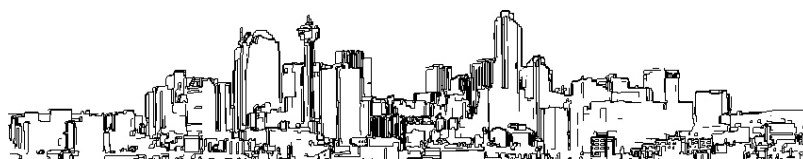Devika Thatte
Dhananjay Yadav
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BUILDING BETTER NEIGHBOURHOODS

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Cities, Policy & Planning
research series

BUILDING BETTER NEIGHBOURHOODS

A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE INFILL HOUSING

Devika Thatte
Dhananjay Yadav
Sasha Tsenkova

ALBERTA
REAL ESTATE
FOUNDATION

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE,
PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE

Executive Summary

This report outlines a strategic framework for advancing sustainable infill housing in Calgary, with the goal of fostering complete, inclusive, and vibrant neighborhoods. Grounded in the principles of Compact, Inclusive, and Connected communities, the strategy responds to the growing demand for diverse and attainable housing options in established urban areas.

Compact neighborhoods emphasize efficient land use by integrating residential, commercial, and community amenities in close proximity. The strategy promotes effective density through walkable, mixed-use development and encourages adaptable building types such as apartments over shops or flexible work-live units that can respond to changing needs.

Inclusive neighborhoods focus on equity and diversity. This means expanding housing choices for residents across income levels and life stages, and ensuring accessibility for all, regardless of age, ability, or background. Inclusive planning aims to support social integration, cultural identity, and long-term housing stability.

Connected neighborhoods are designed around strong multimodal transportation networks that link homes to services, transit, and public spaces. Walkable street grids, integrated green infrastructure, and easy access to daily amenities reduce car dependency and foster both community well-being and environmental sustainability.

The report also reviews current literature addressing the challenges of missing middle housing and offers a guide to gentle neighborhood densification. It concludes with an analysis of eight case studies, each highlighting a different typology that contributes to increasing housing supply while reinforcing the principles of compact, inclusive, and connected urban development.

Contents

1. Introduction

Calgary is at a critical moment in its urban development trajectory. Rapid population growth, rising housing costs, and shifting demographics have highlighted the need for more diverse and attainable housing options. While much of the city remains dominated by single-detached homes and high-rise towers, the gap between these two extremes - the "missing middle"- remains underdeveloped.

This report explores strategies for sustainable infill housing that can fill this gap. By identifying and supporting a range of mid-density housing forms - such as duplexes, fourplexes, townhouses, and lane-oriented developments - the city can increase its housing supply without compromising neighborhood character. This approach is about more than density; it is about creating vibrant, inclusive communities where people of different backgrounds and life stages can live, work, and thrive.

Drawing from the UN-Habitat "My Neighbourhood" framework and informed by local context, this report outlines a strategic direction based on three interconnected principles: Compact, Inclusive, and Connected neighborhoods. These principles guide the selection of housing prototypes and the planning tools proposed in this report.

1.1 Vision

"We envision complete neighbourhoods where people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds can live affordably in walkable, connected communities—made possible through thoughtful infill and middle housing innovation."

1.2 Strategy
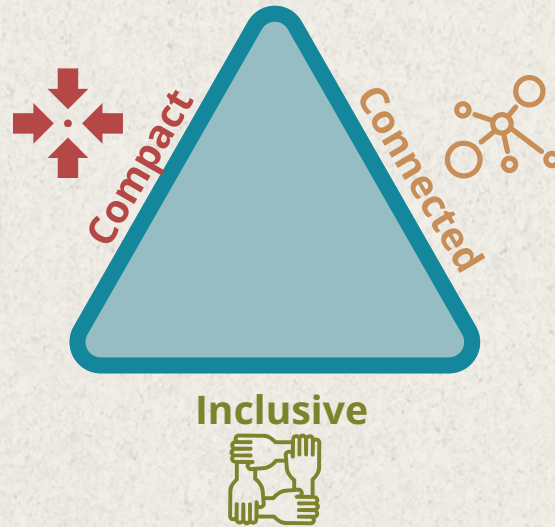
The foundation of this strategy is built on three key principles that inform how infill development can contribute to complete and livable neighborhoods:

Compact Neighborhoods
These neighborhoods make efficient use of land by integrating housing, amenities, and transportation within a walkable distance. They support gentle density and mixed land use, allowing more people to live in vibrant, low-rise communities without the need for high-rise expansion.

Inclusive Neighborhoods
Inclusivity means providing housing choices that are accessible and affordable for a range of household types, income levels, and abilities. These neighborhoods allow people to stay in their communities as their needs change, fostering diversity and social resilience.

Connected Neighborhoods
Connectedness is about proximity and access. A well-connected neighborhood links homes to transit, services, parks, and public spaces through safe, walkable, and multimodal networks. These connections support health, sustainability, and community interaction.

Together, these principles create a roadmap for infill housing that enhances quality of life, responds to diverse housing needs, and builds a stronger, more adaptable city.

2. Literature Review

This strategy is informed by three key sources: Making the Case for the Middle by the Canadian Urban Institute (2023), the Gentle Density Housing Bylaw Guide by Small Housing (2025), and UN-Habitat's My Neighbourhood framework (2023). Together, these documents provide a strong conceptual and implementation foundation for enabling missing middle housing and supporting neighborhood transformation in Calgary.

Making the Case for the Middle: CUI + MDDL (2023)
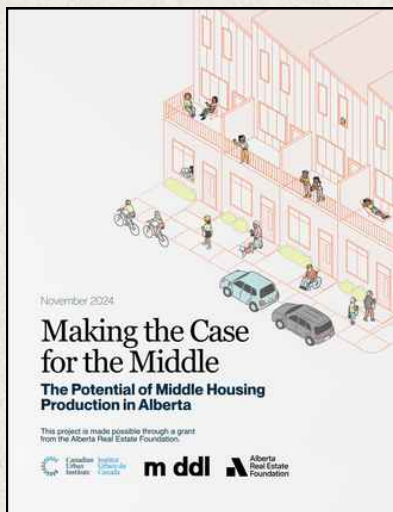
This report investigates the potential for middle housing—such as duplexes, triplexes, courtyard apartments, and laneway homes—to address Alberta's growing housing crisis. To restore housing affordability to early 2000s levels, the province requires an estimated 20,000 new housing units by 2030. Missing middle typologies are identified as a scalable and context-sensitive solution to meet this demand.

The report highlights that while zoning reform (such as the elimination of single-detached zoning) is critical, it must be complemented by enabling mechanisms such as streamlined approvals, design flexibility, and financial incentives. Calgary's 2024 city-wide rezoning initiative and Edmonton's Infill Roadmap (2018) are cited as leading examples of policy action.

The report also emphasizes the importance of strategic communication and community engagement to overcome opposition to increased density. Messaging that focuses on "modest homes" and intergenerational living has proven effective in shifting public perception. Initiatives in Oregon and Alberta show that inclusive, equity-driven engagement is essential for building support.

Citizen-led development plays a key role in delivering small-scale, incremental infill. Approaches such as converting existing homes into triplexes or adding laneway suites are seen as viable "Missing Little" interventions. However, financial feasibility remains a barrier, with challenges such as high land costs, rigid codes, and limited access to financing. The report advocates for modular construction, pre-approved designs, and relaxed regulations to improve affordability and implementation.

CUI supports these findings through four case studies:
- Edmonton's Infill Roadmap (2018): Community-informed actions to enable low-impact density.
- Calgary's Blanket Rezoning (2024): A regulatory overhaul supported by strategic engagement.
- Airdrie's Housing Accelerator Fund: Fast-tracking 900 units through zoning simplification.
- Missing Little (School of Cities): Promoting basement and laneway conversions as incremental density.

Key barriers to implementation include restrictive zoning, aesthetic concerns, financial constraints, and skilled labor shortages. The report recommends city-wide regulatory reform, design guidance, incentives, and sustained public engagement to support long-term success

Gentle Density Housing Bylaw Guide: Small Housing (2025)
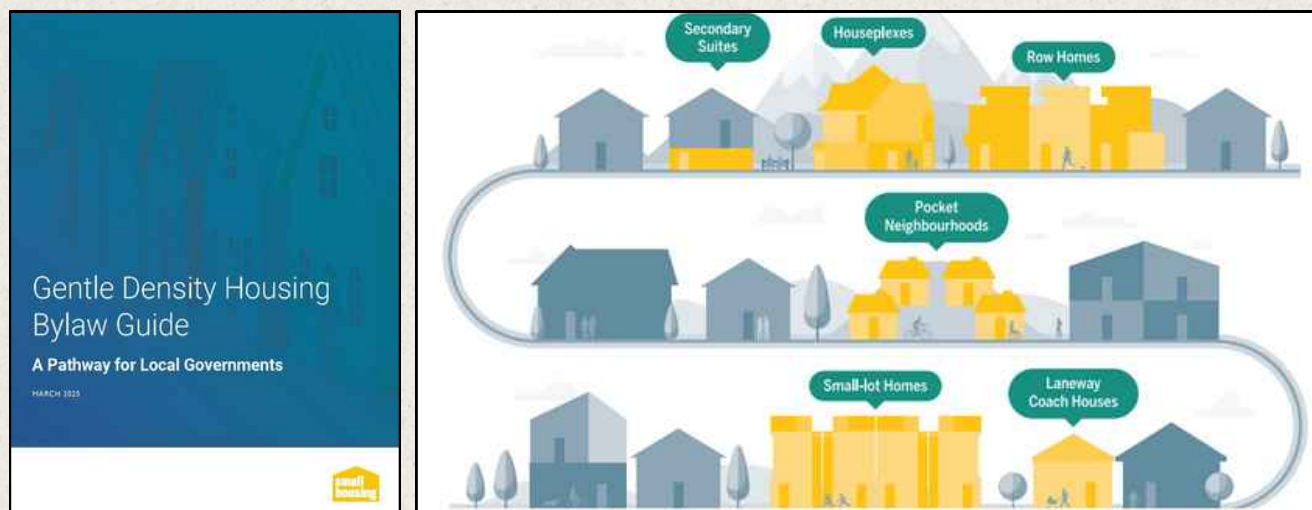
This guide offers a practical, step-by-step approach for municipalities to implement gentle density policies through zoning reforms. Supported by CMHC, it responds to rising housing costs, constrained land supply, and dominant single-detached zoning by proposing low-impact infill solutions in existing neighborhoods.

Gentle density is defined as modest increases in housing through forms like secondary suites, laneway homes, small multiplexes, and co-living spaces. These housing types optimize existing infrastructure, reduce commute lengths, and support climate action goals.

The guide outlines key benefits:
- Cost-efficient infrastructure expansion
- Increased supply and housing choice
- Reduced carbon emissions from shorter commutes
- Support for multigenerational and flexible living arrangements

The implementation framework includes:
- Defining local housing goals
- Engaging the community to build trust and address concerns
- Assessing zoning and infrastructure capacity
- Developing housing concepts and supportive bylaws
- Monitoring outcomes and adjusting policies

Local governments can choose between creating new gentle density zones, modifying existing ones, or launching comprehensive zoning reviews. The guide encourages municipalities to tailor approaches based on local capacity and conditions.

It also provides strategies to manage public concerns such as parking, tree loss, infrastructure strain, and changes to neighborhood character. By emphasizing that redevelopment is voluntary and incremental, the guide helps reframe density as a choice, not a mandate.

Supporting assessments—such as housing needs studies, infrastructure capacity reviews, and development potential modeling—are recommended to ensure context-sensitive implementation. Regulatory guidance includes updates to permitted uses, building height, setbacks, parking requirements, subdivision rules, and heritage/tree protections.

To streamline approvals, the guide advocates for pre-approved plans, density bonuses, fee waivers, and alignment with transit or climate policy. It also calls for continuous monitoring and community reporting to ensure accountability and adaptive management.

UN-Habitat "My Neighbourhood" Framework (2023)
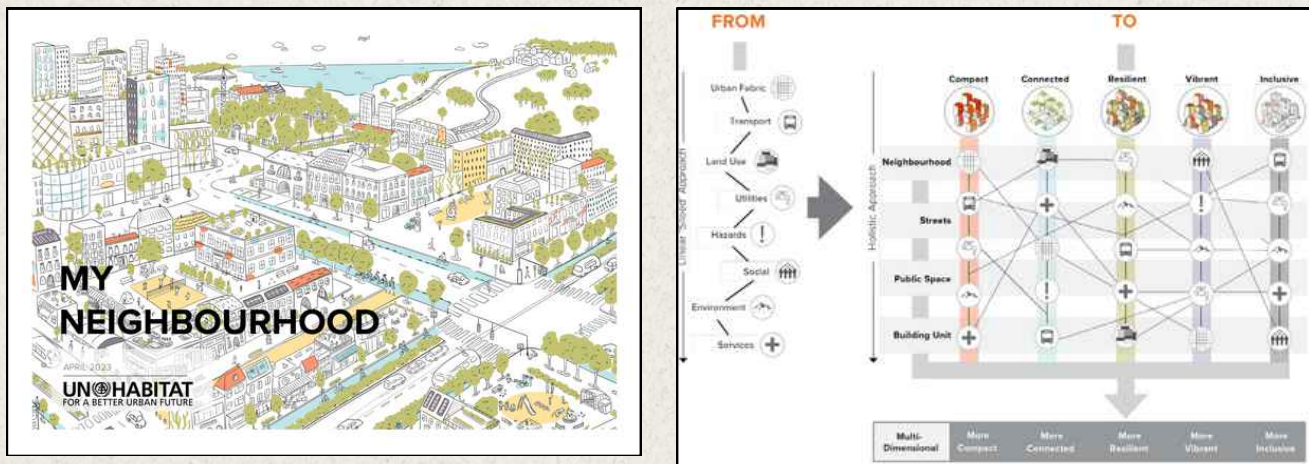
The UN-Habitat publication My Neighbourhood: A Framework for Urban Transformation provides the foundational structure for this report's strategy. The framework emphasizes three interdependent planning principles—Compact, Inclusive, and Connected neighborhoods—as essential components of equitable and sustainable urban development.

It encourages cities to adopt a people-centered, integrated approach to neighborhood transformation by aligning housing, mobility, public space, and infrastructure. The document also highlights the importance of community engagement and incremental, context-sensitive planning. These principles directly informed the structure of this report's proposed strategy and were used to evaluate the case studies presented.

Summary

Together, these sources position missing middle and gentle density housing as practical, scalable, and equitable solutions to Canada's housing crisis. While recent reforms in Alberta mark important progress, the literature underscores that successful implementation requires a mix of regulatory change, financial tools, and community-based engagement. The strategy proposed in this report draws from these insights to support infill development that is compact, connected, and inclusive.

3. Methodology

This research followed a multi-step methodology combining secondary data analysis with field observations to examine patterns of change and housing typologies within Calgary neighborhoods.

- **Defining Research Questions**
 The research was guided by questions such as: How is housing changing in inner-city neighborhoods? What are the visible signs of transformation such as gentrification, suburbanization, or urban decay? What forces are driving these changes, and how are they impacting communities socially and economically?

- **Data Collection**
 The study primarily relied on secondary sources, including administrative records such as development permit data, zoning regulations, and historical planning documents. These were supplemented by site visits, which allowed for direct observation of neighborhood characteristics, including built form, land use patterns, and signs of demographic or spatial change.

- **Data Analysis**
 The analysis focused on a series of case studies that illustrate various missing middle housing typologies. These were assessed using thematic analysis to identify recurring spatial, social, and economic patterns across neighborhoods undergoing infill development.

- **Interpretation and Reporting**
 Findings are synthesized in the final sections of the report, where they inform the proposed strategy and recommendations for advancing compact, inclusive, and connected infill housing in Calgary.

4. Compact Neighborhoods

Compact neighborhoods stand as a vital paradigm in contemporary urban planning, offering a potent antidote to the sprawling patterns of development that have characterized much of the last century. At their core, these neighborhoods are defined by a deliberate strategy of high density and optimized spatial efficiency. Rather than allowing urban functions to disperse across vast distances, compact neighborhood design prioritizes the close integration of residential areas, commercial services, employment opportunities, and essential community amenities. This intentional co-location aims to create a self-sustaining ecosystem where daily needs are readily accessible, fostering a more convenient, sustainable, and socially cohesive living environment. The principles underpinning this approach are echoed in frameworks like UN-Habitat's "My Neighbourhood," which emphasizes the crucial role of thoughtful urban design in cultivating effective and sustainable human settlements.

The fundamental principle driving the development of compact neighborhoods is the maximization of land use. This is achieved by strategically positioning housing in close proximity to employment centers, a diverse array of amenities, and robust public transportation networks. The goal is to optimize the utilization of precious urban space without necessarily relying on the construction of towering high-rise structures, which may not always be the most appropriate or desirable solution depending on the specific urban context and local preferences. Instead, compact design often focuses on mid-rise buildings, townhouses, and efficient use of land parcels to achieve density while maintaining a human scale.

The imperative for embracing compact neighborhood models stems from their inherent capacity to forge a highly efficient urban form. This efficiency manifests in several critical dimensions. Primarily, the close proximity of services drastically reduces the time and resources residents expend on daily travel. By minimizing the distances required to commute to work, access shopping facilities, or engage in leisure activities, compact neighborhoods directly lessen the reliance on private automobiles. This, in turn, paves the way for the increased adoption of alternative and more sustainable modes of transportation, such as walking, cycling, and public transit. Furthermore, the deliberate integration of diverse land uses and functions within a concentrated geographical area injects a palpable sense of vibrancy and dynamism into urban life, creating more engaging and multifaceted communities.

4.1 Effective Density: Beyond Simple Numbers

A cornerstone of compact neighborhood planning is the concept of effective density. This goes beyond simply measuring the number of dwelling units per hectare or the number of people per square kilometer. Effective density considers how that density is experienced and how well it supports the desired urban functions and quality of life. A high-rise residential tower surrounded by parking lots might exhibit high numerical density, but it may not contribute to a walkable, vibrant neighborhood.

Effective density, on the other hand, focuses on creating a critical mass of people and activities within a walkable catchment area. This is achieved through a combination of factors, including building form, street network design, and the distribution of amenities. Mid-rise buildings with ground-floor retail, interconnected street grids that encourage pedestrian flow, and the strategic placement of parks, schools, and community centers all contribute to a higher effective density. This type of density supports local businesses by providing a consistent customer base, makes public transportation more viable due to increased ridership, and fosters social interaction by creating more opportunities for chance encounters. Furthermore, effective density can lead to more efficient use of infrastructure, such as water and sewer lines, as services are concentrated within a smaller area. The key is to achieve a density that feels comfortable and contributes to a thriving public realm, rather than simply maximizing the number of units.

4.2 Mixed Land Use: Weaving together the fabric of daily life

Another crucial element of successful compact neighborhoods is mixed land use. This principle involves intentionally integrating different types of land uses – residential, commercial, civic, and recreational – within close proximity. Traditionally, urban planning often segregated these uses into distinct zones, leading to car-dependent suburbs and underutilized areas during certain times of the day. Mixed land use seeks to break down these silos, creating neighborhoods where residents can live, work, shop, and play within a relatively small area.

The benefits of mixed land use are manifold. It significantly reduces the need for residents to travel long distances for everyday needs, thereby decreasing traffic congestion and carbon emissions. The presence of local businesses within walking or cycling distance enhances convenience and supports the local economy.

Moreover, mixed-use environments tend to be more vibrant and engaging, with activity occurring throughout the day and evening, contributing to a greater sense of safety and community vitality. For example, a neighborhood with apartments above shops, offices interspersed with cafes, and parks within walking distance offers a rich and diverse experience for its residents. This integration fosters a stronger sense of place and encourages social interaction among people with different daily routines. The key to successful mixed land use lies in careful planning and design to ensure compatibility between different uses and to mitigate potential negative impacts, such as noise or traffic from commercial areas affecting residential zones.

4.3 Functional Variability: Embracing adaptability and resilience

The concept of functional variability is closely related to mixed land use and emphasizes the importance of designing spaces and buildings that can adapt to different uses over time. This adds a layer of resilience and long-term sustainability to compact neighborhoods. Rather than rigidly defining the function of every building or space, functional variability promotes flexibility and the potential for repurposing.

For instance, a building designed with flexible floor plans can more easily transition from residential to commercial use, or vice versa, as the needs of the neighborhood evolve. Public spaces designed with multiple potential uses – a plaza that can host a farmers' market, a concert, or simply provide seating – enhance the adaptability and vibrancy of the neighborhood. This adaptability is particularly important in the face of changing economic conditions, demographic shifts, or unforeseen events. Neighborhoods with a high degree of functional variability are better equipped to absorb change and remain resilient over time. This can also involve designing infrastructure that can support different types of activities and ensuring that zoning regulations allow for a degree of flexibility in land use. By embracing functional variability, compact neighborhoods can avoid becoming monocultures and instead evolve organically to meet the changing needs of their residents and the wider urban context

Compact neighborhoods designed with a focus on effective density, mixed land use, and functional variability, offer a powerful model for creating sustainable, vibrant, and resilient urban environments. By prioritizing proximity, integration, and adaptability, these neighborhoods can enhance the quality of life for residents, reduce environmental impact, and foster strong, interconnected communities. As cities continue to grow and face increasing pressures, the principles of compact neighborhood design offer a crucial pathway towards a more sustainable and equitable urban future.

5. Inclusive Neighborhoods

In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, the concept of the inclusive neighborhood has emerged as a cornerstone of progressive urban development. Moving beyond mere coexistence, inclusive neighborhoods prioritize equity and social cohesion, striving to create communities where every individual, irrespective of their background, feels inherently valued, deeply respected, and genuinely empowered. This vision encompasses a rich tapestry of human diversity, acknowledging and celebrating differences in race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and religious beliefs. Within these thoughtfully designed urban spaces, all residents are afforded equitable opportunities to actively participate in the vibrant fabric of community life and seamlessly access the resources essential for well-being and prosperity.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), through its insightful "Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities" program, provides a robust framework for both understanding the multifaceted nature of inclusive neighborhoods and strategically guiding their creation. A central and critical goal of this framework is the active reduction of entrenched spatial inequalities and the effective mitigation of persistent poverty through the implementation of carefully targeted urban regeneration strategies. These strategies are not solely focused on physical transformation; rather, they aim to cultivate communities that are not only seamlessly connected through infrastructure and spatial design but also deeply integrated at a social level. The desired outcome is the emergence of neighborhoods characterized by dynamism, rich diversity, and an undeniable vibrancy that benefits all residents.

The deliberate creation of inclusive neighborhoods is not merely an aspirational goal; it is an essential prerequisite for fostering genuine social inclusion, a phenomenon that yields profound and far-reaching impacts on both individual well-being and the overall resilience of the community. These neighborhoods actively work to dismantle the structures that perpetuate poverty and social exclusion by diligently ensuring equitable access to a comprehensive range of essential resources and opportunities. This includes the provision of safe and affordable housing, quality education, accessible healthcare services, and pathways to meaningful employment. By proactively establishing a level playing field for all residents, inclusive neighborhoods demonstrably improve living conditions and empower individuals to realize their full potential and thrive within their communities.

However, the benefits of inclusive neighborhoods extend far beyond the mere provision of tangible material resources. They play a uniquely crucial role in cultivating an environment of mutual respect and deep understanding among residents from diverse backgrounds. Through the intentional promotion of meaningful interaction and open dialogue across different social groups, these neighborhoods actively enhance social cohesion, build bridges of trust, and cultivate a stronger, more unified sense of community. This robust social cohesion acts as a vital asset, significantly contributing to the overall well-being and long-term resilience of the community when faced with inevitable challenges and periods of adversity.

The successful development of truly inclusive neighborhoods necessitates the thoughtful implementation of urban regeneration strategies that are both comprehensively conceived and sensitively tailored to the unique nuances of local contexts. These strategies must prioritize the careful preservation and strategic enhancement of a community's existing socio-economic, natural, and cultural assets.

This involves a deep recognition of and a conscious effort to build upon the inherent local strengths, available resources, and cherished traditions to foster a strong sense of continuity, place, and collective identity. Furthermore, the integration of strong participatory processes is absolutely fundamental to the ultimate success of inclusive neighborhood development. Community-led regeneration, which actively and meaningfully involves residents in all stages of the planning and decision-making processes, significantly strengthens the sense of ownership and ensures that development initiatives are directly aligned with the genuine needs and articulated aspirations of the community itself. Moreover, fostering inclusive engagement and promoting collective action are crucial for effectively addressing the diverse and often complex needs of all community members, with a particular focus on those who are frequently marginalized or underrepresented in traditional planning frameworks. This requires the deliberate creation of accessible platforms for open dialogue, meaningful collaboration, and effective advocacy, thereby enabling all residents to have a genuine voice in shaping the future of their shared community.

5.1 Variety of Diversity: Embracing the Spectrum of Human Experience

A truly inclusive neighborhood is characterized by a rich and vibrant tapestry of diversity, extending far beyond simple demographic representation. It actively embraces and celebrates the multifaceted nature of human experience, recognizing that each individual brings unique perspectives, skills, and cultural richness to the collective. This commitment to diversity encompasses a wide spectrum of identities, including but not limited to:

- **Racial and Ethnic Diversity**: Inclusive neighborhoods are home to people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, fostering intercultural understanding and exchange. This requires actively combating segregation and promoting equitable housing opportunities across the neighborhood.
- **Socioeconomic Diversity**: Creating opportunities for people from different socioeconomic strata to live side-by-side is crucial for breaking down social barriers and fostering empathy. This necessitates a range of housing options, from affordable to market-rate, and access to diverse employment opportunities.
- **Age Diversity**: Inclusive neighborhoods cater to the needs of residents of all ages, from young children and families to working adults and senior citizens. This involves providing age-appropriate infrastructure, recreational facilities, and social programs.
- **Ability Diversity**: Recognizing that individuals have varying abilities is fundamental. Inclusive neighborhoods prioritize universal design principles to ensure that the physical environment is accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities.
- **Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity**: Inclusive communities are welcoming and safe spaces for people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. This requires fostering a culture of respect and actively challenging discrimination.
- **Religious and Cultural Diversity**: Respecting and celebrating the diverse religious and cultural practices of residents enriches the social fabric of the neighborhood. This involves providing spaces for cultural expression and fostering interfaith dialogue.
- **Immigration and Migration Backgrounds**: Inclusive neighborhoods welcome and support individuals and families with diverse immigration and migration histories, recognizing the valuable contributions they bring to the community.

Fostering this variety of diversity requires proactive and intentional strategies. This includes implementing fair housing policies, promoting inclusive community events and programs, supporting diverse local businesses, and actively working to dismantle discriminatory practices. By embracing the full spectrum of human diversity, inclusive neighborhoods become more vibrant, resilient, and innovative.

5.2 Affordability: Ensuring Equitable Access to Housing and Resources

A fundamental pillar of an inclusive neighborhood is affordability, particularly in relation to housing. Without access to safe, stable, and affordable housing options, individuals and families are at risk of displacement, instability, and limited opportunities for social and economic participation. An inclusive approach to affordability requires a multi-pronged strategy that addresses the diverse housing needs of the community:

- **Diverse Housing Stock**: Inclusive neighborhoods feature a range of housing types and price points, including subsidized housing, affordable rental units, and market-rate options. This ensures that individuals and families with varying incomes can find suitable housing within the community.
- **Anti-Displacement Strategies**: Urban regeneration efforts in inclusive neighborhoods must prioritize preventing the displacement of existing residents, particularly those from vulnerable populations. This can involve implementing rent control measures, providing relocation assistance, and prioritizing the rehabilitation of existing affordable housing stock.
- **Community Land Trusts and Cooperative Housing**: Exploring alternative ownership models like community land trusts and cooperative housing can help to create permanently affordable housing options and empower residents.
- **Access to Essential Services**: Affordability extends beyond housing to encompass access to other essential services, such as affordable transportation, childcare, healthcare, and healthy food options. Inclusive neighborhoods prioritize the equitable distribution of these resources.
- **Economic Opportunity Initiatives**: Creating pathways to economic opportunity through job training programs, support for local businesses, and access to education can improve the financial stability of residents and enhance affordability in the long term.

By actively addressing issues of affordability, inclusive neighborhoods ensure that all residents, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have the opportunity to live with dignity, participate fully in community life, and build a secure future.

5.3 Appropriate High Density: Balancing Density with Livability and Inclusion

While often associated with urban environments, the concept of appropriate high density can be a valuable tool for fostering inclusivity. When implemented thoughtfully and with a focus on quality of life, higher density can contribute to affordability, walkability, and the efficient use of land and resources. However, it is crucial to balance density with the creation of livable and inclusive spaces:

- **Mixed-Use Development**: Integrating residential, commercial, and community spaces within a high-density neighborhood creates vibrant, walkable environments that reduce the need for extensive travel and foster social interaction.
- **Human-Scale Design:** Prioritizing human-scale design elements, such as pedestrian-friendly streets, public plazas, and green spaces, ensures that higher density does not compromise the livability and quality of life for residents.
- **Adequate Infrastructure and Amenities:** Appropriate high density requires careful planning to ensure adequate infrastructure, including transportation, utilities, and public services, as well as sufficient access to parks, schools, and community facilities.
- **Diverse Housing Options within Density**: Even within higher-density developments, it is crucial to provide a range of housing types and sizes to accommodate diverse household needs and promote socioeconomic mixing.
- **Community Engagement in Density Planning**: Involving residents in the planning process for higher-density development is essential to ensure that their concerns are addressed and that the resulting environment meets the needs of the community.

When implemented appropriately, higher density can contribute to the creation of more compact, walkable, and resource-efficient neighborhoods that offer a wider range of housing options and support vibrant social interactions. However, it must be carefully managed to avoid overcrowding, ensure adequate infrastructure, and prioritize the well-being and inclusivity of all residents.

5.4 Barrier-Free Design: Creating Universally Accessible Environments

A cornerstone of inclusive neighborhood development is the implementation of barrier-free design principles. This approach goes beyond mere compliance with accessibility standards and aims to create environments that are usable and enjoyable by people of all ages and abilities, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Barrier-free design encompasses a wide range of considerations:

- **Physical Accessibility**: This includes features such as ramps, elevators, wide doorways and hallways, accessible restrooms, and tactile paving to ensure that people with mobility impairments can navigate the physical environment with ease and independence.
- **Sensory Accessibility**: Recognizing that individuals have diverse sensory needs, barrier-free design also considers elements such as appropriate lighting levels, noise reduction measures, and clear wayfinding systems for people with visual or auditory sensitivities.
- **Cognitive Accessibility**: Designing environments that are easy to understand and navigate for people with cognitive disabilities is also crucial. This can involve clear signage, simple layouts, and the use of universal design principles in information presentation.
- **Inclusive Public Spaces**: Parks, playgrounds, and other public spaces should be designed to be accessible and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their abilities. This includes features such as accessible play equipment, seating options, and pathways.
- **Accessible Transportation**: Barrier-free design extends to transportation systems, ensuring that public transit is accessible to people with disabilities and that pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is safe and convenient for all.
- **Adaptable Housing**: Promoting the design and construction of adaptable housing units that can be easily modified to meet the changing needs of residents over time contributes to long-term inclusivity.

Implementing barrier-free design principles from the outset of any development project is not only a matter of legal compliance but also a fundamental ethical imperative for creating truly inclusive neighborhoods. By proactively removing physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers, these communities empower all residents to participate fully in social, economic, and civic life.

The creation of inclusive neighborhoods is not a singular project with a defined endpoint, but rather an ongoing commitment to fostering belonging, equity, and social cohesion within our urban environments. By actively embracing the variety of human diversity, prioritizing affordability, strategically implementing appropriate high-density development, and embedding the principles of barrier-free design into the very fabric of our communities, we can create spaces where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to thrive. These inclusive neighborhoods, guided by frameworks like UN-Habitat's "Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities," hold the key to building more resilient, vibrant, and just urban futures for all. The journey requires ongoing dialogue, genuine collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to ensuring that the benefits of urban development are shared equitably among all residents, creating communities where everyone truly belongs.

6. Connected Neighborhoods

A connected neighborhood is one that enables residents to access essential destinations such as schools, employment, parks, shops, and transit through a well-integrated, human-scaled mobility network. In such neighborhoods, movement is not solely dependent on private vehicles but is supported through a mix of transportation modes, including walking, cycling, buses, and light rail. Equally important is the presence of ecological corridors and vibrant public spaces that connect people to each other and to nature.

Infill development must go beyond simply placing housing in vacant or underutilized lots. It must support a broader neighborhood structure that enables everyday activities to occur within walking distance and within an environment that is inclusive, safe, and resilient. The connected neighborhood is a critical pillar of sustainable urban planning because it strengthens social and environmental integration, improves access to opportunity, and enhances mobility equity, particularly for seniors, youth, and low-income households.

This section explores four key dimensions that together create connected neighborhoods: multi-modal transit, effective street networks, proximity and walkability, and ecological connectivity.

6.1 Multi-Modal Transit

Multi-modal transit systems accommodate a range of transportation modes, including walking, biking, buses, and trains, through infrastructure and design that prioritizes accessibility and convenience. In a well-connected neighborhood, no single mode dominates. Instead, different modes complement one another, enabling residents to choose how they travel based on time, need, and ability.

Strategic infill development near transit hubs, such as Calgary's LRT stations, MAX rapid bus routes, and major cycling corridors, supports transit-oriented growth. It ensures that new housing supply is tied to existing infrastructure, reducing pressure on roads and parking. For example, missing middle housing forms like fourplexes, townhouses, and secondary suites are particularly well suited to areas within 400 to 800 meters of high-frequency transit routes where density can increase without overwhelming the existing system.

Reducing parking minimums in these areas also supports car-light living, making infill projects more affordable and space efficient. Importantly, accessible transit options expand employment and education opportunities for residents, especially those without private vehicles, and provide crucial independence for youth and seniors.

6.2 Effective Street Network

A neighborhood's street network defines not only how people move but also how they interact with their surroundings. An effective network prioritizes permeability, meaning multiple connected route options for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists alike. Rather than dead-end streets or disconnected loops, well-connected neighborhoods are organized through grid-based or modified grid systems that enhance navigation, access, and efficiency.

These networks improve emergency access, facilitate the movement of goods and services, and enable more housing units to front onto public streets. Shorter blocks and multiple points of access support finer-grain development, allowing infill housing to be more sensitively integrated into the neighborhood. This is particularly important for laneway developments and townhouses, where lane activation and multiple frontages can promote higher-quality design and more usable space.

Additionally, complete street principles such as traffic calming, curb extensions, and dedicated bike lanes help ensure that streets function as public spaces, not just corridors for vehicles. When streets are designed to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists equally, they become more inclusive and welcoming, enabling daily interactions and fostering community cohesion.

6.3 Proximity and Walkability

Walkability refers to the ability of residents to meet most of their daily needs within a short walk from home. This is often measured through the "15-minute neighborhood" concept, which proposes that housing, groceries, schools, parks, healthcare, and other essential services should all be accessible within a 15-minute walk. Proximity, in this context, becomes a function of land use planning, street design, and the distribution of public amenities.

Infill housing contributes to walkability by increasing the number of residents within service catchment areas, thereby making amenities and transit more viable and frequent. When more people live close to retail nodes, schools, and bus stops, there is greater justification for investment in these services. At the same time, walkability must be supported by infrastructure. Safe sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting, benches, and landscaping are all necessary for people to choose walking over driving.

Walkable neighborhoods also support healthy aging and active lifestyles, reducing reliance on cars and lowering transportation costs. In particular, seniors benefit from being able to access shops, clinics, and social spaces without needing to drive. For children and youth, walkable neighborhoods support independence and safer routes to school. Thus, walkability is not only about convenience. It is fundamentally about inclusion and quality of life.

6.4 Ecological Connectivity

Ecological connectivity addresses the often-overlooked role of green infrastructure in shaping livable, resilient neighborhoods. It refers to the integration of natural systems, such as urban forests, rain gardens, and stormwater corridors, into the built environment in ways that connect people with nature while enhancing ecosystem function.

As neighborhoods densify through infill development, it becomes especially important to preserve and expand access to green space. Ecological connectivity ensures that environmental assets like parks, tree canopies, and water systems are not fragmented by development but instead linked and accessible. Linear parks, green alleys, and bioswales can connect larger open spaces while serving environmental functions such as filtering runoff, cooling neighborhoods, and increasing biodiversity.

For infill projects, incorporating green infrastructure can take many forms. Permeable paving, shared courtyards, rooftop gardens, and street trees all contribute to a larger ecological network. These interventions also serve social purposes by providing spaces for rest, play, and interaction, while mitigating the environmental impacts of increased density.

Integrating green and blue infrastructure, such as stormwater management, into neighborhood design also enhances climate resilience. It reduces the risks of flooding and heat stress, improves air quality, and supports mental health by providing residents with daily contact with nature.

7. Design Solutions

The concept of "missing middle housing" has gained prominence in discussions about urban development and housing affordability. It addresses the gap in housing options between single-family homes and high-rise apartment buildings. The Altadore/Garrison Woods community in Calgary serves as a valuable case study for examining design solutions that effectively integrate missing middle housing typologies. The primary objective is to increase housing supply and diversity within established neighborhoods while maintaining the existing community character. This approach seeks to provide a wider range of housing choices to accommodate diverse household sizes, incomes, and lifestyle preferences.
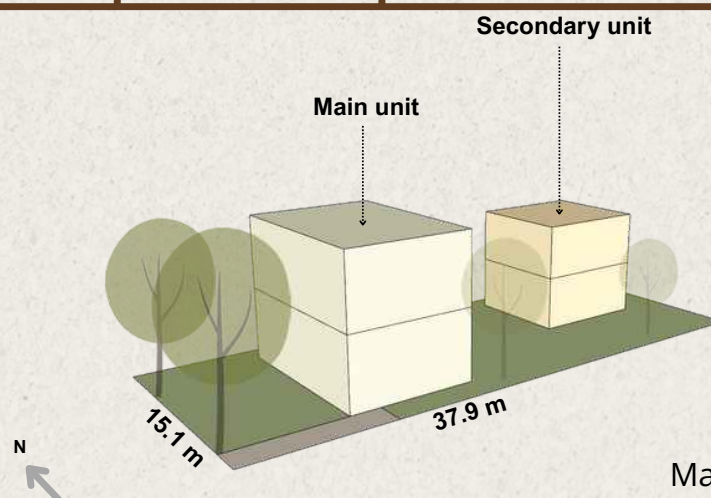
7.1 Garage Suites

Garage suites represent one form of missing middle housing. These are secondary dwelling units constructed above detached garages, offering additional living spaces that can be adapted to various uses. A case study of a single-detached house with a detached garage at 4217 15A Street SW in Calgary illustrates this typology. The existing garage was reconstructed to include a second-level suite, effectively adding a new dwelling unit to the property. The redesigned garage also incorporated two covered parking spaces, demonstrating how this typology can enhance both housing capacity and functionality. Garage suites can serve as a valuable source of rental income for homeowners. They often provide housing options for individuals and small households, including students, recent immigrants, and those with lower incomes. Moreover, the development of garage suites can contribute to the activation of laneways, transforming underutilized spaces into vibrant and accessible areas. This densification technique is particularly common in areas with a high concentration of single-family homes, such as Altadore, Garrison Woods, and North Glenmore in Calgary. An important advantage of garage suites is that they can be developed by homeowners with relatively modest financial investment and minimal disruption to their daily lives. Constructing a suite above an existing garage minimizes changes to the property and helps to preserve the character of the surrounding community.

4127 ,15a St SW

Address : 4127 ,15a St SW

Lot		Setback	
Width	15.1m	Front	7.6m
Depth	37.9m	Side	1.5m
Area	572.6 sq.m.	**Secondary building**	
Main unit size	95 sq.m	Width	7.3m
Secondary unit size	53.8 sq.m	Depth	7.9m
Parking		Height	7.36m
Off-street ratio	1 per unit	Floors	2
On-street + Off street	1+2	**Value : CAD 905,000/-**	

Secondary unit

Main unit

15.1 m

37.9 m

N

7.2 Mixed-use development with residential units

Mixed-use units represent another important missing middle housing typology. These developments typically combine street-front retail spaces with residential units on the upper floors. Examples of mixed-use developments can be found along main streets in the Garrison Woods area, near its boundary with Marda Loop. These developments align with the revitalization masterplan for the former Canada Force Base (CFB) lands, which envisioned commercial areas concentrated along specific avenues.

"The Gateway at Garrison Woods" serves as a representative example of a mixed-use development in this context. This four-story building is consistent with the scale of neighboring buildings, contributing to the continuity of the streetscape. The Gateway offers a contemporary residential experience within the charming and historically significant community of Garrison Woods in Southwest Calgary. Developed on the former Currie Barracks military base, this multi-family development blends modern design with the established character and mature landscaping of the area.

Typically featuring a mix of condominiums and townhouses, The Gateway provides a diverse range of housing options to suit various lifestyles. The apartments here are made up of well-designed units, which commonly include features like open-concept layouts, modern kitchens, in-suite laundry, and private balconies or patios. The architectural style often reflects a contemporary aesthetic while harmonizing with the overall feel of the Garrison Woods neighborhood.

One of the key draws of The Gateway is its prime location within Garrison Woods. This master-planned community boasts a unique blend of residential living, retail spaces, and green areas. Residents enjoy convenient access to a vibrant village square with boutique shops, restaurants, cafes, and essential services, all within walking distance. The community is designed with pedestrian-friendly streets and numerous parks and pathways, fostering a strong sense of community and an active lifestyle. The area also provides convenient access to major roadways, making it easy to explore other parts of the city and the nearby Rocky Mountains.

Gateway to Garrison Woods

Address : 3534 Garrison Gate SW, Calgary -Gateway to Garrison			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	116.4m	Front	6.7m
Depth	100.5m	Side	3.1m
Area	11862 sq.m	**Building dimensions**	
No. of units	158	Width	100.9m
Typical unit size	115 sq.m	Depth	87.5m
Parking		Height	14.5m
Off-street ratio	1.25 per unit	Floors	3
On-street + Off street	40+200	**Value : 29,140,000**	

Active street wall

116.4 m

100.5 m

N
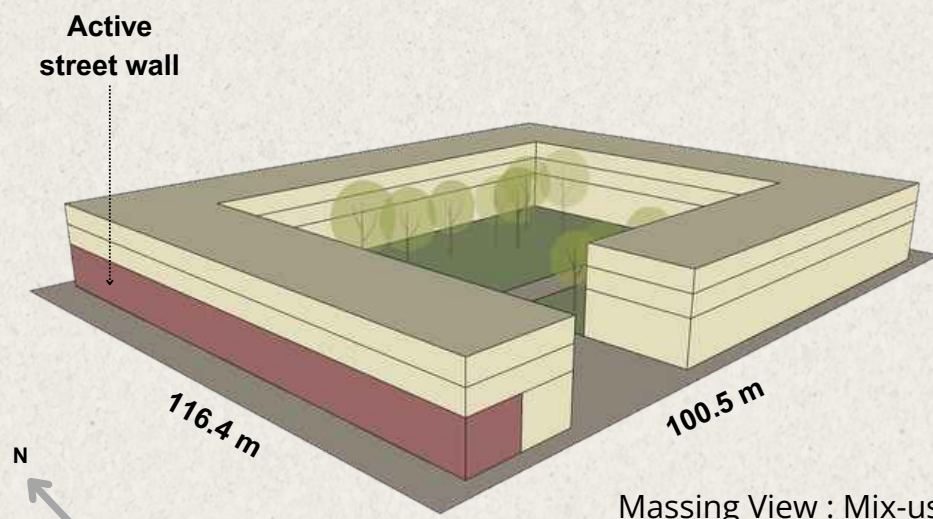
Massing View : Mix-use development

7.3 Live-work Units

Live-work units, while less common in Altadore/Garrison Woods are another missing middle typology. These units combine residential and commercial spaces, allowing residents to live and work in the same location. Live-work units often feature workspaces on the ground floor, designed to accommodate a variety of businesses, with residential units located on the upper floors.

"The Harrison" in the Marda Loop area provides an example of this type of development. The Harrison is a new, modern apartment building located in the vibrant Marda Loop district of Calgary, Alberta. Situated at 3470 18th Street SW, it offers a collection of 51 rental apartments and 12 workspaces. Developed by Sarina Homes and managed by Porte Communities, The Harrison is designed for the modern renter seeking an urban lifestyle.

Key Features:

- Location: In the heart of Marda Loop, a walkable shopping and dining district in Southwest Calgary. The area is known for its lively atmosphere, numerous businesses (over 200), artisan cafes, and restaurants.
- Residences: Offers one and two-bedroom apartments ranging from approximately 600 to over 1,000 square feet.
- Retail Spaces: The ground floor features retail spaces, currently housing businesses like Massage Addict, La Diperie Ice Cream, Coyote Rose Tattoo, Scholars, Aroma Café Bar, Lavoom Salon, and The Plant Place.
- Amenities: The amenities in the Harrison include the rooftop patio, fitness center, interior courtyard and well-lit covered parking spots.

The Harrison offers modern rental living in the heart of the amenity-rich and lively Marda Loop district of Calgary. It provides well-appointed apartments with a range of amenities and convenient access to the numerous shops, restaurants, and services that define this popular neighborhood.
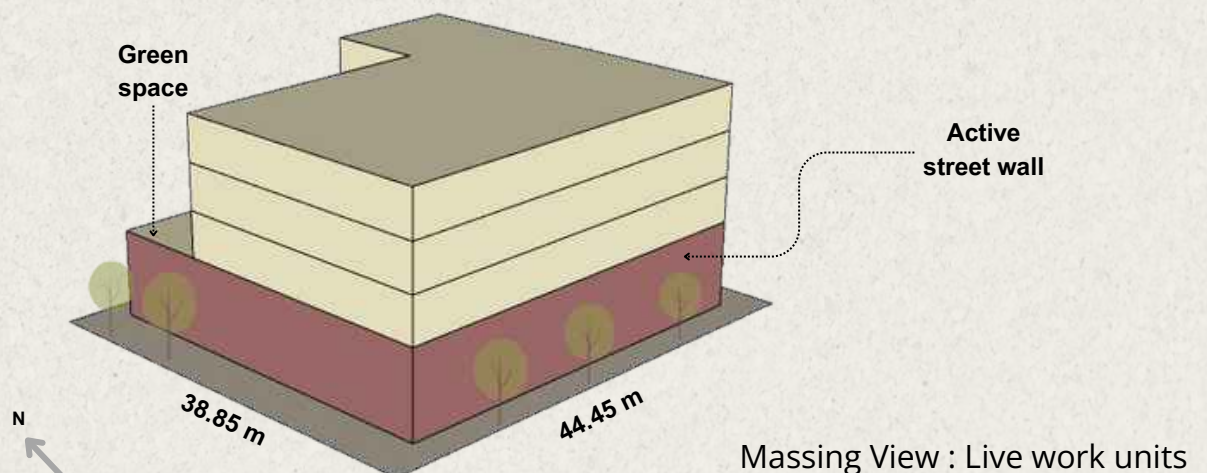

Elevation View

Site Plan

Address : 3470,18 Street SW, Calgary - *The Harrison*			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	38.85m	Front	4.5m
Depth	44.45m	Side	2.4m
Area	1705.3 sq.m	**Building dimensions**	
No. of units	51	Width	34.45m
Typical unit size	65 sq.m	Depth	38.65m
Parking		Height	21m
Off-street ratio	1.25 per unit	Floors	4
On-street + Off street	5+64	**Value : CAD 24,350,000/-**	

Massing View : Live work units

7.4 Secondary Units

Secondary suites, typically located within the basement of single-family homes, represent another strategy for increasing housing diversity. Buildings with secondary suites, like the multi-family unit at 5008 22 Street SW, offer several distinct features and benefits. Primarily, a secondary suite is a self-contained living unit within a larger property, possessing its own entrance, kitchen, bathroom, and living area. This allows for independent living while sharing the overall property infrastructure.

One key feature is the separate entrance, ensuring privacy and autonomy for both the primary residents and the suite occupants. This often involves a dedicated exterior door or a clearly defined internal access point. Inside, the self-contained nature is paramount. A fully functional kitchen, equipped with essential appliances like a stove, refrigerator, and sink, allows for independent meal preparation. Similarly, a private bathroom, including a toilet, sink, and shower or bathtub, is a standard feature. A dedicated living area provides space for relaxation and entertainment.

From an ownership perspective, buildings with secondary suites offer increased income potential through rental revenue. This can significantly offset mortgage costs and contribute to overall financial stability. Furthermore, it provides flexible living arrangements, accommodating extended family members, caregivers, or generating rental income. The presence of a secondary suite can also increase the property's resale value, appealing to a broader range of potential buyers seeking investment opportunities or multi-generational living options.

Considering the example of 5008 22 Street SW, a multi-family unit with secondary suites would likely exhibit these characteristics across multiple units within the building. Each suite would maintain its self-contained nature, offering tenants or owners independent living spaces. This model allows for a higher density of occupancy while preserving individual privacy and functionality. However, specific features and the quality of finishes can vary between units within the building.

5008 22 St SW, Calgary

Address : 5008 22 St SW, Calgary			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	38.85m	Front	3.8m
Depth	15.24m	Side	1.2m
Area	557.6 sq.m	**Building dimensions**	
No. of units	2	Width	12.1m
Typical unit size	115.3 sq.m	Depth	13.1m
Parking		Height	7.3m
Off-street ratio	1 per unit	Floors	2 + basement
On-street + Off street	2+2	**Value : CAD 845,000/-**	

38.85 m

15.24 m

N
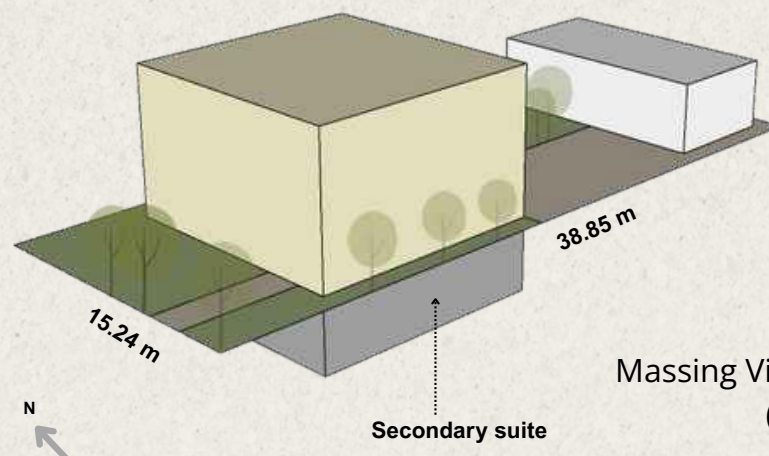
Secondary suite

Massing View : Secondary suite, (Basement)

7.5 Laneway-Oriented Townhouses

Laneway-oriented townhouses offer a contemporary missing middle solution by maximizing residential density on a single parcel while preserving low-rise urban character. A compelling example of this typology can be found at 3032 Parkdale Blvd NW, where 24 townhouse units are organized into four clusters of six. The units are arranged around a central internal lane, which provides vehicular access to rear garages while doubling as a shared circulation space. This model preserves public street frontages for pedestrian activity, while shifting cars to the rear—redefining the laneway as a semi-public community space.

This development demonstrates the principles of a compact neighborhood by achieving high unit density on a single inner-city lot without resorting to mid- or high-rise forms. The organization of units around a shared lane allows for efficient land use, enabling multiple frontages, semi-private outdoor areas, and integrated parking. Its location in Parkdale—within walking distance of the Bow River pathway, transit stops, and the University of Calgary—supports the connected neighborhood model.

Furthermore, the typology offers adaptable housing for a range of household types, including young families, downsizers, and shared living arrangements. The use of repeated modular forms also allows for construction efficiency and potentially reduced unit pricing. This reinforces inclusivity by increasing housing options in a central neighborhood where affordability is a growing concern. The Parkdale project sets a strong precedent for how laneway townhouses can contribute to infill goals across other Calgary neighborhoods.
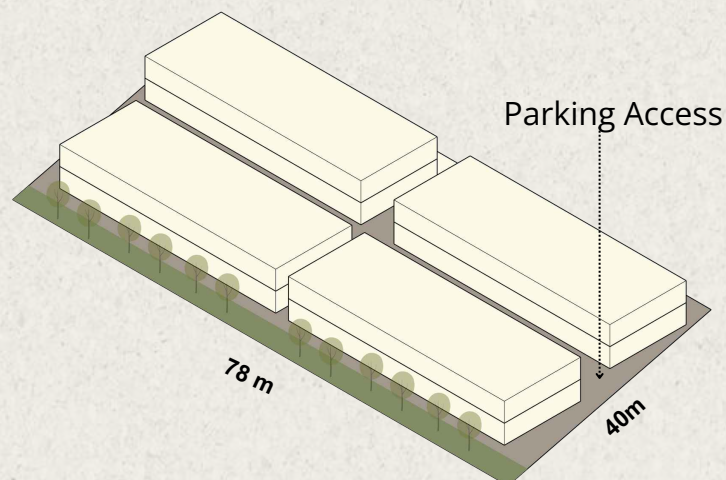

Site Plan

Elevation View

| Address : 3051 Parkdale Lane NW, Parkdale, Calgary			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	78 m	Front	3.8 m
Depth	40 m	Side	4.5 m
Area	3,165 sq m	**Building Dimensions**	
No. of units	24	Width	12 m
Typical unit size	152 sq m	Depth	36 m
Parking		Height	10.8 m
Off-street ratio	48	Floors	3
On-street + Off street	6 + 48	**Value : CAD 859,000 (Unit Cost)**	

Parking Access

78 m

40m

Massing View : Lane Townhouses

7.6 Sunalta Pie / SA16 Fourplex

The SA16 project, designed by Gravity Architecture and developed by RNDSQR in Calgary's Sunalta neighborhood, exemplifies the adaptability and innovation possible within a fourplex housing model. Situated on a narrow, irregularly shaped "pie lot," the project overcomes spatial constraints through a design that strategically orients unit access and amenity space toward both the front and rear of the site. Each unit maintains ground-level access, maximizing privacy and eliminating the need for internal shared corridors.

As a compact development, the fourplex typology achieves moderate density on small infill parcels without compromising neighborhood form. Its low height and finely tuned massing help it blend into the existing residential context. The project's location near the Sunalta LRT station and connected bike routes ensures excellent connectivity, facilitating transit-oriented lifestyles for future residents.

Importantly, the SA16 model supports inclusivity by providing unit sizes and layouts suitable for small families, couples, or roommates, and offering a lower-cost alternative to detached homes in the same area. The project demonstrates how good design can allow four-unit configurations to feel spacious, private, and dignified—contributing meaningfully to the missing middle in both typology and urban form.

Site Plan

Front Elevation

Garrages

Side View
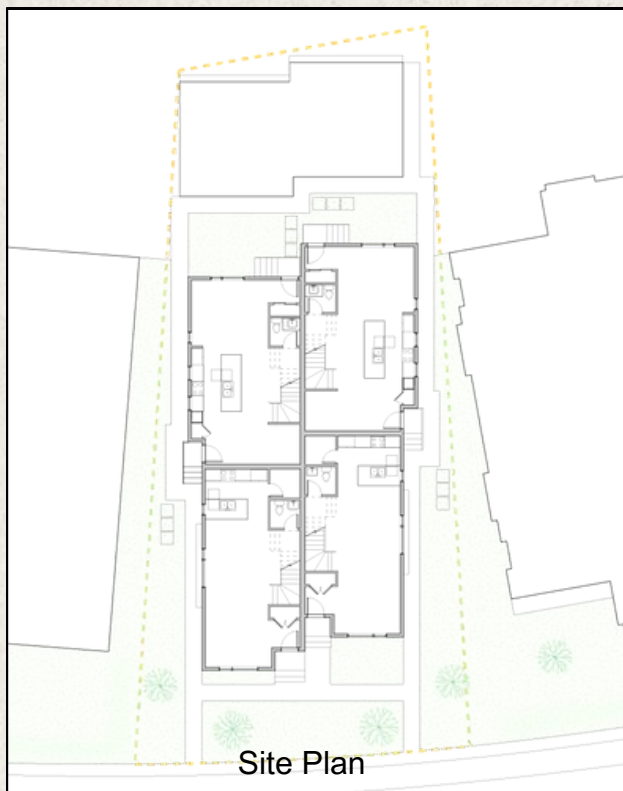
Address : 1614 16 AV SW, Sunalta, Calgary			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	14 m	Front	5
Depth	40 m	Side	2
Area	619.59 sq m	**Building dimensions**	
No. of units	4	Width	11 m
Typical unit size	145 sq m	Depth	20 m
Parking		Height	10.8 m
Off-street ratio	1 per unit	Floors	3
On-street + Off street	2 + 4	**Value : NA**	
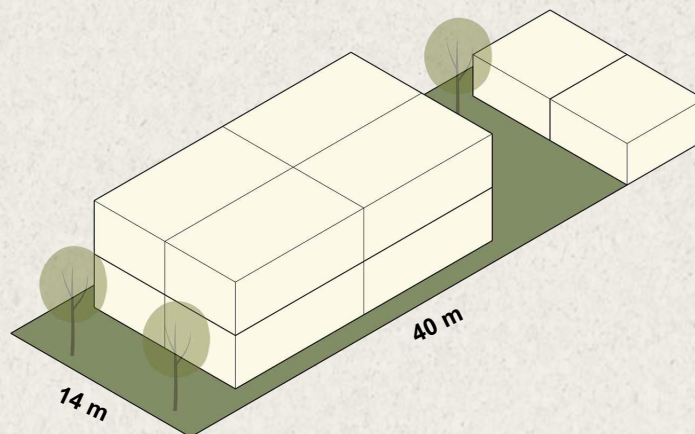
Massing View : Fourplex Infill Prototype

7.7 AL16 Commercial Infill

While missing middle housing is typically residential in focus, AL16 introduces a commercial infill typology that plays an essential role in creating complete and livable neighborhoods. Located in Altadore and developed by RNDSQR, AL16 reclaims a former underutilized lot to deliver 17 office units, ground-floor café space, and shared patios and meeting rooms. The project demonstrates how compact commercial forms can support local economic activity and serve as important anchors within walkable neighborhoods.

AL16 contributes to a compact urban structure by intensifying land use without increasing building height beyond the residential scale. It introduces fine-grain urbanism through a mix of micro-offices and shared workspaces, ideal for small businesses, freelancers, and service providers. The development also supports connectedness, offering proximity to key amenities, green spaces, and public transit. By placing employment opportunities within walking distance of housing, AL16 reinforces the logic of 15-minute neighborhoods.

Additionally, the project fosters inclusivity by creating affordable, flexible space for local entrepreneurs, community organizations, and small-scale retail operators who are often excluded from large-format commercial developments. AL16 reveals how missing middle thinking can extend beyond housing to integrate the employment and services that make neighborhoods more socially and economically complete.
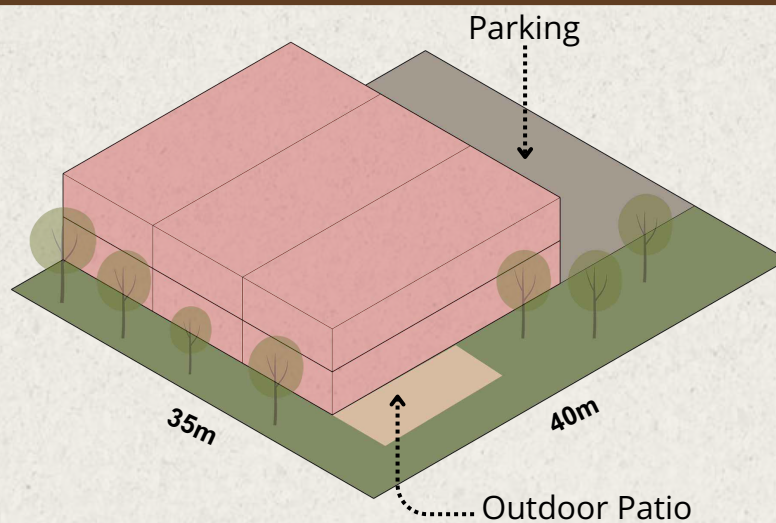
Patio View

Elevation

Address : 4038 16 St SW, Altadore, Calgary			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	40 m	Front	5 m
Depth	35 m	Side	10
Area	1330 sq m	**Building dimensions**	
No. of units	NA	Width	22 m
Typical unit size	NA	Depth	26 m
Parking		Height	7.2 m
Off-street ratio	8	Floors	2
On-street + Off street	8 + 8	**Value : NA**	

Parking

Outdoor Patio

Massing View : Commercial Infill Prototype

7.8 Semi-Detached Duplex with Secondary Suite

The semi-detached duplex is a well-established housing form that remains underutilized as a tool for strategic infill. A recent listing in inner-city Calgary (as seen on Zillow) demonstrates how a side-by-side duplex with a legal basement suite can house up to three separate households on a single residential lot. Each of the two primary units offers individual entrances, garages, and private outdoor spaces, while the basement suite provides a flexible option for rental income or multigenerational living.

This typology fits squarely within the compact neighborhood framework by doubling the density of a traditional detached lot—and in some cases, tripling it with the inclusion of a secondary suite. The spatial layout respects neighborhood rhythm while delivering significantly more housing capacity. Its common occurrence in RC-2 or R-CG zones also means it can be implemented with minimal regulatory intervention.
From a connected standpoint, these homes are often located near schools, commercial corridors, and transit stops, offering everyday convenience without car dependency.

The inclusion of a legal suite also boosts inclusivity, enabling more affordable housing choices in gentrifying areas and allowing for flexible living arrangements that meet evolving household needs. This typology exemplifies a low-barrier, high-impact approach to increasing the availability and diversity of housing in Calgary's established neighborhoods.

Address : 2632 30 Street SW, Killarney, Calgary			
Lot		**Setback**	
Width	12 m	Front	13.5 m
Depth	50 m	Side	1 m
Area	600 sq m	**Building dimensions**	
No. of units	2	Width	10.5 m
Typical unit size	195 sq m	Depth	18 m
Parking		Height	7.2 m
Off-street ratio	4	Floors	2
On-street + Off street	4	**Value : $1,100,000 (Unit Cost)**	
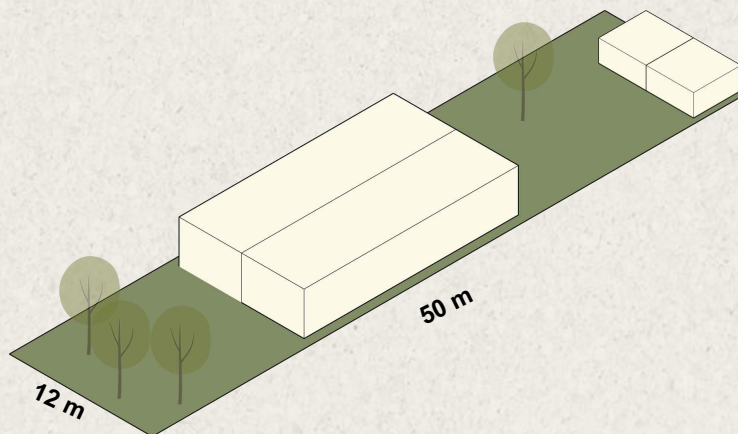
Massing View : Duplex Infill Prototype

8.Conclusion and Discussion

This report demonstrates how a strategy centered on compact, connected, and inclusive principles can guide the sustainable transformation of Calgary's neighborhoods through the integration of missing middle housing. The analysis has shown that reintroducing mid-density forms—such as fourplexes, townhouses, garage suites, and mixed-use infill—can meaningfully expand the city's housing options while reinforcing neighborhood character and livability.

The typologies explored throughout this report respond directly to Calgary's current urban challenges. These include rising housing costs, demographic shifts, aging infrastructure, and growing pressure to reduce car dependency and environmental impacts. The selected case studies highlight a spectrum of design and policy innovations that support density without compromising neighborhood identity. Projects like the Parkdale lane-oriented townhouses or the SA16 fourplex in Sunalta reveal how infill can be spatially efficient and socially responsive, while commercial and live-work examples like AL16 and The Harrison demonstrate the potential for mixed-use formats to create more complete and walkable communities.

By embedding housing within well-connected street networks, near transit and amenities, these prototypes reflect the importance of mobility equity. At the same time, inclusive elements such as tenure diversity, secondary suites, and affordability-driven design underscore the importance of housing choice and accessibility. When supported by thoughtful policy tools—such as reduced parking minimums, pre-approved designs, and community-led engagement—these models become not just feasible but scalable.

Crucially, the research affirms that implementing missing middle housing must be both a design and governance effort. It is not sufficient to upzone or approve typologies in isolation. Regulatory frameworks must be accompanied by financial mechanisms, inclusive design standards, and communications strategies that respond to local needs and concerns. The City of Calgary's recent city-wide rezoning efforts, as well as initiatives in Airdrie and Edmonton, point to a growing regional momentum toward more flexible, human-centered planning.

As Calgary continues to grow, infill development will play an increasingly central role in ensuring the city remains equitable, climate-resilient, and livable. This report suggests that the missing middle is not just a housing form—it is a broader approach to rethinking how we build and inhabit neighborhoods. Done right, it can reconnect residents to one another, increase access to opportunity, and create spaces that reflect the diversity and dynamism of the communities they serve.

Moving forward, continued monitoring, iterative policy-making, and community collaboration will be essential to scaling these strategies. The integration of affordability safeguards, climate-responsive design, and cultural sensitivity will further strengthen the impact of missing middle interventions. Ultimately, the challenge is not just to build more, but to build better—toward a city that is compact in form, inclusive in spirit, and deeply connected in every sense.
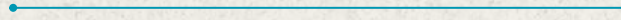
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