



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

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## Social Creatures + Urban Design

- People are fundamentally social creatures
- We need a place to get together, a stage, aka, the public realm, where we can socialize, engage and be seen
- As a species, we don't function well when there aren't casual and happenstance opportunities to connect with neighbours, strangers and other cultures
- Jane Jacobs simplified this idea into the often quoted "Eyes –on-the-street" principle





## **Pedestrian Oriented Vibrancy: Small Town Main Street + Former Streetcar Suburbs**

- We are so used to seeing successes in pedestrian oriented streetscapes on the some of the Main Streets of Small Town BC and the former streetcar suburbs of Robson, Dunbar, Lonsdale, Commercial Drive etc., we don't bother to take stock of the less than vibrant architectural/neighbourhood models
- Generally, we don't analyse what works and hasn't worked for community building
- We take the successes & momentum for granted.
- This also affects affordable housing + community building



## Robust Public Realm + Social Connectedness : Market Housing

- As the City of North Vancouver's urban designer at the time, I insisted on a patio and a CRU along West 17<sup>th</sup> (left) as well as a patio with seating for grocery store merchandizing on the very high profile corner (right) on Lonsdale Avenue
- Now imagine stucco walls, parkade grills & no patios, ie, no bldg edge programming
- There have been police cars for a charity event on this mini-plaza (right)) plus other community events
- The project needed an OCP amendment for 2 additional floors of affordable housing but was ultimately unsuccessful.

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## Robust Public Realm + Social Connectedness :Affordable Housing-Why Not?

- First Avenue Athlete's Village Coop Housing is well integrated into the neighbourhood (green bldg)
- There is no “modesty clause” where affordable housing can't look expensive or like regular housing because people are not paying market rent/ prices, because they are the “other people”
- Who is non-subsidized affordable housing for? The “missing middle”, lower to middle income people, basically everyone on this webinar
- Affordable housing is needed for majority of British Columbians, there is no “other”

## Affordable Housing w/o Social Connectedness

➤ Warehousing of the 'poor' began w/slum clearance after 1945

“ [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. **Regent Park's 'pastoral' setting turned into a no-man's land of sorts.**”

*Global News, June 2012*



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



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

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[https://www.google.ca/search?q=regent+park+toronto&rlz=1C1CHBD\\_enCA766CA766&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi b7rL5IO3aAhW](https://www.google.ca/search?q=regent+park+toronto&rlz=1C1CHBD_enCA766CA766&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi b7rL5IO3aAhW)

## Affordable Housing w/o Social Connectedness

- Affordable housing with the “modesty clause”, which always excluded public spaces, urban design definitions between semi-private and public spaces
- Without happenstance opportunities to get to know your neighbour or create local employment, through a cafe or other bldg edge programming, these “projects” became hostile, anonymous places with anonymous behaviours like petty crime, drugs and graffiti
- “sense of place” & sense of neighbourhood ownership impossible

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### Police look for second person of interest in Regent Park murder



CTV Toronto: Police look door-to-door for killer  
Homicide investigators are canvassing door-to-door in Regent Park hoping to catch the murderer of a rising athlete. Ashley Rowe reports.



## What is the Cost of No Social Connectedness?

- Social alienation is not just a big city problem with big density
- Regent Park was made up of 3 storey walk ups without any bldg edge programming or on-site amenities; no retail or recreation
- It was inward looking, disconnected from the outside neighbourhoods; the “other people” were warehoused here
- What is the cost of youth lost to gang life, loss of life and economic opportunities?
- What is the cost of a built environment that impedes community building in perpetuity?



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

## Renewed Regent Park With Mixed Uses + Public Realm

- Renewed Regent Park has housing for a mix of market and affordable housing as well as 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
- The Toronto Community Housing is accepting application this year for affordable housing

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

## No Public Realm /Social Connectedness: Homeless Housing

- Vancouver's container housing for the homeless-"housing the poor", not unlike the noble aims of Regent Park w/o any public realm to build community
- Wealth buys social access/connectedness- poverty is the reverse
- Contrary to what seems intuitive, once physical shelter is achieved, temporarily or or other wise, building community and socializing is fundamental to a homeless person's survival, literally. And emotionally.
- Nice, but would you sit out on the concrete picnic tables there?



<http://dailyhive.com/vancouver/220-terminal-avenue-vancouver-modular-social-housing>

## No Public Realm /Social Connectedness: Homeless Housing

- The informal networking, knowing where cheaper (or free) food can be had, who can help with paperwork issues, free clinics etc. Is a life line.
- Homeless people are often estranged from their families and the streets are where they find “family” & support; a safe “third place”, i.e., public realm, can offer a place to meet others and find “family”
- The “missing middle”, while our issues are different, we have the wherewithal to solve basic problems.
- As planners, we have to ask the hard questions.



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

## No Public Realm /Social Connectedness: Homeless Housing

- How important is the public realm and/or a “third place” for homeless shelters? Even for 30 days at a time?
- How important is it for the community to connect with the homeless in their midst?
- Maybe twinning, through design, the temporary housing with something like a pop up cafe (a simplified Picasso’s Cafe which gave restaurant training to kids at risk) could be a solution for connecting the homeless with each other as well as with the larger community



## No Public Realm /Social Connectedness: Market Housing

- A Town or City's social fabric is made up of many incremental contributions and efforts of people and organizations
- A Town or City's vibrancy in the public realm is made up of many incremental architectural streetscape designs
- If enough of a critical mass of bldgs do not provide for bldg edge programming for a proper public realm, ie, a public living rm/third space, a neighbourhood could suddenly spout anonymous behaviours, a downturn hard to recover from.
- Can the above market housing/retail street edge be easily transformed into a pedestrian friendly one?

## Affordable Housing + Social Connectedness: What Does it Look Like?



- First Avenue Athlete's Village Co-op Housing
- Raised patios of min. 3 risers facing the street, set back from the sidewalk
- Patio large enough to have a BBQ grill and a couple of chairs, maybe a table- this should be min. size
- Balconies above provide added "eyes-on-the-street"
- Layered patio edge, a bit of gravel, low shrubs and then a fence give enough visual privacy that no one will care if you open a beer but visually accessible enough from the street so that no one can hide there to mug the resident
- Trees above and small boulevard create a secondary public "outdoor" space in front of the patios



## Affordable Housing + Social Connectedness What Does it Look Like?

- How can you tell whether the patio design is well used and loved?
- Any furniture/chairs are the best indicator that the patio has been designed well and creates a good balance between semi-private and public space
- All blinds closed are always a little concerning
- At least a 3' setback for the patios and building from the sidewalk



## Affordable Housing + Social Connectedness: What Does it Look Like?

- Interior courtyard at Athlete's Village co-op housing
- Not necessary to have grade separation but there is partial visual separation through shrubbery; design definition between semi-private and semi-public space
- One of the problems noted by Global News re: Regent Park was the lack of delineation of between private and public space which created a "no man's land"
- Note that all the successful social connectedness design elements for Athlete's Village create distinct separations between private, semi-private, semi-public and public spaces. Sense of ownership very possible.



## Affordable Housing + Social Connectedness: What Does it Look Like?

- Affordable Housing Social Connectedness = “eyes-on-the-street”
- Pedestrian oriented urban design = delineation between private, semi-private, semi-public & public space = “eyes-on-the-street”
- “Eyes-on-the-street” = 90% effectiveness for CPTED
- CPTED= 90% visually faking out petty criminals that someone will pop out their heads to hang out on their balcony or patio & call the police

## Affordable Housing + Social Connectedness: What Does it Look Like?



- Social Connectedness is neighbourhood based as well!!
- Athlete's Village Cooperative Housing is located in the Olympic Village
- Shops and services, cafes and "public living rooms" are available within a 10 minute walking radius
- Opportunities for happenstance socializing with neighbours, strangers and other cultures possible with pedestrian oriented, mixed use, complete communities that include non-market housing