



Community Housing Action Committee (CHAC)
January 13, 2022

Affordable Housing + Social Connectedness: Can We Afford to Ignore It?

With Prologue on “Modesty Clause” + Covid Context Updates

Gloria Venczel, BES., B.Arch., RPP, MCIP
Principal/Urban Design + Economic Vibrancy

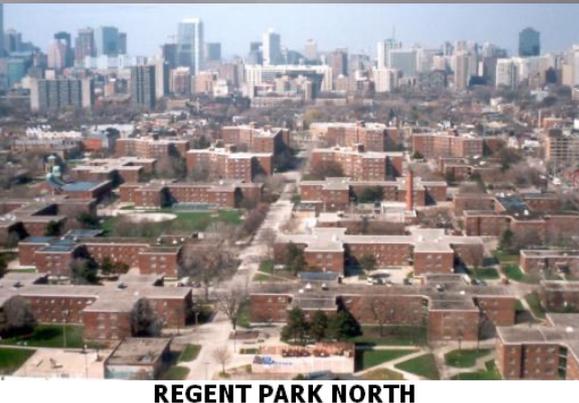
Vibrant Places Inc.
Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity
www.vibrantplacesinc.com



<https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2013/06/neighbourhood-node-new-and-old-regent-park>



https://www.rapidict.org/Regent_Park (both)



REGENT PARK NORTH

Prologue: “Modesty Clause” in Affordable Housing

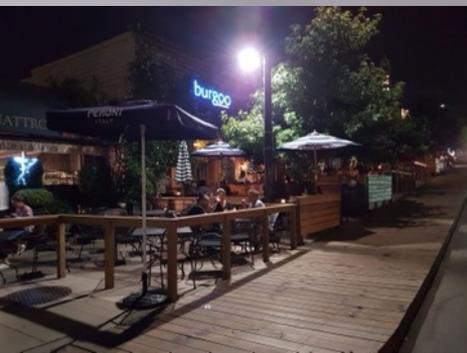
A “Modesty Clause” in affordable housing is the unspoken assumption that:

- That non-market housing is built on “tax-payers’ dime”.
- The harsh attitude of “Beggars can’t be choosers”.
- That the architectural design should look “modest”, unremarkable + cheap, even w/ same costs.
- That the 1960s “need for speed” in creating affordable housing was justified in this failed experiment that saw the rise of instant ghettos (left).
- No mixed uses, resulted in the warehousing of people in ill-fitting architectural + neighbourhood designs, devoid of “Third Spaces”/café happenstance meeting places, that small businesses normally provide.
- That the market is always right.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Prologue: “Modesty Clause” in Affordable Housing

The reality is *actually*:

- Non-market housing for “missing middle” is often achieved w/o any tax-payer subsidies, but not nearly enough to meet demand.
- Estimated 95% of lower mainland, anyone who requires housing and has to work for a living, from baristas to family doctors, need “missing middle” affordable housing.
- Local residents, or 95% of population, are not “beggars”, constitute foundations of civil society.
- W/o local residents contributing to a vibrant, solid social fabric + city culture, lower mainland wouldn't be the global safe haven to park investment money.
- Local residents are “geese that lay the golden egg” for region's prosperity + should be treated as such, especially wrt affordable housing.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Prologue: “Modesty Clause” in Affordable Housing

Some of the *needs* for socio-economic resiliency are:

- Affordable housing design should contribute to neighbourhood’s “sense of place” + be integrated seamlessly, non-stigmatizing.
- Affordable housing needs to be located in 15-minute, walkable, complete, mixed-use neighbourhood, incl. amenities + public transit.
- Exceptional pedestrian-oriented streetscape design/urban design, complete with public/semi-public + semi-private space transitions towards the street...
- ... to provide opportunities for public/semi-public space happenstance mtgs between housing residents themselves, as well as non-residents, to build community, enhance social resiliency wrt covid + climate crisis impacts.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Prologue:

“Modesty Clause” in Affordable Housing

Some socio-economic *solutions* could be:

- Non-market housing, rental or co-ops, can be created through on-site, revenue-neutral density bonusing, plus density transfers.
- Churches, which own land, partnering w/ housing non-profits and/or developers.
- Renewal of housing co-ops + portfolio approach to redevelopment.
- Daylight undeclared assumptions re: “modesty clause”, call out elephant in the room, re-examine if assumptions make any sense.
- Recognise socio-economic value local residents bring to table in regional prosperity, a la economist Richard Florida’s ‘Creative Class’ connection between city culture + innovation in a knowledge economy.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Social Resiliency: *Public Spaces + Social Connectedness*

- People are fundamentally hard wired social creatures.
- We need a place to get together, a physical neighbourhood “stage” , aka, public spaces where we can socialize, engage, see and be seen.
- These happenstance opportunities in the public realm, to connect with neighbours, strangers and other cultures, is where we grow, enhance and polish our civil society.
- Such social connectedness helps build community, a “sense of belonging” and social resiliency, esp. in challenging times.
- While some of these ideas were taken for granted and remained unexamined, COVID has shone a spotlight on how important designing for social connectedness in neighbourhoods really are.



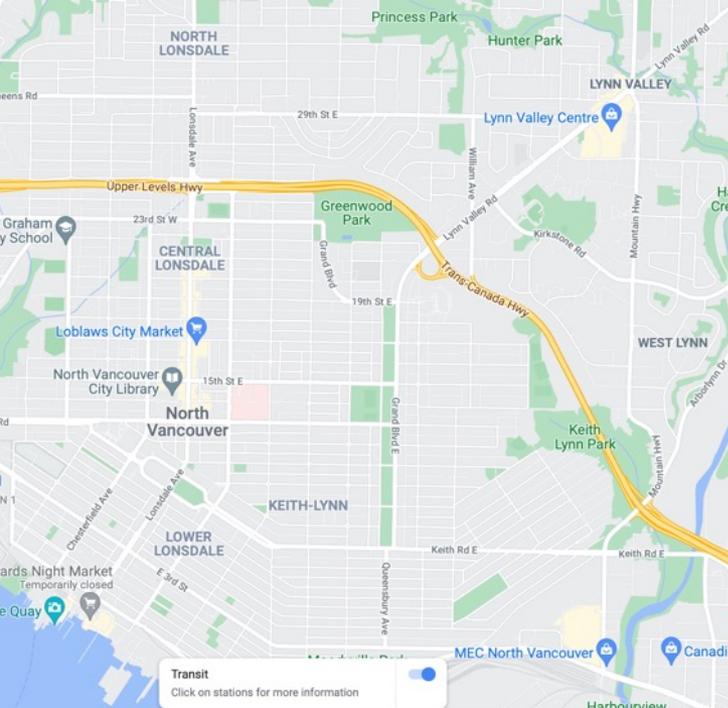
Affordable Housing: Walkable Neighbourhood Amenities

- The successful walkable neighbourhoods in the lower mainland, as well as North America, are the former street car suburbs, along the streetcar lines, pre WWII.
- The former streetcar suburbs of Lonsdale Avenue, Broadway Avenue, Commercial Drive etc., were the developers' success formula of the day.
- They had 25' storefronts along the streetcar lines, aka, pedestrian oriented urban design, and smaller 33'-50' frontage house lots.
- This strategy helped to ensure a wide enough range of shops and services within walking distance, pre-private automobile, so that people would want to buy and live on the 33' house lots.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



What Happened to Walkable Neighbourhoods?

➤ Neighbourhood patterns have always been driven by the transportation technology at the time of their “heyday” or during their most robust growth.

➤ Post WWII, the private automobile became the dominant transportation technology. Amenities became only accessible by car.

➤ Car based suburbs have been the developers' success formula from post WWII to present.

➤ The Google Map, adjacent, shows a very short, grid like street pattern for the former streetcar suburb of Lonsdale Avenue, full of amenities within walking distance.

➤ Note the street patterns around the Lynn Valley Centre on the map, irregular and circuitous. It was built around the car culture, post WWII, w/ large lots and a central mall, without near by amenities.



Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Affordable Housing is City Building, Not Widget Building

- Cities are a financial, technological and social expression of the best that we can be, at this point in time, building on an existing neighbourhood context.
- It is the best our civil society can muster. However, nothing is carved in stone.
- Without the pedestrian-based streetcar transportation technology as a neighbourhood pattern driver, a car based neighbourhood rethink must be very deliberate in creating walkability, amenities and public spaces, especially if affordable housing is being considered for the area.
- It's been done before, with lessons learned, to apply to a contemporary neighbourhood rethink.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Updated Streetcar Suburb: 17th + Lonsdale

- While the bones of walkability + amenities are still solid, they need updates as well.
- Lonsdale Ave. can't stay all low-rise, but it can stay vibrant.
- The semi-private patios create a neighbourly connection to the street, along with upper balconies.
- Added residents/ customers help make the local shops n services viable along Lonsdale Ave.



Updated Streetcar Suburb: 17th + Lonsdale

➤ As the City of North Vancouver's former Urban Designer /Development Planner, conducting urban design reviews for rezonings, I persuasively encouraged retail space + patio space along 17th as vibrant building edge programming.

➤ Encouraged a public courtyard or programmed forecourt with a range of seating, merchandise + community events. Has functioned like a mini-civic plaza.

➤ Note the +/- 25' storefront spacing along Lonsdale, providing reciprocal storefront rhythms to the west side's pedestrian oriented retail units, contributing to Lonsdale's vibrancy success story.





Integrated Affordable Housing: *Olympic Village Neighbourhood*

- First Avenue Athlete's Village Co-operative Housing is non-subsidized, probably 20% less expensive (co-op rule of thumb), in perpetuity, than the market cost.
- Very well architecturally integrated into the neighbourhood (green bldg), in using high quality of materials, in balcony and massing articulation for neighbourliness towards the street.
- The ground unit patios use the three stair riser rule of thumb height above the street to create visual privacy for the residents + people walking by.
- Patio semi-visible, not fortress-like, providing "eyes-on-the-street", with enough room for a small BBQ + dining set for 4



Integrated Affordable Housing: Social Connectedness + Design

- First Avenue Athlete's Village Co-op has an inner courtyard with a playground, surrounded by patios at grade + outdoor circulation corridors.
- The corridors and patios allow for casual oversight of the play area for safety + social connectedness/meeting neighbours.
- The at-grade, semi-private patios are visually semi-transparent, providing enough privacy for a family dinner uninterrupted but inviting enough for a neighbour to chat.
- The playground is semi-public space; anyone in the building can use it.
- Distinct design cues between private, semi-private space + semi-public ensures that there is a sense of ownership and outdoor spaces don't become a "no man's land" of neglect.



Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Integrated Affordable Housing: Social Connectedness + Design

- The Athlete's Village Co-op Housing facing a busier street -requires more physical separation for patios to be usable and neighbourly.
- 3-4 steps up and at least 3' setback from sidewalk using layered landscaping + opaque railing.
- Gives enough of a balance between privacy and social connectedness- it gives choice.
- The 3 steps up ensures that that the indoor (private space) or outdoor dinner table height is at head height of a passerby. Less awkward for passerby, too.



Integrated Affordable Housing: Olympic Village Neighbourhood + Walkable Amenities

- Athlete's Village Cooperative Housing is located in the Olympic Village, with many amenities within walking distance.
- Opportunities for happenstance socializing with neighbours, strangers and other cultures possible with pedestrian oriented, mixed use, complete communities that include non-market housing.
- Affordable housing is indistinguishable from the surrounding market housing.
- The Olympic Village has the vibrancy of a former streetcar suburb, but it wasn't one. It was a deliberate rethink to create a contemporary walkable, vibrant neighbourhood.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



Lessons Learned from Instant Ghettos? *Affordable Housing in the 1960s*

“[Toronto’s] Regent Park’s pastoral setting turned into a no-man’s land of sorts.” *Global News, June 2012.*

“ [Toronto's] Regent Park was designed to be a 'garden city,' with buildings placed in a "pastoral" setting, facing inwards and turning their backs on the noise of the city.

Streets were replaced with walkways and green space, making the area largely inaccessible to traffic. The design was also completely residential, containing no commercial and recreational facilities.

And so, people who did not live in Regent Park had very little reason to go there. The abundant green space in the area also led to confusion over where private property ended and public property began.”

<https://globalnews.ca/news/243057/background-torontos-regent-park/>



<http://magazine.utoronto.ca/feature/new-regent-park-toronto-community-housing-john-lorinc/>

Lessons Learned from Instant Ghettos? Affordable Housing in the 1960s

➤ The “modesty clause” for affordable housing was the dominant thinking in the 1960’s, not city/community building.

➤ Such “projects” were efficient, urgent solutions, less than no frills warehousing of people. But people, as a species, we are hard wired for socializing.

➤ There were no shops and services, which normally provide the public spaces/living rooms or “Third Place” cafes to meet n greet your neighbours, to build relationships + community.

➤ Without a clear design for transition between public spaces, semi-public, semi-private and private, there was no sense of local and community ownership possible of the neighbourhood.

➤ Such “projects” were isolated/segregated from other neighbourhoods. The outdoors became dangerous, no man’s land, aka, ghettos.



<https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2013/06/neighbourhood-node-new-and-old-regent-park>



[https://www.google.ca/search?q=regent+park+toront](https://www.google.ca/search?q=regent+park+toront&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA766CA766&source=lnms&tbm=src&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwib7rL5iO3aAhW)
[o&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA766CA766&source=lnms&tbm=src](https://www.google.ca/search?q=regent+park+toront&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA766CA766&source=lnms&tbm=src&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwib7rL5iO3aAhW)
[h&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwib7rL5iO3aAhW](https://www.google.ca/search?q=regent+park+toront&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA766CA766&source=lnms&tbm=src&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwib7rL5iO3aAhW)

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



<https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2013/06/neighbourhood-node-new-and-old-regent-park>



<http://www.s-edge.com/case-studies/regent-park/>



<https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2013/06/neighbourhood-node-new-and-old-regent-park>

Rethink of Regent Park: Integrated Neighbourhood + Public Spaces

- Renewed Regent Park has housing for a mix of market and affordable housing, including mixed uses.
- Mixed uses, like ground floor retail which provides for bldg edge programming like cafes, allows for the activation of the public realm-something legitimate to do, see and be seen
- Defined public, semi-public, semi-private spaces and defined expectations, “sense of place” + sense of community ownership & care possible.
- More about city/community building.
- Didn't have a former streetcar suburb as a neighbourhood pattern driver.
- Regent Park rethink was a deliberate design for walkable, vibrant, complete communities.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com



<http://vaha.ca/this-is-a-vaha-post-with-an-image-and-a-long-title-its-also-an-external-post/>



<http://www.abundanthousingvancouver.com/tmhvsneighbourhoodgroups>

Temporary Modular Housing for the Homeless: *Public Spaces + Family?*

- Temporary shelter is more than a roof over the head of homeless people; it often provides a temporary family.
- Without a defined “Third Space” for meeting fellow homeless people, who know when and where the pop up health clinics will be, as well as times for free meals, it is difficult to socially connect.
- The concrete picnic tables, as outdoor amenities, are cold, uncomfortable, without any sense of privacy for a conversation.
- The picnic table outdoor amenities can make the homeless feel like they are on display.
- Some sort of hot lunch temporary café, like the former social enterprise, the Picasso Café, could be the type of “Third Space” needed.

Vibrant Places Inc.

Economic Vibrancy + Placemaking + Urban Planning + Community Capacity

www.vibrantplacesinc.com

Neighbourhoods + Affordable Housing + Public Spaces = Vibrant Cities

