclusion; we are becoming an age- and dementia-friendly city; we recognize those who support the community in a number of ways; we encourage and support place-making and community gatherings, wherever safe; and we are in the process of updating our housing policies to ensure that people can continue to reside in their communities no matter their income level. When evaluating new developments, our Council and staff have had many conversations regarding how buildings can impact mental health and social connectivity.

At the same time, our City has not established clear guidelines to help real estate developers understand better what they should be looking to achieve in designing to support better mental and social health in our city

Community mental and social health is significantly affected by our built environment. Factors that positively affect mental health include a safe, clean and welcoming neighbourhood, opportunities to look at and go into greenspaces, and spaces for accessible community gardens.¹ Conversely, studies have shown that *lack* of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure. What's more, research suggests that socially isolated citizens tend to be more vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change, due to weaker support during heat events and flooding.²

Seniors especially face challenges from social isolation.³ These include impacts on physical and mental health (more drinking and smoking, poor eating, more falls, more heart disease and strokes, higher rates of depression and mental health crises), and increased fear of crime and theft, making seniors even less likely to participate in social activities.”

Although there is no consensus on what is the optimal density for neighbourhoods, it is generally accepted that urban sprawl can be detrimental to community connectivity and mental wellness for some community members.⁴ There is a point where density becomes too great and cities too crowded, making people want to withdraw and not interact; and paradoxically, this withdrawal increases feelings of isolation.⁵ Citizens living in very-high-density neighbourhoods where people are mainly housed in high-rises report experiencing social isolation and

¹ BC Centre for Disease Control, 2019. Mental Health & Well-being Considerations for the Built Environment. <http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/mental-health-built-environment.pdf>

² BC Centre for Disease Control, 2019. Is Mitigating Social Isolation a Planning Priority for British Columbia (Canada) Municipalities? http://www.bccdc.ca/Our-ServicesSite/Documents/Social_Isolation_Report_17Sept2019.pdf

³ Government of Canada. Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors. <https://www.canada.ca/en/nationalseniors-council/programs/publications-reports/2014/social-isolation-seniors/page05.html>

⁴ **Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design.** New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Montgomery, Charles, 1968-, **Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design.** New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

⁵ Boyko CT, Cooper R: Clarifying and re-conceptualising density. *Progress in Planning* 2011, 76(1):1-61.

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depressive symptoms⁶ ; although one study contests this idea.⁷ Elders and students living in inner-city high-rise buildings experience social isolation.

The inclusion of vertical structures in developments can but does not inevitably present social health concerns, provided that the built environment has been carefully designed, from the start, to ameliorate them.⁸ For example, buildings with common spaces for interaction (inside and out), as well as welcoming, stimulating and varied layouts, can mitigate social isolation issues to some extent.^{9,10} Ultimately, we need to active promote a better balanced approach to development that ensures our residents have housing and neighbourhoods that support their mental, physical, social, and economic health.

Though Port Moody is our own unique community, , some relevant background and framing on this issue from the town of Esquimalt in their work to develop a similar guide¹¹:

“What can [a municipality] do to promote more social connectedness in multi-family housing?” That is the question may communities are starting to consider, with supporting questions such as:

- Why is social connectedness important to our mental and physical well-being?*
- What makes multi-family homes a desirable housing choice (or not)?*
- How can we increase the attractiveness and livability of multi-family housing to families, especially those with young children?*
- What are the things that the Township can do to support social connectedness?*

We all need social connectedness. As human beings, once our basic needs of housing, food and safety are met, the next most important thing is a sense of social connection. This includes time spent with friends and family, or a smile from a stranger in the street. When we learn to recognize our neighbours, get to know them by name, feel comfortable stopping and chatting, and perhaps even become friends, this is an important part of our happiness as individuals, and this type of interaction (or its absence) can have an impact on our mental and physical health. Positive effects of social connection include:

- We live longer, by perhaps as much as 15 years.¹²*

⁶ Evans GW, Wells NM, Moch A: Housing and mental health: a review of the evidence and a methodological and conceptual critique. *Journal of social issues* 2003, 59(3):475-500.

⁷ Verhaeghe P-P, Coenen A, Van de Putte B: Is living in a high-rise building bad for your self-rated health? *J Urban Health* 2016, 93(5):884-898.

⁸ *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Montgomery, Charles, 1968-, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

⁹ Chile L, Black X, Neill C: Experience and expression of social isolation by inner-city high-rise residents. *Housing, Care and Support* 2014, 17(3):151-166.

¹⁰ Carstens DY: *Site planning and design for the elderly: Issues, guidelines, and alternatives*: John Wiley & Sons; 1993.

¹¹ Township of Esquimalt. *Designing Density Final Report* (2019).

https://www.esquimalt.ca/sites/default/files/docs/business-development/Designing_Density_Report_Final_to_Township_of_Esquimalt_Dec_2019.pdf

¹² Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker, Tyler Harris, David Stephenson. “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review.”

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691614568352>

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- *We are healthier: Our immune system is stronger and we recover faster from disease.*¹³
- *We are happier: We have more friends, lower rates of anxiety and depression, and higher self-esteem.*¹⁴
- *We build community: We have greater empathy towards others, leading us to be more trusting and cooperative with others,¹⁵ and we are more likely to be engaged in community through volunteering.*¹⁶
- *We are more productive at work.*¹⁷
- *We are more resilient: Social support helps to buffer the effects of an adverse event or stressful life circumstance.*¹⁸

We eat and sleep better: Healthy behaviours like physical activity and eating fruits and vegetables are more likely to be reported by those with greater social connectedness.¹⁹

The purpose of this report is to request council support tasking the Advisory Design Panel to develop mental/ social wellbeing guidelines for multi-family housing developments. Around the council table, we have had many conversations, especially regarding townhomes and large developments about the mental and social health aspects of housing developments.²⁰ These conversations often occur at early input or first reading; however, it would be more beneficial to our residents and developers alike to have a common understanding of a) what elements are important to consider in new buildings to support mental and social wellness and b) clear guidance on what we as a community expect. This could be an adjunct guidance document to our sustainability checklist.

Discussion

“Social well-being is an important component of overall health and well-being and the homes we live in can either enhance or impede social connectedness, inclusion, and trust between neighbours.

For example, design features such as shared gardens, common areas (i.e. recreation rooms, rooftop decks, communal kitchen spaces), and on-site local shops and services can enhance

¹³ Emma Seppälä Ph.D. “Connect to Thrive: Social connection improves health, well-being, and longevity.” In Psychology Today, August 26, 2012. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/feelingit/201208/connect-thrive> <https://myhealthmycommu>

¹⁴ Charles Montgomery. A Recipe for Urban Happiness: Nine essential ingredients for happier, healthier cities. <https://medium.com/happy-cities/happiness-framework-ead6430997ca>

¹⁵ Emma Seppälä, op cit. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/feeling-it/201208/connect-thrive>

¹⁶ Plan H. Social Connectedness Guide.

<https://planh.ca/sites/default/files/toolsresources/socialconnectednessactionguidewebinks.pdf>

¹⁷ Charles Montgomery. A Recipe for Urban Happiness: Nine essential ingredient

¹⁸ J. Jetten, C. Haslam, S.A. Haslam, and N.R. Branscombe, “The Social Cure,” Scientific American Mind 20 (2009), 26-33. Quoted in Social Connectedness Action Guide. Plan H. p.2. <https://planh.ca/sites/default/files/tools-resources/socialconnectednessactionguidewebinks.pdf>

¹⁹ My Health, My Community

https://myhealthmycommunity.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/05/MHMC_SocialConnections_web.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.urbandesignmentalhealth.com/journal-3---happy-homes.html>

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social connectedness and social well-being”²¹ This expanded in attachment 1: *Creating Better Shared Spaces in Apartment Complexes and their Local Areas 2021*.

Based on best practices in other jurisdictions, current academic and grey literature, categories of design features for consideration in a Port Moody guidance document could include but not be limited to:

- Common areas within building complexes that are sufficiently attractive, stimulating and welcoming enough to encourage gathering there instead of elsewhere,
- Shared spaces for age-friendly activity (8-80 years),
- Prosocial placement of seating and other furnishing in social spaces
- Spaces designed for all ages for shared game, sports or other daily recreational activities, that include spaces for casual viewing,
- Ratios of private/ semi-private/ shared space
- Green spaces and/or selective green integration into predominantly non-green gathering spaces
- Considerations for healthy corridors
- Entrance and building perimeter designs that support social connection
- Parking considerations vs open space [for townhomes]
- Prioritizing social and green areas around residences ahead of space allocations for driveways and garage entries.
- Human-scale development
- Considerations of natural light, fresh air, and a feeling of openness
- Other elements to be identified.

Any guidelines we develop as a community need to be rooted in evidence. The members of the Advisory Design Panel are experts in their fields with experience in research and report development.

There is a wealth of sociological and design research at hand for reference, when drafting Port Moody’s building guidelines and best practices. These include:

- BC Centre for Disease Control, 2019. Mental Health & Well-being Considerations for the Built Environment.²²
- A Well-being Framework for High-rise Housing (Thesis) ²³

²¹ Township of Esquimalt. Designing Density Final Report (2019).

https://www.esquimalt.ca/sites/default/files/docs/business-development/Designing_Density_Report_Final_to_Township_of_Esquimalt_Dec_2019.pdf

²² <http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/mental-health-built-environment.pdf>

²³ Blay, Meghan (2019). A Well-being Framework for Highrise Housing (Thesis)
<https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/17396>

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- Supporting Friendlier, more Neighbourly Multi-family buildings in Vancouver (2017)²⁴
- Happy Homes Report (2017)²⁵
- Study of Interior Public Spaces for the Promotion of Social Interaction in High-rise Residential Buildings (2018)²⁶
- Passages through High-rise Living (2014)²⁷

Where do People Interact in High-Rise Apartment Buildings? Exploring the Influence of Personal and Neighborhood Characteristics (2020)²⁸

- Helping Cities Plan High-Rise Growth (2018)²⁹
- Jurisdictional Examples:
 - Townhouse designs in Victoria³⁰ (Parking considerations and considerations for open space and neighbourliness.)
 - Multi-family designs in Esquimalt³¹ (Research and *What we Heard*)
 - Milton Tall Building Guidelines³²
 - Ottawa Urban Design Guidelines High-rise Buildings³³

In summary, where we live has a great impact on our mental and social well-being. This is an important and emerging topic, much of this is already being done elsewhere and there is ample research to draw from. A climate emergency, as well as the lack of affordable and regional plans for emphasizing compact communities indicate that new housing is and will continue to be mainly multi-family dwellings in a variety of forms. However that looks, the focal point must be the wellbeing of residents. Guidance on what needs to be in new developments to promote wellbeing will be important for community wellness and transparency for the development communities. However, Port Moody is currently very stretched on both staff capacity and funding for projects. We do have a wealth of knowledge in our community volunteers on the Advisory Design Panel and have some access to Health Authority experts, depending on their

²⁴ https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2017-45_Supporting%20Neighbourly%20Vancouver%20Multi-Unit%20Buildings_Tavakoli.pdf

²⁵ <https://thehappy.city.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/HappyHomesReport.pdf>

²⁶ <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11120&context=theses>

²⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295927193_Passages_through_High-rise_Living

²⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7369851/>

²⁹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90021073?seq=1>

³⁰ <https://www.victoria.ca/assets/Departments/Planning~Development/Community~Planning/OCP/Replaced/Design%20Guidelines%20for%20Attached%20Res%20Dev%20-%20adopted%20May%2010%202018.pdf>

³¹ https://www.esquimalt.ca/sites/default/files/docs/business-development/Designing_Density_Report_Final_to_Township_of_Esquimalt_Dec_2019.pdf

³² <https://www.milton.ca/en/business-and-development/resources/Tall-Building-Guidelines.pdf>

³³ <https://ottawa.ca/en/urban-design-guidelines-high-rise-buildings>

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capacity as well. This is a project which would enhance Port Moody's stance as healthy community leaders and provide a precedent for other communities to emulate, while, most importantly, enhancing well-being for Port Moody community members.

Other Option(s)

1. THAT the report dated May 15, 2021 from Councillor Amy Lubik regarding Developing Social and Mental Health Wellbeing Guidelines for Buildings in Port Moody be referred to ADP for investigation of potential grant possibilities to fund the work referenced in the report.
2. THAT the report dated May 15, 2021 from Councillor Amy Lubik regarding Developing Social and Mental Health Wellbeing Guidelines for Buildings in Port Moody be referred to the Tri-Cities Healthy Communities Partnership for potential action.
3. THAT the report dated May 15, 2021 from Councillor Amy Lubik regarding Developing Social and Mental Health Wellbeing Guidelines for Buildings in Port Moody be received for information.

Financial Implications

None

Communications and Civic Engagement Initiatives

Possible feedback from community on social/ mental wellness guidelines

Council Strategic Plan Objectives

Council's strategic plan objectives are met by demonstrating dedication to:

- The health and wellness needs of residents;
- Access to housing;
- Social inclusion; and
- Courage to lead and embrace new ideas.

Attachment(s)

1. Creating Better Shared Spaces in Apartment Complexes and their Local Areas 2021.

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Creating Better Shared Spaces in Apartment Complexes and their Local Areas

By Sian Thompson

More people than ever are living in apartment complexes in Australia, and while the pace of construction may have slowed recently due to Covid-19 and prior over-supply, the shift towards apartment living will continue [1]. At the 2016 Census, 9% of the Australian population lived in private apartment complexes, and in Victoria and NSW, one in five apartments were in large buildings of more than 100 units [2]. Living in large buildings can be an isolating experience, with poor residential satisfaction [3]. However, this is not necessarily the case around the world, due to differing cultural contexts as well as more attention to design and management for community purposes [4]. With many more people living in apartments, we need to make these great places to live, now and in the long term, which means ensuring we are planning, designing and managing apartment complexes and their local areas to ensure the best outcomes for residents.

“People want different types of connection in their local area, from people you just acknowledge, to people you chat with, to people you make friends with.”

This research, undertaken in 2019, investigated the social aspect of living in large apartment complexes, drawing on case studies in Sydney and asking what ‘good outcomes’ look like [5]. To understand how we can improve spaces within and around apartment complexes to better support social connection and encourage use, two overarching questions were asked: what types of social connections residents want locally, and how the built environment and management can support this.

The project focused specifically on what it termed ‘shared spaces’ - apartment communal spaces such as lobbies, gardens and swimming pools - plus commercial and public spaces within ten minutes’ walk, including shops, cafés, parks and libraries. These spaces are where residents most often see each other, and can develop relationships based on ‘propinquity’ (crossed paths) [6]. In the course of this research, it became apparent that some apartment shared spaces were rarely used, which is a poor outcome considering the time and money spent on designing, constructing and maintaining these spaces.

What do current guidelines advise?

Existing design guidelines in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia, while improving, don’t go into detail on how to encourage use and support interaction specifically. Victoria has recently amended their Design Standards and Design Guidelines for apartments, linking to living experiences during Covid-19, when people spent more time in their apartments and local areas [7]. New apartment buildings of ten or more units will need usable outdoor open space, and larger buildings may also have indoor communal space. The new guidelines provide many good design ideas: making pleasant spaces to linger (sunlight, landscaping, seating, wind protection) that are easy to maintain, functional, accessible and visually and physically integrated with buildings. Well-designed circulation spaces are argued to encourage social interaction, though little explicit guidance is given on how they do this.

In NSW, apartment complexes must follow SEPP65 and its associated Design Guide, which proposes barbecue areas, play areas, pools, gyms, tennis courts and common rooms [8]. It suggests shared spaces should be “readily visible from habitable rooms and private open space areas while maintaining visual privacy” [8] though mentions only the safety and privacy, rather than social,

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advantages of this. Community gardens, seating in circulation spaces and natural daylighting are suggested to increase social interaction. Western Australia's guidelines improve upon NSW's advice by focusing more particularly on the activities shared spaces support. The guidelines suggest shared spaces should be "accessible, useable and attractive, allowing a range of activities for all residents" including shared food preparation, gardening, interest groups and resident meetings [9].

Within these guidelines the emphasis is on safety, noise, privacy and environmental considerations such as sunlight and wind (especially where minimum standards are concerned), with only a passing reference made to features that specifically support social interaction.

What types of social connections do residents want in large apartment complexes?

While the residents interviewed as part of this project often liked the classic idea of 'community', it usually wasn't what they wanted in their building and local area, with many valuing privacy and anonymity. Despite this, almost a third of survey respondents (61/200) wanted more local social connection. The chart below considers answers to 'do you have enough contact?' against 'do you feel isolated?'. Residents wanting more contact were 'Lonely' (isolated) or 'Contact-seeking' (not isolated), while residents with enough contact were 'Satisfied' (not isolated) or 'Private' (isolated).

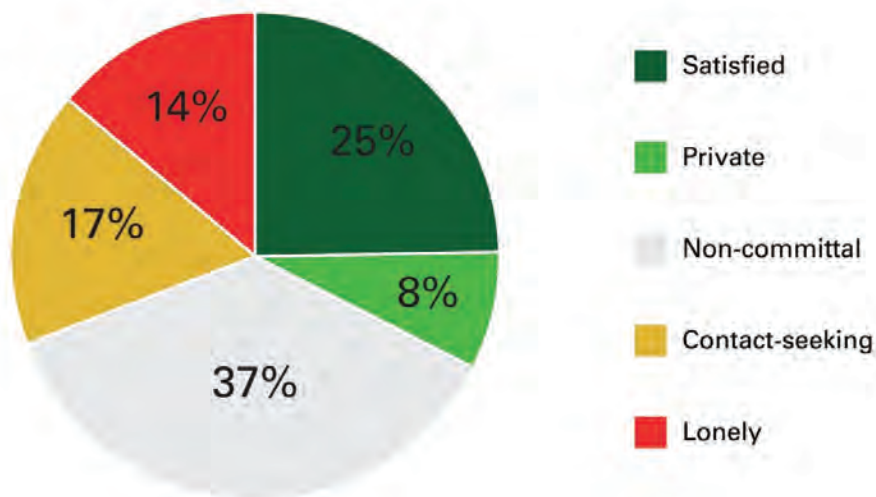


Image: Satisfaction with local social connection survey results

People wanted different types of connection in their local area, from people you just acknowledge, to people you chat with, to people you make friends with. The first two of these are 'weak ties' [10] or 'casual social ties' (CSTs) as I term them: relationships that don't take much time or energy, but allow you to exchange favours and feel a sense of trust and belonging. The way we design and manage spaces within and around apartments can support both the development of these ties and solitary activities.

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What design and management factors support use and social connection in large apartment complexes and their local areas?

Space	Encounters	Receptivity
Circulation	High	Low
Destination	Often low, aim for high	High

Image: Encounters and receptivity of circulation and destination spaces.

Social connections develop through **encounters + receptivity + catalysts** and different spaces provide these to different extents. To increase opportunities for social connection, we want to increase use of space (encounters), in spaces where people are open to interaction (receptivity), and allow or provide catalysts for interaction.

The following advice for circulation and destination spaces in the apartment complex, and other spaces in the local area, complements guidance on sunlight, safety, privacy and other principles often covered in existing guidelines.

CIRCULATION SPACES

These are spaces such as lifts, lobbies and car parks where people are on their way somewhere. These spaces are well-used and people often encounter each other here, but receptivity is low – you might say hello and comment on the weather, but everyone is on the way somewhere and interaction is brief, especially between strangers. In spaces used by many people, you'll often find 'civil inattention' – politely ignoring each other. Therefore, circulation spaces are good for supporting acknowledgement ties and creating a friendly atmosphere, but not for developing stronger chatting or friend ties. Catalysts like dogs, children or problems increase the chances of interaction, while some transparency between spaces supports visual encounters. Seating in circulation spaces is functional and welcome, but it is unlikely to increase interaction between strangers - lingering here is 'odd' and civil inattention common.

CIRCULATION SPACES: RESIDENTIAL CORRIDORS

Apartment residents often feel they 'should' know the neighbours on their floor, at least by sight, as these neighbours can best help in emergencies or when locked out. People are often more receptive to interaction in residential corridors – though these encounters may be rare. Signs of personality can act as catalysts for interaction; management could allow residents to personalise the space outside their doors, similar to Gehl's 'soft edges' [11].

Some residential corridors are large enough to provide neutral ground for residents to meet, and safe spaces for children to play. Residents of small units might also use them as break-out spaces, for

silence or enjoying winter sunlight. Spaces like this should be pleasant (natural light, well-ventilated, seating), easy to clean, and afford purposeful but flexible use.

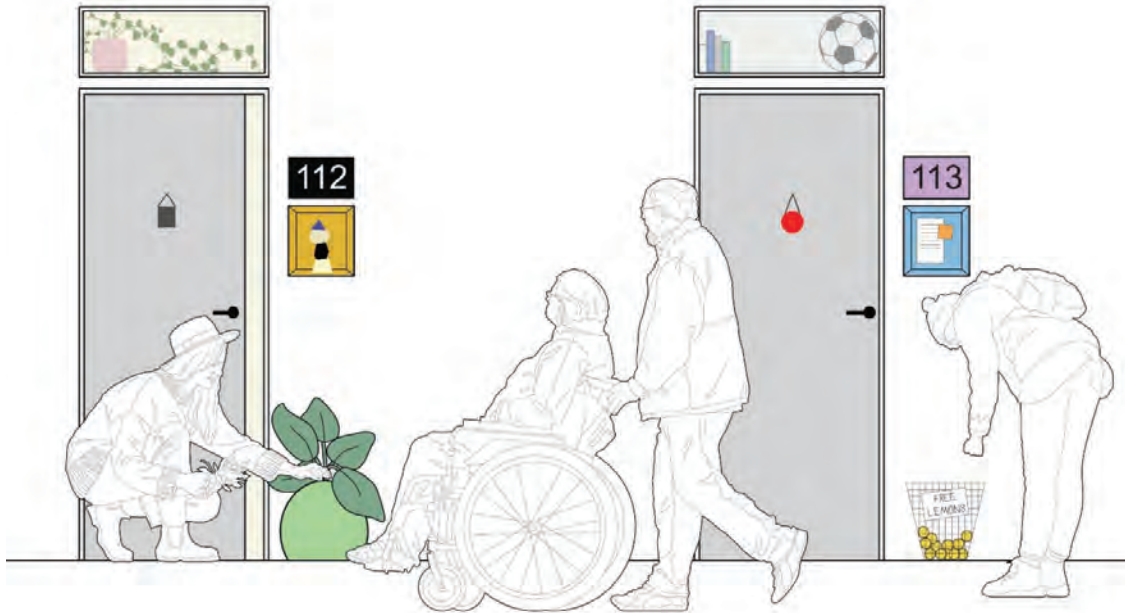


Image: Potential design features and personalisation techniques that could provide catalysts and increase hallway encounters.

DESTINATION SPACES

Purposeful but flexible use is also especially important for 'destination spaces' in apartment buildings such as gardens, roof terraces, or common rooms. Residents can develop deeper CSTs here, where time pressure is less apparent, shared interests are implied and future meetings are likely – all increasing receptivity. However, these spaces are often not well-used, with a lack of purpose (or purposes not matching resident interests) a major factor. For example, a roof terrace may have a beautiful view but insufficient seating, no WC and a ban on glass, which restricts activities. Health and safety is particularly important on a roof terrace, but design and management should aim to expand the activities possible in a space rather than restrict them. Functional spaces with clear purposes, such as communal laundries or bike maintenance stations, are likely to be used regularly, so could have seating to support lingering, or be co-located with spaces supporting lingering. Spaces that support multiple, complementary activities simultaneously are useful, and there should be safe play spaces to support children. Amenities should be easy to maintain and durable.

Spaces should also be easy to find – residents cannot use a space if they cannot find it or do not know it exists. These spaces should be easily accessible and visible - well integrated - while avoiding the 'fish-bowl' effect. Resident involvement in the management of spaces can increase use through better meeting residents' needs and greater resident engagement [12]. A range of events or organised activities can provide catalysts for residents to meet others with similar interests, and these might be manager- or resident-led. Finally, consider why a resident would use *this* space over staying in their unit or going out into the city. [The Happy City](#) has further useful ideas on 'doing things together' in shared spaces.

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SPACES IN THE LOCAL AREA

People like to connect with others at a range of scales [13], and quality spaces in the local area support these connections and get residents out and about. In busy urban areas, people are less receptive to interaction, but a number of catalysts can spark connections. Residents in this research often had CSTs with staff of local small businesses, such as cafés and newsagents, because they had a reason to interact regularly. Staff continuity was especially important here. Low-cost, visible, welcoming businesses or public spaces can be valuable 'third places' [14], supporting lingering and providing venues for activities, events and classes to connect people with shared interests. Some residents felt a sense of ownership and belonging for small businesses in their complex, however ground-floor commercial spaces are often difficult to fill [15]. Low-rent spaces where long-term tenants can be found, or low-cost community spaces planned in collaboration with councils or other organisations, could address this need [16]. It is also important that community spaces are visible and salient, so people know a space exists and what happens there, and that active community members' initiatives are supported, not thwarted by bureaucracy.

Nearby green spaces were valued by those who had them, and desired by those who did not. People are more receptive in small local parks (which have a lower chance of civil inattention), however residents highly valued larger regional parks for their amenity. Parks should support children and dogs, which are both excellent catalysts for interaction, as well as general exercise and relaxation. Busy roads reduced the accessibility and pleasantness of green space, and landscaping should take dogs' needs into account.

More of us will be living in apartments in the future so we need to ensure these environments support us in connecting with others and providing useful spaces. To do this, design guidelines should provide more illustrative guidance for developing useful, socially-supportive spaces, focusing not just on privacy but also considering how spaces can increase use, leverage receptivity and provide or support catalysts. Designers, developers and planning approval authorities should take care that shared spaces are well-designed, rather than afterthoughts to meet minimum requirements, and that local areas provide a range of quality spaces. Building managers and resident committees should make sure spaces are well-maintained and support a range of activities, change spaces that are little used, and reconsider unnecessarily-restrictive rules. With these actions, we can create more successful shared spaces and support social connection, making apartments better, more enjoyable places to live.

About the author:

Sian is a Research Associate at City Futures Research Centre, UNSW Sydney. She has a background in psychology, design and urban sociology and a keen interest in the lived experience of urban housing, housing affordability, sustainability and design at the building and precinct scale. She's worked in various roles in the construction industry in Sydney, London and Auckland, and is committed to translating research into practical advice to make great places to live.