



Living Up, Or Living Apart?

Addressing the Social Consequences of
High-Rise Living



Prepared for

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A human “is a social being, and by nature adapted to share his life with others...Now if he is solitary, life is hard for him; for it is difficult to be continuously active by one’s self, but not so difficult along with others.”

– Aristotle

Introduction

Vancouver has nowhere to grow but up.

A result of the complex interplay between geography, migration, land economics and desirability, among other forces, means that the City of Vancouver has no option but to accommodate future growth within its constrained landmass through intensification and densification.

Metro Vancouver forecasts the region's population to grow by 30,000 new residents per year, or 1.2 million total, by 2041. Anticipating the need for over 500,000 new dwellings, Metro estimates that 80% of new residential growth will occur through strategic infill and densification in a variety of built forms. It also plans for 68%

of growth to occur in existing urban areas. This means we will undoubtedly see more multi-unit buildings pepper our neighbourhoods, from mid-rise walk-ups to podium-towers that reach for the clouds; more of us will live in closer quarters.

This study does not dispute the economic or environmental benefits of greater density. It does, however, suggest that we pay attention and give closer consideration to the social implications of high-rise living if towers are to become a ubiquitous feature of the urban fabric.

The urgency of cultivating connections

Recent research into connection, engagement & belonging in the region conducted by the Vancouver Foundation revealed some surprising results:

- Vancouverites rank social isolation as their highest concern
- 1 in 4 people say they are alone more often than they would like
- Young people aged 24 to 34 report feeling alone 3 times more than others
- 34% of people have no close friends living nearby

Moreover, strong correlations were made with denser built form, showing that people who live in high-rises:

- Are less likely to know at least two of their neighbours' names than people living in single detached houses.
- Have fewer chats with their neighbours and are less likely to do small favours for them, like pick up their mail when they are away.
- Report a higher level of loneliness and have a harder time making new friends.
- Trust their neighbours less (40%) compared to those in detached homes (60%)

The absence of social connections is connected to higher rates of physical & mental illness

**1 in 4
people say
they are alone
more often
than they
would like**

With 45% of Vancouver's population living in high-rise buildings, these findings are concerning for the social, physical and mental health of individuals and communities. Not knowing your neighbours names, having fewer chats and not feeling like you belong are not insignificant. They are indicators of fragile social capital and affect well-being.

An ever-growing body of knowledge has identified that the lack of social connections is a significant social determinant of health. The absence of social ties and networks, together with feelings of isolation, have been linked to premature death, increased rates of disease, and

higher rates of mental illness (including depression, anxiety, stress and substance abuse) to name a few.

Since 2011, a broad range of institutions and community organizations have expressed urgency around the need to better understand and address low (and decreasing) levels of social connection. Both the Vancouver Foundation and the City of Vancouver have since conducted more extensive surveys into connectedness and engagement in the city.

The issue has also captivated Vancouver Coastal Health, highlighting that the effects of

social disconnection cut across authorities, sectors, boundaries and purview.

A handful of interventions to build social connection in high-rise buildings have recently been tested and piloted. Interest in a larger, continued effort is growing across multiple City departments, institutions, community organizations, and research groups. It is our hope that this report contributes to this momentum.

**High-rise
residents are
more likely
to feel
disconnected**

Policy Context

This report responds to the concerning results of the Vancouver Foundation's research and builds on existing City work, including an initiative related to Neighbourhood Social Resilience, that has explored social connection in multi-unit residential buildings and neighbourhoods. This study aims to contribute new knowledge and perspectives that can advance multiple City strategies and goals related to building social connections, social capital and resilience. It is the first time local developers and property managers have been directly engaged in this topic

and we hope the findings encourage more private sector engagement and collaboration.

Helping residents to connect with each other helps us achieve multiple policy objectives that cross departments throughout the City. The Healthy City Strategy includes goals for Cultivating Connections and Being and Feeling Safe and Included. The City's Housing and Homelessness Strategy also provides further direction for different kinds of housing necessary to meet resident needs, and ways to improve and preserve the housing we already have.

Healthy City Strategy



Cultivating Connections

Goal: Vancouverites are connected and engaged in the places and spaces that matter to us

Targets: All Vancouverites have 4 people in their network that they can rely on, and increase municipal voter turnout to at least 60%

Being and feeling safe and included

Goal: A safe city in which residents feel secure

Targets: Increase residents' sense of belonging and safety by 10%, and make Vancouver the safest major city in Canada

Encouraging increased connection also supports the Engaged City Task Force's objective of building capacity and trust. This study identifies some of the barriers and opportunities to one of the proposed actions, "Rethinking Condos for Social Inclusion".

Moreover, this project fits into the broader sustainability policy context of the Greenest City Action Plan, supporting the goal of Climate Leadership and the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.

Building neighbourhood social resilience helps in responding to extreme weather events due to climate change, and also in emergency preparedness; it is an example of a "no regret" action – one that benefits the community regardless of the extent of climate change, or emergencies, we will eventually experience. In addition, it supports the Greenest City goal of a Lighter Footprint, as fostering and strengthening connections between residents can be a gateway to sharing resources and skills and lowering our ecological footprint.

Engaged City



Building capacity & trust

Priority: Increased engagement at the neighbourhood level

Action: Rethinking condos for social inclusion

Greenest City



Climate Leadership & Adaptation

Vision: Vibrant and inclusive neighbourhoods

Goal: Reduce Vancouver's ecological footprint by 33% of 2006 levels

Background

A few words on social cohesion, capital, well-being, the implications for high-rise buildings

Social cohesion and social capital are widely used terms and concepts, but their definitions, elements, factors and outcomes are not universally agreed upon. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine and analyse the breadth of frameworks used to conceptualize the two, but the following brief discussion should provide some context.

Social Cohesion

How you define social cohesion determines which indicators you use. Researchers Caroline Beauvais and Jane Jenson identify two broad definitions in use and their associated indicators,

“Those who define social cohesion in terms of social solidarity and patterns of distribution turn to measures of inclusion-exclusion, as well as measure of income distribution, poverty and a range of inequalities. Those who define social cohesion in terms of social bonds and capital measure rates of participation, membership and trust, as well as trying to characterize the network form.” (Beauvais & Jenson, 2005, p.25)

This study focuses on the elements and components of the latter, social capital, and acknowledges that they do not include or encompass key elements of broader social cohesion including: institutions and infrastructure or income distribution, equity, and access.

Social Capital

Social capital is often referred to as the ‘glue’ that holds civic and civil life together. It’s the interactions between people. And it is the quality of these interactions that determines whether we can solve common problems or co-operate for mutual benefit.

Social capital encompasses a broad range of formal and informal relational networks—families, sports teams, neighbourhoods, clubs, schools, work places etc. By definition, it exists beyond individual people, in a community.

Key elements of social capital include:

- Presence and participation in networks
- Reciprocity
- Trust
- Social norms

The size of these social networks, how spatially dispersed they are, how dense, how frequent the contact, and what their composition is gives us a sense of the structure of social relations in these networks. The content of the relations is more difficult to measure because it consists of varying degrees of intimacy, intensity and the presence or absence of cultural norms.



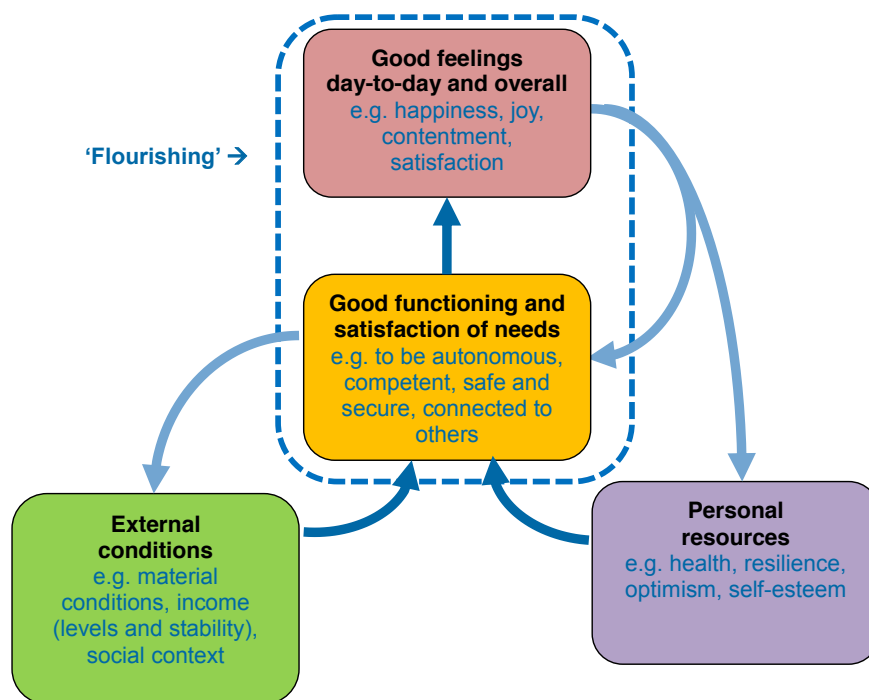


Fig. 1 The New Economic Foundation's Dynamic Model of Well-being

What do we mean by well-being?

Whereas social cohesion and capital are understood at the community level, the concept of well-being operates at the level of the individual and tells us how people *are*. The social psychological approach to well-being looks at "how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole." (NEF, 2012). This encompasses one's emotions, satisfaction with life, outlook, connectedness to others, feelings of autonomy and purpose. Many

aforementioned components of social capital are also potential drivers of well-being (see Fig. 1).

Overlapping themes

Holdsworth and Hartman's research weaves together slightly different indicators of community cohesion that we find useful to consider. Comparing figures 1 and 2, it is evident that healthy individual functioning and community cohesion share multiple elements and indicators, such as safety, autonomy, respect and connection.

One interesting finding of their

work was that "participants overwhelmingly named neighbourliness as the most important aspect of a strong community" (2009). The conditions of neighbourliness, which aren't as clearly described in other social capital research, are detailed below Fig. 2, along with the three other key indicators.

Feelings of autonomy, connection, respect and belonging are critical to flourishing at both the individual and community level.

“ Participants overwhelmingly named neighbourliness as the most important aspect of a strong community ”

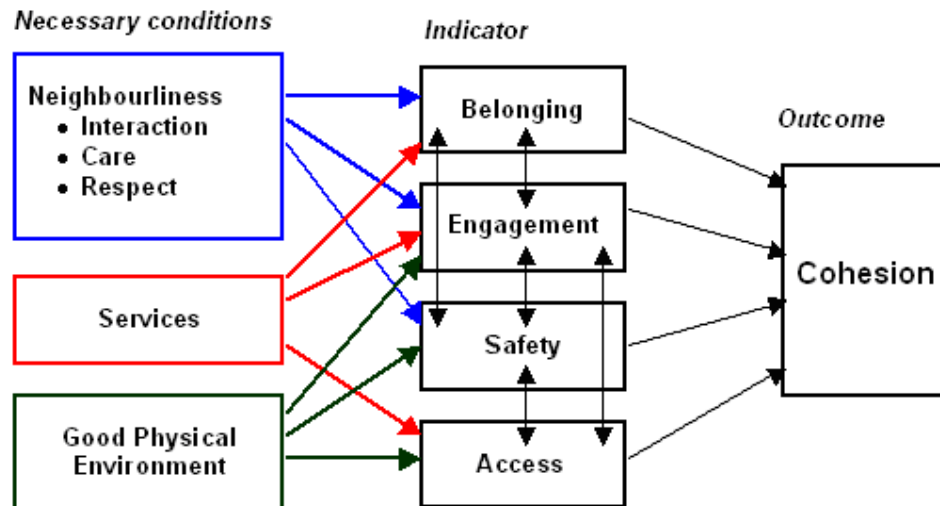


Fig. 2 Conditions & Indicators of Community Cohesion, Holdsworth & Hartman

A sense of belonging - indicated by:

- Neighbourliness
 - High level of interaction with neighbours, friends and family
 - An ethic of care (offering support and help) *
 - Mutual respect: observing boundaries, acceptance of diversity, community
- Consultation

Community engagement - indicated by:

- Volunteering
- Use of services
- Attendance at community events

A perception of safety – indicated by:

- Low official crime rate
- Residents' expression of feeling safe

* Keeping an eye on neighbours' houses whilst they were away, minding children, making loans of equipment and assisting in emergencies are demonstrations of a sense of care, and these are practices that also occur between friends and family members.

Why should we care about high-rise buildings?

Vancouver's housing crisis and building boom show no signs of stopping. With millions of square feet of residential and mixed-use development planned for coming years, the time seems ripe to pause and consider, not just changes to our skyline, but the implications for the social sustainability of our neighbourhoods and communities.

It must be pointed out that high-rise buildings aren't to blame for all our civic and social ills. What research exists on the possible negative consequences of high-density living is correlative at best, not causal.

Researcher Robert Gifford laments the scarcity of more recent work in this area and notes the problematic methods of older studies, calling on the

need for more research to be undertaken if we are to gain greater understanding. Dated studies from the 1970-80s show research participants to be quite satisfied with high-rise residences. However, it's important to note that self-reported satisfaction may not be the most reliable indicator. Subsequent researchers have drawn attention to the likelihood of cognitive dissonance among residents and the fact that said studies did not compare satisfaction among different housing types or forms.

Gifford does ultimately conclude, however, that even after adjusting for external moderating factors, high-rise dwelling may have negative effects on levels of stress and strain, mental health, perceptions of crime, child development, pro-social behaviour and social relations.

He writes, the "research is unanimous in finding that rates of helping others are lower in high-rise buildings" (p.12). The literature includes several studies that suggest high percentages of dissatisfaction among parents about the suitability of high rises for their children. Every study

“[The] research is unanimous in finding that rates of helping others are lower in high-rise buildings ,,”

of behavioral problems finds more among children in high rises" (p.12). Research out of Italy shows that high-density and diversity can be "obstacles for the creation of social ties within the neighborhood" (Lenzi et al,

2012 p.451) among adolescents and identified “the presence of opportunities for activities and meeting places in the neighborhood was associated with higher levels of social connectedness among residents” (p.451).

Research from a variety of international cities and contexts draws similar relationships and conclusions, and is increasingly calling on more attention to be paid to outdoor, shared and public spaces.

In Brisbane high-rises, social interactions between residents have been observed to be small and trivial, consistent with “an emerging body of research, which suggests there is little social contact within high density residential communities” (J. Williams, 2005; Zhang & Lawson,

2009 as cited in Buys, 2013). Although, residents report being happy “to keep to themselves... [and] maintain a simple ‘hello’ relationship with their neighbours but did not want to feel pressure or any obligation to talk to [them]” (p.22), it may not be such a simple ‘choice’.

Other research has found that large numbers of residents in a building can cause people to withdraw and avoid participation. Moreover, small private dwellings with quick transitions to public spaces can make residents feel like they have less control in regulating social interaction. Therefore, feelings of overcrowding and exposure may be strengthening strong resident desires for privacy, causing them to withdraw in order to maintain what little privacy they feel they have.

This suggests that building design can have an important influence on hindering or promoting social interaction.

Although high-rise buildings provide many benefits that contribute to livability—the density for alternative transportation options, access to amenities, goods services etc.—broader social implications of density are begging for attention. Less social interaction and fewer connections breed lower trust, diminish individual and collective senses of belonging and affect people’s willingness to help each other, volunteer and engage in their communities, affecting our individual and community health and well-being.

“ There is little social contact within high density residential communities ”

Additional considerations: Disaster & Resilience

In the face of disaster

Social interaction, connections and capital have specific relevance to emergency preparedness. Research shows that neighbourhoods with lower social capital “fail to mobilize collectively and often must wait for recovery guidance and assistance from private and public sectors” (Aldrich, 2012, p.7). This can mean the difference between life or death.

Research after the 2011 Japanese tsunami showed that communities with greater social capital were up to 5 times more likely to survive. Moreover, interviews with survivors highlight how informal communication and looking out for neighbours affects disaster mortality. “Those who evacuated described being heavily influenced by neighbors and friends who urged them to do so or came directly to their homes to ensure their safety” (p.73), while many residents who perished did not heed the evacuation warnings.

Strong social ties make neighbourhoods and cities more resilient by:

- Building a culture of participation
- Helping to spread knowledge and information across individuals and groups
- Forging trust

Strong social capital helps groups collectively overcome problems, mobilize resources, advocate for their needs and lowers the chances of mass exit and depopulation after a disaster since residents are more tied to a place and community of people.

Less social interaction and fewer connections breed lower trust, diminish individual and collective senses of belonging and affect people’s willingness to help each other, volunteer and engage in their communities, affecting our individual and community health, well-being and resilience.

The Study

The aim of this project was to contribute to the growing effort and body of knowledge in the area of social connection and high-density living in a way that would support City decision-making, engage private sector stakeholders and provide a jumping off point for future more collaborative and generative phases.

In addition to doing a scan of local and international precedents, this study focused on investigating the motivations, values, perceptions and actions of key stakeholders—developers and property managers—to uncover the barriers and opportunities to tackling this formidable issue.

What we did

We carried out 6 interviews with developers and 4 with property/building managers or management companies and used ethnographic tools like card sorting and conversation prompting to reveal and discuss beliefs, values, motivations and preferences. The interviews were all conducted in person, in public places like cafes or the interviewees' offices or buildings.

This research is qualitative in nature, therefore interpretive, and uses texts and phrases as data. The sample size

is notably small and we do not claim it to be representative, but ethnographic interviews such as these can often reveal deeper and more nuanced insights into how stakeholders think, feel, and what they believe in more than remote surveys, for example.

Visualizations of materials used, snapshots of interview responses in the form of empathy maps and a summary table of responses is available in the Appendix.

We engaged a breadth of companies ranging from small, locally-focused developers to those with large, national portfolios, all of whom have substantial rental and market properties in development in the region.

The findings are explored in subsequent pages.

Who did we speak to?

Developers

Developer A	Small developer that specializes in non-market rental housing.
Developer B	Medium-sized local developer that specializes in condominiums and increasingly more market rental buildings.
Developer C	Sole-proprietor developer and manager of rental buildings.
Developer D	Brand new company that is striving to “do development differently”. Partners have decades of experiences building multi-family housing.
Concert Properties	Large developer with a national portfolio of high-rise residential & commercial property. Retains ownership and manages some rentals. Builds and markets environmental features.
Kevington Building	Smaller, family-owned developer of commercial and residential property. Manages its own rental buildings.

Property Managers

Manager 1	Sole proprietor. Manages 167 units across 11 properties for 5 owners.
Manager 2	Co-owner of larger management company with a portfolio of 100+ strata properties and rental units across Metro Van.
Manager 3	Sole employee. On-site caretaker of a condo tower on Howe St.
Lolly Bennett	Kevington Properties employee. On-site manager of District Main.

Note: Most participants opted to keep their personal and company identities anonymous. Names have been changed accordingly with the exception of individuals from Concert and Kevington

What did we find?

A Summary of Key Issues & Opportunities

1 Lack of awareness & understanding of the issue

2 The industry doesn't always know what works, or why

3 Design matters & shared spaces are lacking

4 The business case is tough to make in this real-estate market

5 Property managers can be assets, allies & champions

6 The City can be a champion and a leader

1 Lack of awareness & understanding of increasing disconnection and its consequences

Research on the prevalence of loneliness, feelings of disconnection and a lack of belonging in Vancouver and its ties to multi-unit dwellings has not made its way into the development community. Social components and needs are much less understood or considered compared to more technical features, like energy efficiency for instance, and unless individuals have personally experienced loneliness or disconnection in a multi-unit building, the prevalent attitude is that building form and density have no impact or bearing on sociability or well-being.

Social isolation is not understood to be an issue

“I don’t know if it’s a new or big issue”

“I don’t know if it’s ‘serious’...I don’t actually know enough about it”

Developers feel that they have little influence over social connection

“The problem is, we only build buildings. And social is more than just a building. It’s the infrastructure and everything around it. I’m afraid I have to put that down to planners and the City partly to connect buildings”

Those without backgrounds in architecture are unlikely to believe high-rises affect well-being

“Apartments don’t isolate people more”

“I don’t think the building’s got nothing to do with it”

Social disconnection is accepted as the norm and left to the responsibility of individuals

“I find, as most people say, Vancouver isn’t a very social city”

“I think a lot of this comes down to the individual. If you make an effort to get out there...it’s circumstances and the individual. It’s how much they want to do. ‘I’m lonely’, well, do something about it”

Recommendations

Education & Advocacy

Education of the development and property management industry is imperative to raising awareness of the consequences of social disconnection and isolation in high-density buildings.

Building awareness and communication is possible through a variety of formal and informal means, from professional associations to direct engagement.

For example, there is an opportunity to advocate for change in existing property management licensing curriculum and professional development. Managers complained that courses are almost exclusively focused on tenancy law, with little attention paid to softer skills such as conflict resolution, relationship-building, or impact of design on health and happiness.

A variety of approaches, channels, partnerships and strategies is recommended for maximum effect.

What can the City do?

- **PARTNER** with stakeholders and organizations, including Vancouver Coastal Health and the Architecture Institute of BC, and other experts who do research at the intersection of public health and urban development, to develop a coherent body of knowledge and communication strategy.
- **ENGAGE** the industry through various professional associations, including:
Planning & Development: Urban Development Institute (UDI), Planning Institute of BC (PIBC), and the Real Estate Council of BC
Property Management: Landlord BC, Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), Professional Association of Managing Agents (PAMA), and Strata Property Agents of BC (SPABC)
- **ADVOCATE** for the inclusion of social sustainability curriculum in licensing and real estate programs at Sauder and Langara, as well as professional development courses for those already in the field.

The goal should be to legitimize social health and well-being as a development and planning issue

Inspiration

In 2006, the City of Toronto's **Lights Out** program started as a multi-partner campaign to make buildings more bird-friendly. It eventually led to the adoption of Bird-Friendly Development Guidelines and brought the issue to the attention of many North American cities, including Vancouver.



2 The industry doesn't always know what works & avoids unnecessary risks

Many developers are not sure why some buildings are more social than others. There is little to no user research or post-occupancy evaluation. It seems that decisions regarding amenity spaces, programming or developer-client interactions are often ad hoc and intuitive. Because of the sheer scale of investment involved, and therefore risk, new ideas don't emerge often. However, if new concepts work, they've been known to spread with relative speed and ease. But generally, development companies do things the way they've always been done and are not likely to expose themselves to the unnecessary risk of new or unproven ideas. Even though a few developers said they would know how to increase social connection, they could not give specific examples when pressed.

Developers move on quickly once a building has sold and don't acquire an intimate knowledge of what works and why

"As developers, when it's sold, we're out of there...the onus on community-building falls to the people living there."

"We see the building for such a small period of time generally"

Developers learn mostly through observation and anecdotal evidence

"Nothing too structured, it's more conversations with our property managers that we hire. Or things that we see other people doing that are interesting."

The industry is conservative and very risk-averse, so there is little incentive for creativity. New ideas trickle in slowly, often from other cities.

*"It's such a small town and 5 or 6 developers do 60% of the business. There's not a lot of new ideas. It's hard to do new ideas because the scale is so big. Hundreds of millions of dollars, you get one shot to do it and if you **** it up it's really expensive. That's why there's not a lot of creativity."*

"Because it's not like we're going to take the risk to do this and end up losing money, where no one else is going to do it and they're going to make more money and we're not going to be able to compete"

Recommendations

Knowledge Sharing

Because of the industry's conservative nature, developers are not likely to look outwards for new ideas, especially in an area they don't understand well, like social connection. They need the ideas to come to them.

There is an opportunity to capture ideas, both big and small, and share them during existing interactions with the City.

What can the City do?

- **HELP CAPTURE** and document various features and strategies developers and property managers are using and how well they are working.
- **SHARE** and disseminate ideas, even small ones, to developers during their interactions with the City, such as various points of the permitting process, to engender a culture of curiosity and solution-seeking.

Inspiration

At Concert Properties it has become an informal custom for the sales teams to introduce purchasers to their neighbours. The sales team gets quite well-acquainted with everyone moving into the building during the sales process, and when it comes time to handover keys, they're often moving in a few people at the same time, providing the perfect moment to introduce neighbours.

This is not a company policy, but an informal norm that has spread across the sales team, driven by the sales people themselves. It's a simple action during a opportune moment that other developers may overlook.

Setting the conditions for a more socially connected building extend beyond physical form and programming. Developers and property managers can set the tone in a variety of interactions with residents.

Examples of opportune moments for intervention:

- Key handover
- Showing of suites
- 1st strata meeting with developer & strata council formation
- Hiring security guards, concierges, buildings managers and other staff
- Strata annual general meetings

These are ordinary moments where an expectation or behaviour can be set or reset with a different kind of tool, role, prompt or script. They may seem insignificant, but interactions like this contribute to the overall culture of a building, and building culture is contagious.

3 Design matters & shared spaces in high-density developments are lacking

When it comes to designing and including amenities or other socially conducive elements, there is no record of tried and tested approaches, collection of best practices, shared understanding of what works or knowledge-sharing. Complaints that amenities in multi-unit buildings are underused are common. In our opinion, this can often be attributed to design and strict rules of access. This is especially case as more research points to how environments impact social interaction. It is, therefore, critical to put more thought and consideration into their design as units are being built smaller and smaller in buildings where inter-level access is restricted for reasons of safety and security—whether real or imagined. Access to meeting places and nature are vital to individual and community health and can be better integrated into high-density design.

There is no consensus on which amenities work or why or how they can be designed better

“[Buildings] don’t need to have amenities because they don’t work”

“Most buildings are the same. If you’re trying to do amenities, the gyms are always the busiest place. They’re the only thing that works.”

“Gyms are actually quite unsocial. You’re out of breath, you don’t really want to talk. So we do lounges. We’ve always put in a lounge.”

“Typically, the only amenities that we have found do find more use are rooms that are party rooms or lounges that people who maybe want to entertain a larger party...you book a room for exclusive use”

There is interest in exploring building more semi-private/semi-public spaces

“If a building could have more of a public face to it without losing the ability for the people to feel like they’re being infiltrated, those are way nicer environments and way cooler”

There is a feeling that regulations are so restrictive they can get in the way of possible solutions

“The biggest challenge is getting different ideas past City Engineering.”

“I think the ideas are good but if you look at the new building codes coming out, it operates in absolute opposition to that.”

“If they change the FSR exclusion around centralized lobbies and stairwells and stuff, there would be a lot more take up. But you’re not going to penalize yourself to do some of the stuff.”

“Sustainability, livability, interactive place-making...nobody disagree that those aren’t all great things but sometimes the prescriptive nature of the bureaucratic system of municipal government makes it difficult a lot of times to come up with innovative or unique solutions to solve some of those problems.”

Recommendations

Design Guidance

Because it is not their area of expertise and not yet common knowledge or practice, developers will need guidance and outside expertise to improve sociability in buildings.

Since denser dwellings are an inevitable part of Vancouver's growth, the City should aspire to ensure the highest quality environments possible. This may include long-term endeavors to align building and fire codes with other kinds of livability requirements.

What can the City do?

- **FACILITATE** and encourage cross-departmental collaboration to build shared understanding of needs and opportunities, as well as guide future actions.
- **SUPPORT** or conduct continued research into best practices for high-rise environments including the evaluation of current policies for shared spaces like lobbies, plazas and parks attached to residential towers, and Community Amenity Contributions.
- **ULTIMATELY DEVELOP** documents and/or policies like building guidelines that spread best practices, recommendations and tools for building environments that enhance rather than discourage social connection.
- **CO-DESIGN** recommendations and guidelines with developers, property managers and other industry professionals.

Developers appreciate help, guidance + direction

"If we could tap into the collective knowledge of property managers, stratas, everybody, and understand better what's used..."

"If they had guides, it is a good reference point, especially for architects. Guides and tools."

"Having someone you can go to that's an expert on it would be useful."

"If there was a more established base of knowledge we probably would all understand a bit more."

"My background is project management, architecture. I don't understand it enough myself—social connectedness and social planning. And I'm not alone."

3 Design matters & shared spaces in high-density developments are lacking

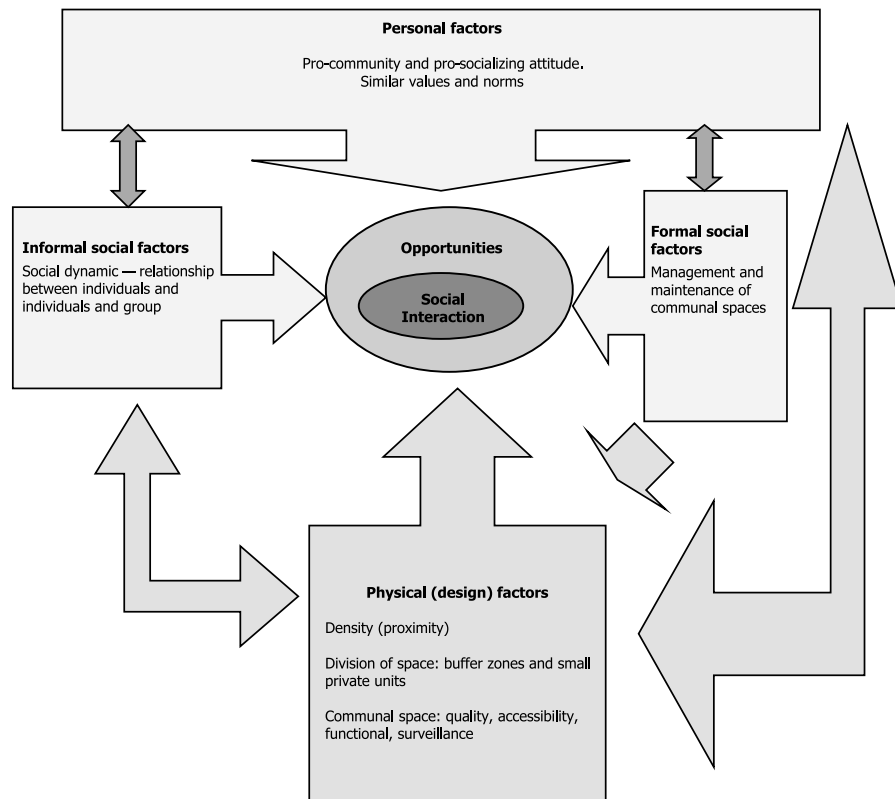


Fig 3. The interaction between design, personal and social factors in a co-housing community and its impact on social interaction

Lessons from Co-housing

Urban design researcher Jo Williams examined how design and other factors influence the levels and quality of social interactions in co-housing communities. Co-housing developments often already use social contact design principles, so she was able to measure and provide an interesting comparative analysis of specific design factors (some of which are

listed on the following page).

Her work illustrates (as exhibited by Fig. 3) that personal factors like attitudes, informal social factors like group dynamics and formal social factors, including decision-making, are all interconnected and influence social interaction.

The fourth factor, design, is shown to affect opportunities and “also directly influence social

interaction, attitude and social dynamic” (Williams, 2005, p.222).

She concludes that, “Design appears to be an important factor influencing social interaction in co-housing. Density (proximity) and layout, the division of public and private space and the quality, type and functionality of communal spaces appear to be the key design factors influencing

Design factors evaluated by Williams:

- Overall layout
- Opportunities for surveillance
- Presence of shared walkways
- Transition from private to public space
- Presence of semi-private space
- Types of communal spaces
- Quality of communal spaces
- Flexibility of communal spaces
- Suitability of communal spaces
- Accessibility of communal spaces

Various research cited by Williams has found that:

- Multi-story buildings can reduce social interaction and spontaneous activity because residents may feel “it is too bothersome to come down and go out”
- Semi-private space can increase social interaction by providing opportunities for spontaneous interaction and reducing feelings of overexposure to the same people by providing vital buffers
- Opportunities to simply see or hear neighbours outside of one’s home are conducive to social interaction
- “Communal spaces (indoor and outdoor) need to be good-quality, suitable for their use but at the same time flexible”
- Residents are more inclined to use communal spaces that can be shared between smaller groups

social interaction” (Williams, p.224-225).

Although conditions of co-housing cannot be simply imported or generalized to higher-density buildings that lack the same intentional cultures, some of the design principles seem transferable and could provide valuable insights and lessons into increasing human interactions.

“At extremely high densities, residents feel that they have less control over their social environment and are inclined to withdraw from the community”

4 The business case is tough to make in this real-estate market

We see the need and the myriad of benefits that can accrue from enhancing social connection in high-density buildings, but do developers and property managers? We found that the benefits are not well or easily understood. They're very difficult to quantify and they don't have a convincing enough 'return'. With low vacancy rates and a hot market, developers have no incentive to change the status quo or take any risks, especially in an area that is so unfamiliar to them.

The business case

We hypothesized that increased social connection and feelings of belonging might:

- Result in longer tenancies and reduce tenant turnover, saving owners time and money associated with tenant recruitment
- Give people a greater sense of community and shared responsibility, making a building easier to manage
- Increase neighbour co-operation and reduce the time managers spend mediating conflict
- Reduce vandalism and/or crime
- Differentiate and enhance a company's brand

Why it's not so strong

- Low vacancy rates mean owners and property managers are not expending a lot of time or money to attract tenants. Posting on Craigslist is free and they get more applicants than they can handle.
- This means that the cost of tenant turnover is negligible to most owners and managers. For some, turnover is, in fact, desirable given the provincial 2.9% annual rent increase cap. The opportunity to increase earnings can outweigh the inconvenience of looking for tenants or be necessary to keep pace with market prices and rising property taxes. Other owners/managers may prefer the stability of good, long-term tenants at the expense of higher earnings.
- Despite lacking ownership over units, vandalism in rentals is negligible and crime in buildings almost universally comes from outside of the building.
- Real-estate is in such high demand that differentiating one's brand is not a priority.
- Potential economic benefits come mostly in the management of a property, giving developers who sell no incentive to invest in social connection

Demand is so high, there is no incentive to do anything differently

“It’s difficult for developers to go this route. It’s a hard place to go. In a town like Vancouver where there is so much demand and there will continue to be so much demand for housing, you don’t need to do it. From an economic point of view, you’re really not doing it for money.”

Investment in community-building isn’t seen as having high economic returns, even by those who do it

“To be very honest, this program really is not a financial one. Internally, corporately, this is just sort of the style we like to have. It’s the interaction we like to have with our tenants...I would almost say [we] for sure—lose money doing this. From our perspective, this is not a moneymaker...This is our identity. We like to walk into our buildings and enjoy the people”

“People walk in and feel the positive karma. That’s the sell-ability you get. Not measurable. How do you measure positive karma? You don’t.”

The case of District Main

District Main did confirm some of our hypotheses

- Turnover *is* really low. Tenants primarily move out if/when they purchase their own home or move for work. Otherwise, they’re extremely satisfied with the building and community.
- Having a good reputation does help attract new tenants, “The word of mouth aspect is key.”

However, it also revealed some surprises

- The building manager, Lolly, didn’t think the building was easier to manage than other buildings. “I think people are people and I have the same issues in this building that other buildings that either aren’t managed or are poorly managed.” However, in comparison to what we heard in our conversations with other managers, it sounds like she has fewer problems.
- There can be a double-edged sword to social capital. Both the manager and developer noted that with a greater sense of community and a good tenant-owner relationship, tenants may feel so comfortable and entitled that they complain more liberally and more often than usual, making the administration of the building actually more complicated, rather than less so.

5 Property and building managers can be assets, allies and champions

Unlike developers, property and building managers are on the ground, interacting with residents day in, day out, long after a building has been built and sold. As a group, they see the benefits of greater social connection and are willing to support it, even if it's technically not part of their job description. In buildings where there's evidence of increased connection or a stronger sense of community, building managers have proven to be integral pieces of the puzzle. They often lead the efforts themselves, or heavily support the efforts of others. They have so much lived experience and knowledge. There's an opportunity to empower and support them more, as well as spread and scale the efforts of existing champions.

We learned that property and building managers:

- Recognize the need and value of healthy social connections in buildings.
- Are more open and willing to support increasing social connection, but without owner or strata endorsement, they don't have many resources at their disposal.
- Are supportive of resident-driven efforts but don't want them to increase their workload (e.g. cleaning up).
- Want to share and learn from others managers, but don't know who is doing what and have no means of connecting with them.
- Are unsure of where to find information (on rules, by-laws, block parties etc.), resources or support available for social programming.
- May be afraid or lack confidence when trying something new or unproven and be intimidated by bureaucratic layers like applications and permits.
- Are receptive and interested in resources, recommendations, tools or programming that could make it easier and take some of the guesswork out of trying to increase connection.
- Do not interface with the City much, other than to arrange garbage collection or report crimes.
- Those who do go out of their way to build community in their buildings find great personal satisfaction and meaning in a job that is otherwise driven by complaints and negative interactions.
- Are time-poor.

"If everyone would take on a little bit of this, it would be much better for people. I've come to understand that within the building, a point person to encourage things is integral."

- Lolly, District Main

Recommendations

Support & Spread

With so much tacit knowledge, property and building managers are an untapped resource of what works and doesn't work in buildings.

Some managers have consciously and subconsciously developed practices that facilitate greater interaction. It would be worthwhile to highlight those practices and to help spread them.

What can the City do?

- **BUILD** relationships with property managers. With direct access to so many of the City's residents, they can be valuable assets—for instance, in times of emergency—but they do not currently interface with the City.
- **COMMUNICATE** the benefit of social connection in a way that is relevant and matters to their work—directly and through professional associations.
- **SUPPORT** peer-to-peer learning and sharing of best practices. Consider engaging interdisciplinary groups that include developers, architects, strata council members, and city staff, to learn from champion building and property managers.

Qualities & actions of an exceptional building manager

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They know all the residents' names• They say 'Hi' to everyone• They encourage conversation, in the elevator, lobby, hallway, garden etc.• They are friendly (but firm, when it comes to building rules & protocols)• They are high-touch and very visible | <p>They might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Throw a holiday event or party• Find a reason to celebrate• Support residents' ideas financially or with their time• Introduce residents who may have things in common |
|---|--|

6 The City can be a champion and a leader

The private sector isn't likely to take on the responsibility of improving social connection in high-density buildings and neighbourhoods on its own. Developers don't have the expertise in designing for social sustainability or the incentive to do so, but their involvement is critical to long-term progress.

Without institutional support, advocacy, guidance and leadership, social connection may

never become priority in high-rise development.

However, with leadership, bureaucratic and political will, and multi-stakeholder partnership, human sociality can become just as important a development consideration as water use or GHG emissions.

Social connection is empirically proven to improve our individual and collective well-being. Why

can't we design for it?

Making high-rise building forms more conducive to social connection will be a longer term effort, but can be started immediately in a variety of ways. A summary of suggested recommendations and ideas to address key issues and opportunities highlighted by this study is provided below.

Theme	What the city can do
1. Lack of understanding of the issue 2. Ad hoc industry approach 5. Property managers as assets, allies & champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with like-minded organizations to build awareness & legitimize human connection as a development and planning issue • Engage the development and property management industry through formal associations and perhaps new arrangements • Capture, share & disseminate what is being done • Build relationships with property & building managers to spread & scale the work of existing champions
3. Design for social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop shared internal understanding across departments • Co-design recommendations, best practices & guidelines
6. City leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot programming in City-owned rentals • Consider city-wide initiative or event

Departments	Potential Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Communications • Social Development • Planning & Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy & Healthy Building Network • 'Hints for Happier Buildings'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Policy & Planning • Fire services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Livable Building Group • Design Guidelines for Human Happiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Special Events • Public Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hey Neighbour • Community Concierge • City-wide event, like Neighbour Day

Happy & Healthy Building Network

Perhaps it's time to broaden the definition of sustainable building. Just like the green building movement formed councils to educate and advocate for change, we might need more formal groups to push social well-being higher on the agenda.

What is it?

A multi-partner network that convenes, educates and engages the development, property management and real-estate community on the issues and opportunities of designing for increased human interaction.

It could...

- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning among through workshops, job shadowing and fieldtrips between buildings.
- Organize tours for developers, building managers, architects and planners to showcase good practices (as well as mistakes) and learn through first-hand experience.
- Build an online catalogue or portal that collects and showcases best practices and lessons learned

Possible partners

- Vancouver Coastal Health
- Architecture Institute of BC
- UDI, BOMA, Real Estate Council of BC, Landlord BC, PAMA, SPABC
- UBC & SFU

Things to test

1. **Target audience:** Who would the network engage first? Which sector of the industry? Which level of management—executive, mid-level or front-line? What possibilities could a blend of participants open up?
2. **Value proposition & motivation:** Who is voluntarily attracted to? Who's not? Why? How can we use that insight to engage more people? The right people? Who is the right audience?
3. **Engagement model:** Are developers and managers actually willing to share and teach their peers for the greater good?
4. **Scripts:** Which recruiting angles work better than others? What are people hearing? Which aspect of the issues and/or opportunities get people excited?
5. **Roles:** Who would organize the network's activities? Could leaders come from within the various sectors?



Hints for Happier Buildings

Changes don't have to be big or cost a lot of money. Small modifications to existing practices can slowly begin to change a building's culture and create new, more sociable norms.

What is it?

An easy-to-digest collection of material like guides and short videos for developers, property and building managers and strata councils that highlight small interventions that can foster greater interaction.

Materials could cover everything from physical adaptations in buildings to client interactions and residents relationships.

It could...

- Be an early, low engagement touchpoint that begins to raise awareness in the industry
- Be disseminated through professional associations and/or key municipal interactions
- Visually show what one could do differently to change culture



Possible partners

- Architecture Institute of BC
- UDI, BOMA, Real Estate Council of BC, Landlord BC, PAMA, SPABC
- Real-estate marketing agencies

Things to test

1. **Props & Materials:** Would short guides and videos generate any engagement or interest? Would they be believable? Would it give them more legitimacy if they seemed to be coming from peers?
2. **Channels:** Would it matter where the materials came from? When and where might there be opportune moments to share and use them?
3. **Value proposition:** Which arguments for investing in social interaction are most appealing? Believable? And why?

Idea to prototype:

Design Guidelines for Human Happiness

Vancouver has a strategy and design guidelines for bird-friendly buildings, why aren't their guidelines for human happiness and well-being?

What is it?

Comprehensive municipal building guidelines that put the human experience of buildings and environments at the center.

Ultimately, the goal of such guidelines would be to bring human well-being and experience up to the level of importance as more technical considerations like fire safety and energy efficiency.

It could...

- Begin as a checklist and/or set of recommendations
- Be co-designed with developers and architects
- Start small and be piloted on single buildings or blocks, and be monitored to evaluate impact
- Support the ongoing creation of more form-based codes

Possible partners

- Architecture Institute of BC
- Planning Institute of BC
- UDI
- Healthy built environment experts

Things to test

1. **System context:** How would this fit in with existing guidelines, codes and mandates?
2. **Value proposition:** Which barriers would have to be removed or what kind of incentives would need to be offered to steer developers? Would such guidelines make sense for the City?
3. **Roles:** Who would champion the development and implementation of such guidelines within the City?





Paper Prototypes

Paper prototypes, or mock-ups, are low-fidelity (unfinished and not fully detailed) examples of a proposed service or product that allow you to test desirability and usability with potential users. They allow you to test ideas and assumptions quickly and cheaply without having to fully realize and execute the final concept.

How to use Paper Prototypes

You can use mock-ups to test a variety of concept elements, ranging from a small design feature to key elements of a business model.

For example, you can:

- Test the value proposition of an idea (the reason why it provides a benefit or solves a need) with sample communication materials like an ad, poster or brochure advertising the concept *Does the user understand the concept? Are they excited about it? Do they want to use it or participate?*
- Test whether a user would know how to use your product or service and whether the process is effective. For example, if you're recruiting and training volunteers, you can test to see whether they would know what to do at every step of the recruitment or training process. *Are the steps obvious and clear? Or do they require the user to do too much work? Ask users to articulate back to you what they're doing or learning and why. Does it align with your intentions?*
- If part of your idea involves educating or raising awareness, test whether or not the way your concept is executed achieves the desired outcome. *Test different kinds of messaging, which ones are more interesting and effective, and why? Is your delivery method working, are there other ones you could try? What are users taking away?*

Happy + Healthy Building Network



Learning Event poster

We found that there isn't much formal or informal knowledge-sharing in Vancouver's development industry and also heard that property managers are interested in learning from each other.

What if there was a series of fieldtrips to exceptional buildings that showcases lessons and best practices?

With this poster you could test:

- Whether developers, managers, architects and other stakeholders are attracted to such an event and why or why not?
- What is attractive about the idea? What do people expect to get out of it?
- Is the tone working? What other kinds of messaging might be necessary to appeal to your target audience?

Hey Neighbour!

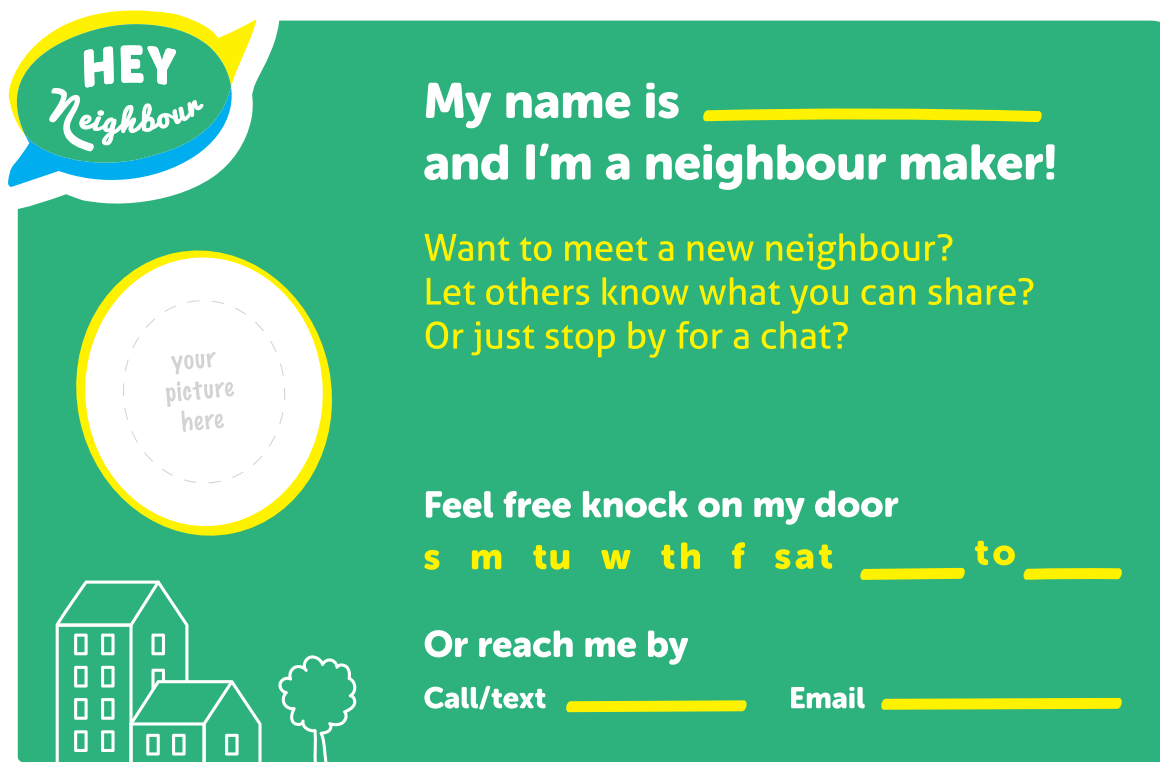


Different kinds of recruitment posters

In addition to engaging private sector stakeholders, pilots like the Ask Lauren Community Concierge and other grassroots efforts show that there is an opportunity to engage residents themselves. A program like Hey Neighbour—where residents opt-in and volunteer to be building hosts—can tap into the energy and willingness of residents who want to positively affect their buildings but may need a little support or structure to get them going.

With a handful of materials, you can test:

- If residents are attracted to the idea. Who are they and what kinds of qualities do they have? Why are they interested? This can help you better target your recruitment efforts.
- If the purpose and mission of Hey Neighbour is getting across. Do potential volunteers have similar or different reasons for wanting to get involved?
- What do potential volunteers think a host does? What kinds of activities are they willing/able to commit to?



HEY
Neighbour


My name is _____
and I'm a neighbour maker!

Want to meet a new neighbour?
Let others know what you can share?
Or just stop by for a chat?

your
picture
here

Feel free knock on my door
s m tu w th f sat _____ to _____

Or reach me by
Call/text _____ Email _____



Sample sign a host might post outside their door



HEY
Neighbour

I'm _____
I live next door in:

If you ever want/need:

**Just
knock!**

A neighbour-to-neighbour exchange card

Precedents

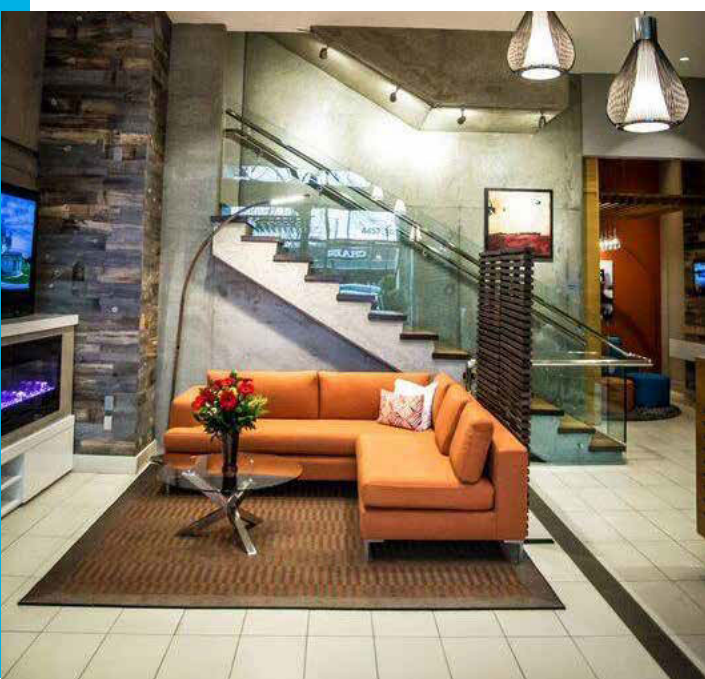
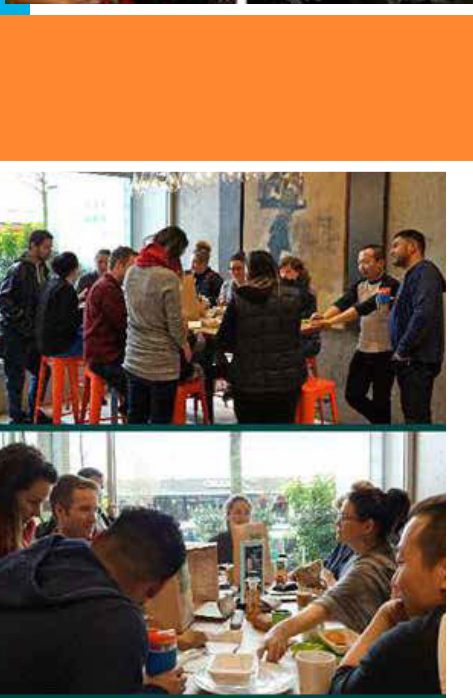
A little inspiration never hurt anyone. On the following pages, we highlight local and international examples of cities, companies and people trying to build community, increase social connection or influence the conditions for cultivating them both.

A wonderful inventory was started in the City's 2014 "Building Neighbourhood Social Resilience" report. We hope to build on this inventory by covering some new areas and describing in greater detail the specific actions and activities undertaken to realize the programs or interventions described.

Examples include

- Exceptional local buildings & projects
- Institution-led policy
- Technology
- City-wide events
- Innovative building forms & housing models

Opposite Page:
Events, gatherings and shared
spaces at District Main



District Main

Probably the most social building in Vancouver, the community at District Main is the product of a proactive and engaged building manager and a company that believes in fostering connections to people and place, because it's who they are.

About

You feel it the moment walk in the door. People you've never met say 'Hello' and chat briefly on their way out to walk their dogs or get their morning cup of coffee. Something is different, and it's palpable.

Kevington Building and the District Main property manager, Lolly Benett, have managed to do something quite special. They've created and fostered a genuine sense of belonging and community in a rental building.

This building shows what's possible when a culture of sociability, friendliness and participation is fostered by leadership and management.

The majority of residents are between the ages of 25-40, with the exception of a few seniors, and approximately sixty per cent of suites are occupied by couples.

Site:	4453 Main St, Vancouver
Site type:	Mid-rise, mixed-use, market rental, 79 units
Team:	1 on-site building manager
When:	Ongoing



“I host parties on the patio so residents can become acquainted with one another... because you can only access the floor you live on, so how are you going to know your neighbour? This is the place to see your other neighbours. That's why I host”

-Lolly Benett, Building Manager

“We do it because we think it needs to be done”

- Joe Khalifa, Development Manager
Kevington Building

What does it look like on the ground?

Key Activities

- 3 big functions per year: Pumpkin Carve, Spring Fling & Summer Gala
- Hosting ‘The Mix’, a weekly coffee mixer on Saturday mornings held in the lobby
- Communicating to residents via Facebook, Twitter, in-building PowerPoint displays & a monthly newsletter
- Supporting resident ideas and activities like: games nights, outdoor movies, Christmas tree decorating contest

Props/Materials

- Food & beverage
- Decorations
- Patio & lobby furniture

Setting

- Lobby
- Patio garden

Results

STRONG sense of community, evidenced by friendships, residents helping each other and self-organizing, and high levels of social interaction

Cost:

- Comes out of monthly residential budget: \$1,000 (Lolly says she never uses the full amount)

Thoughts, Observations & Questions

- What if property manager’s ideas and activities were captured and shared with other interested managers?
- What if managers and companies who believe cultivating connections ‘isn’t their job’ were able to witness what success feels like?
- How might these principles and features fare in less homogenous buildings or condos where resident mix is less curated?
- What if features like these become yet another luxury commodity, and access to more socially connected environments is determined by one’s wealth? How might we promote more inclusive adoption across buildings for all kinds of demographics?
- What if it became the norm for new developments to include an endowment or budget for social programming?

Howe St High-Rise

An increasingly more social building where efforts to build community are being driven by its on-site building manager. In 2015, the manager organized a successful music festival and the building's first Christmas party.

About

After major renovations had been completed to his building, this Howe St. manager started looking for his next project and found it in a community music festival. For never having done anything like this, the manager successfully organized a large-scale event with many pieces and stakeholders. The building was host to a day long, multi-venue music festival featuring musicians from inside and outside the building. The event was also open to the public.

It has now become his mission to increase the happiness of residents in his building by increasing social connections.

“It costs nothing. It cost \$160,000 to paint the building and that doesn’t change anything (maybe curb appeal). But if for \$1,000 you can change the lives of the people living in the building, why wouldn’t you?”

- Building Manager

Site:	Howe St (address confidential, for privacy)
Site type:	Mid 1990s condominium tower, 185 units 2/3rds rental, 1/3rd owner-occupied
Team:	1 on-site building manager 12 resident volunteers (6 key, 6 support)
When:	August + December 2015



What did it look like on the ground?

Key Activities

- Pitching idea to the strata council for approval & support
- Planning and coordinating volunteers and all details of the festival
- Inquiring to City about amplified music in the street and liquor licensing
- Liaising with participating neighbouring business
- Inviting residents & neighbours buildings

Props/Materials

- PA system
- 4 venues and 'stages'
- 12 musical performers
- Security guard

Setting

- Building garden, neighbouring pub, cafe and restaurant

"I don't know anyone in Vancouver. I don't even know anyone in the building and now I have friends"

- Resident

Results

100+ Residents attended

Glowing feedback from residents and strata council, and a commitment by to support a bigger and better the festival in 2016

Cost:

- Music festival: \$2,000, most of which was used to pay honorariums to performers
- Donated: appetizer's by participating businesses
- Christmas party: \$1,000
- Funding was approved and included in the strata's budget

Thoughts, Observations & Questions

- The building manager is a champion who wants to share his story with other buildings. What if people like him were empowered to inspire others with a bit of support?
- Barriers to hosting similar events can be reduced by the City and communicated more clearly.
- Applying for funding can be an intimidating process and too big a barrier for someone trying something new. Without other sources of funding, resident or manager-driven efforts may not come to fruition. What if there were temporary or one-time funds specifically earmarked for social programming in high-rises?
- What if sample strata by-law and constitution templates that budget for social programming were made available as resource for managers and councils?

Ask Lauren

A temporary pilot of a volunteer Community Concierge role that welcomed and connected apartment building residents with the neighbourhood, and each other.

About

Initiated by four CityStudio students, the Ask Lauren project arose out of a desire to address the finding that 1/3rd of Vancouverites find it difficult to make friends and the students' own experiences of social isolation in apartment buildings.

With City support, the group was able to develop connections in the West End with community planners, the Executive Director of the Gordon Neighbourhood House and a representative from Westbank (the developer of The Lauren) which is across the street from the neighbourhood house.

After gathering input from stakeholders, the group decided to run a short 'Community Concierge' trial and finish with a 'Welcome to Neighbourhood' Party, which was generously supported by Westbank.

The students acted as Community Concierges for 50 hours over the course of 1 week and finished off by throwing the welcome party at the Neighbourhood House, where residents were encouraged to meet and mingle with their new neighbours.

Upon completion, they published a toolkit with tips and tricks for citizens who are interested in starting a Community Concierge in their building.

Site:	The Lauren – 1051 Broughton St, Vancouver
Site type:	New market rental
Team:	4 student volunteers
When	Fall 2014
Duration:	50 hours over 7 days



What did it look like on the ground?

Key Activities

- Opening main building doors and welcoming residents as they entered and exited the building
- Occupying a Concierge table in teams of 2 per shift
- Asking and getting to know residents' names
- Facilitating introductions
- Planning + executing a welcome party
- Liaising with building management

Props/Materials

- Table + 2 chairs
- 'Ask Lauren' buttons to identify Concierge
- Simple, consistent colour coordinated outfits that acted as 'uniforms'

Setting

- Main building lobby
- Welcome party: Gordon Neighbourhood House

Results

70% Building attendance to resident welcome party

96% of residents surveyed wanted to see Community Concierge continue

67% of residents surveyed had met at least 1 other resident through the Community Concierge

Cost:

- Concierge needs: \$70
- Welcome party: \$2,000
Included food and alcohol, provided by Westbank
- Donated: party venue & DJ by Gordon Neighbourhood House

Thoughts, Observations & Questions

- The concept seems worth prototyping further. Could residents be recruited to act as Concierges? Or is it better for the Concierge to not be a resident?
- Perhaps a pool of volunteers (seniors & retirees who would like to socialize or students wanting to practice English) could be trained up and dispatched to buildings
- What if potential and/or new volunteers were paired with more experienced ones for support?
- Materials like the toolkit and How-to Guide would need to be expanded, improved and made more user-friendly if they are to be disseminated

Singapore Housing Development Board

As the largest housing provider in Singapore, the Housing Development Board (HDB) has set out in search of ways to increase social connection, community ties and neighbourliness through a variety of institutionally-led means.

About

The HDB has set high goals for itself to improve livability of its housing stock, not only through structural means, but social ones as well. Its 'Roadmap for Better Living in HDB Towns' lays out the following priorities:

- Sustainable Towns
- Well-designed Towns
- Community-centric towns

The HDB model is a prescient example for Vancouver, showing that good design and social sustainability can and should be prioritized as the city grows.

Key Activities

- In 2009, formed a Community Relations Group to look into nurturing stronger communities
- Launched and supported the SHINE movement (SHaring In NEighbourliness), which included Good Neighbour awards and a rather successful SHINE card (an acts of kindness campaign)
- In 2012, launched city-wide Community Week to strengthen ties between neighbours
- Developed 'Roadmap for Better Living in HDB Towns'
- Strengthened professional partnerships by forming HDB Architectural Design Panel with professionals and HDB staff and tapping into academic institutions.

“We will further increase our focus on the ‘people’ factor. The level and quality of social interactions help determine the kind of people and society we become.”



Nextdoor

“Nextdoor is the private social network for you, your neighbors and your community. It’s the easiest way for you and your neighbors to talk online and make all of your lives better in the real world. And it’s free.”

About

Technological solutions, especially trendy apps, deserve to be met with a certain amount of skepticism. Though it’s no magic bullet, Nextdoor does appear to be successfully connecting neighbours online and off.

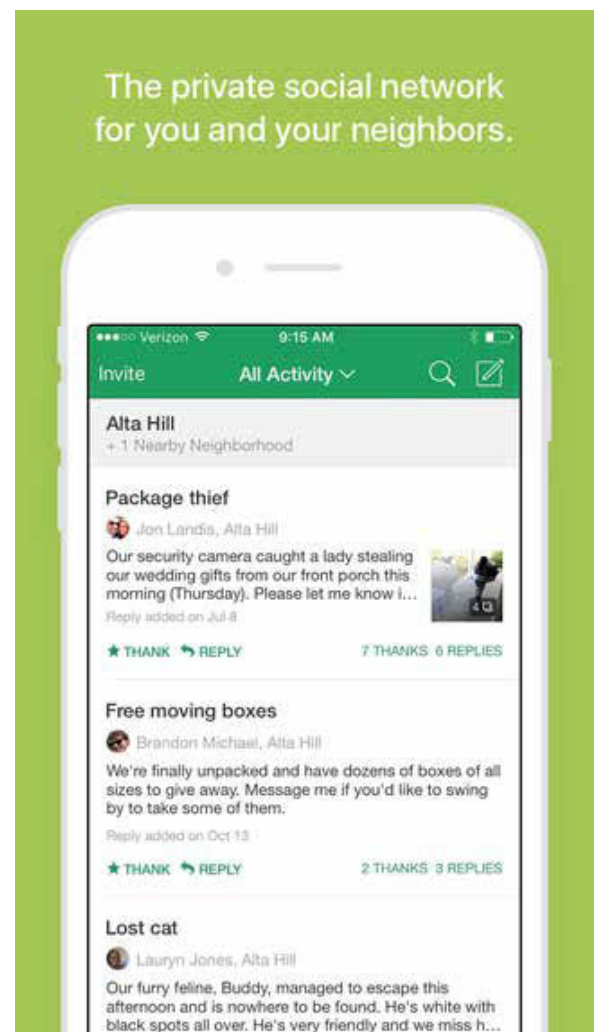
Available in over 96,000 neighbourhoods across the U.S. and just launched in the Netherlands, Nextdoor seems to have staying power and a strong team behind it to grow and become more useful.

The app uses private place-bound mini-networks, and gives users access to their neighbourhood network after they verify their real name and address.

There are many positive reviews and user stories being shared on the Nextdoor Facebook page and it might be a useful out-of-the-box solution for the City to explore adopting.

Has been used to

- Notify neighbours of crime, emergencies (like toxic fires) and other urgent alerts
- Organize offline meet-ups, garage sales
- Share local events, free stuff, and services
- Rescue lost pets
- Offer snow-shoveling help during storms
- Collect & up-cycle unused paint
- Start food co-ops and more...



What if the City of Vancouver partnered with Nextdoor to be the first pilot city in Canada?

StreetFeast

A national, volunteer-run day of neighbourhood lunches in public spaces across Ireland.

About

StreetFeast is a national day of neighbourhood lunches across Ireland that was started by volunteers in 2010 to promote communities, local food and sustainability. The public messaging is simpler than that, however—"It's just a great excuse to eat great food, celebrate your local community and meet people who live near you".

Key Features

- Well-designed brand, website and communication materials
- Options to 'Run' or 'Find' a Feast
- Interactive map showing locations of registered Feasts
- In 2016, early registrants will receive a 'Party Pack' to support their efforts (details of contents unavailable at this time).
- Links and tips to find support funding. In 2016, there is specific support from foundations to host 'community parties'.
- Closer to the date, tips and a toolkit are provided for aspiring hosts. They are easy-to-follow, user-friendly and well-designed.
- Official partnership and support from local councils

Lessons for Vancouver

- Due to their sporadic timing and dispersed but hyper-local nature, Block Parties in Vancouver don't have much city-wide visibility and can feel like one-off events
- Perhaps in addition to the Block Party model, a dedicated day or week, like StreetFeast or other city and neighbourhood festivals, can provide a galvanizing point to build energy, awareness, momentum and celebration
- If successful, such an event can have a movement-like feel and/or build a sense of tradition, giving people a specific and reliable vision to look forward to every year (e.g. the Celebration of Light, Polar Bear Swim etc.).



[About](#) [News](#) [Press](#) [FAQ](#) [Gallery](#) [Find a Feast](#) [Run a Streetfeast](#)



A lovely lunch with your neighbours on **12th June 2016**

REALLY HAPPY MEALS

Street Feast is a day of local lunches across Ireland on 12th June, hosted by you and your neighbours. They can be anywhere really — out on the street, in a local park or in your front garden.

There are lots of good reasons to have a Street Feast, but it's really just a great excuse to eat great food, celebrate your local community and meet new people who live near you.

HOST A FEAST! GO TO ONE



NEWS

- Get funding for your Street Feast
- Street Feast 2016
- Capturing the magic!
- Street feast 2015 is nearly upon us!
- The Sun has finally arrived!

[more news](#)

GALLERY



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New Building & Living Types



Commonspace, Syracuse, NY

Co-living for lonely millennials

From their website: "Commonspace is a new way of living, working and making human connections. It is no less than revolutionary in its simplicity, but perfectly aligned with the human spirit. We are all social creatures, and the best versions of ourselves are expressed when we do so in a group."

This new co-living development will feature 21 micro-units of 300 square feet, each with a tiny kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living space. The micro-units surround shared common areas including a chef's kitchen, games room, and a TV room. "Community Managers" will facilitate group events and maintain harmony among residents.



The Collective, London

Co-living in a city with a housing crisis

The Collective is a property management and development company that has gone beyond traditional service offerings and ventured into packaging a complete rental lifestyle. Targeted at young professionals, it offers studio bedrooms with access to many shared amenities. Old Oak, its flagship new property to be completed May 2016 will feature 10,000 sq-ft of shared spaces and facilities including kitchens and lounges on every floor, communal entertainment spaces, a gym, spa, cinema room, library, restaurant, bar, retail, event spaces, roof terraces and more. Community managers will be in charge of putting on programming like events, talks and other entertainment. Rooms range from £250-340 per week across The Collective's properties. Affordable by local standards, London's sky-high prices and housing supply shortage is particularly squeezing young people out of the city and might provide a glimpse of what Vancouver will face in the near future.





Key Activities

- Property acquisition through partnerships
- Organizing logistics and management of repairs, utility and food payments
- Facilitating the social cohesion of co-living properties (e.g. through house social agreements)
- Curating and selecting residents
- Using an array of online tools to communicate with houses and residents
- Educating new members on expectations and systems

OpenDoor Development, San Francisco

Social connection-driven housing

OpenDoor is redefining what a real-estate company does, what their relationships with tenants look like and what a home can provide. They value the environmental and social benefits of sharing and aim to foster and scale socially connected community living.

The 3 properties in their portfolio have varied amenities—like music rooms and backyard chicken coops—house themes and a curated mix of tenants to ensure the communities gel. Residents range from average ages of 25-35, include couples and singles, and people from varied personal and professional backgrounds.

Challenges & Obstacles

- Educating and partnering with developers to build larger, purpose-built co-living buildings
- A housing type that doesn't fit neatly existing prescriptive zoning policy
- Being limited to properties that are grandfathered under particular multi-tenant rental definitions
- Not being understood by banks
- Advocating for policy change to create a more positive definition of co-living

Hunziker Areal

A new affordable neighbourhood in the suburbs of Zurich that incorporates many unique and innovative features for a environmentally and socially sustainable community.

About

Built by the non-profit housing provider mehr als wohnen ("More than living") on a redeveloped brownfield site, Hunziker Areal is a progressive urban development that was built with environmental and social sustainability in mind. In addition to implementing 2000 Watt Society principles and many energy-saving and carbon-reducing technologies, it has a numerous social features and works explicitly to harbour a culture of participation among residents.



Key Features

- 13 buildings, each with different apartment types and residential mixes, set among parks and open space
- 10 "Allemand" or communal rooms spread across the neighbourhood, plus shared gardens and terraces, a community workshop and a quiet room
- Satellite apartments, a new communal building and apartment type featuring 8-12 bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms and shared space and facilities
- A required pay-what-you-can contribution into a community fund for social and cultural projects that is managed by an elected committee
- A commitment to contribute to community life is considered upon leasing to new tenants
- A car-free requirement



Floorplan of a 9-person Satellite apartment

Semi-Private/Semi-Public Spaces

Via6, Seattle

Two storey publicly-accessible mezzanine

From the outside, Via6 in Seattle looks no different than a common podium-tower development in Vancouver. However, on the inside it features a vibrant, open-concept semi-public/semi-private two storey mezzanine with meeting spaces, lounges, a cafe, bar, bike shop, gaming area and light retail in a market space called Assembly Hall.



Nikkei Place, Burnaby

Where senior residents and the public mix

In the ground floor of Nikkei Place Senior's Home, there is a Japanese restaurant, Hi Genki, that cooks meals for the Home's residents and is also open to the public. It is regarded as successful example of mixing public and private space. Not only is it a popular restaurant and destination in it's own right, but it injects the Home with the energy and variety of changing customers.



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Precedents

Ask Lauren - <http://citystudiovancouver.com/ts/ask-lauren/>

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www.Streetfeast.ie

www.commonspace.io

www.thecollective.co.uk

www.opendoor.io

www.via6seattle.com

www.hunzikerareal.ch

Images

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