

# Let's Talk About CONTEMPORARY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF DENSITY?

### DESIGN ELEMENTS DISGUISE DENSITY

#### Apartment Building as a Bed and Breakfast Inn

With careful design and front porch, Aspen Court in Pacheco provides 20 homes in one acre in an older single-family neighborhood in Pacheco, CA.

#### Aspen Court, Pacheco, CA



#### Family Homes

By placing parking underground, the fifty unit Oak Court Apartments in Palo Alto fits into a high-priced, single family home neighborhood.

#### Oak Court Apartments, Palo Alto, CA



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Public conversations about new housing often use the word “density.” Because its common usage is somewhat different than how it is defined for land use, it can raise questions about how it may impact the character of a neighborhood.

Here are a few facts worth considering:

#### Higher Density Homes Are Really Just More Compact

City planners use the word “density” to describe the number of homes planned per acre of land. Higher density means more homes can be built on a plot of land. It does not necessarily mean “big” or “crowded.” Photos and tours of contemporary affordable housing are the best way to understand what “higher density” looks like.

#### Good Design Allows Higher Density Homes To Blend Into Surroundings

Developers of contemporary affordable housing use top architects and the latest design tools to create housing that is attractive and consistent with its neighborhood as well as more compact. Many of these homes have won design awards.

#### Higher Density Homes Provide Numerous Benefits For the Neighborhood

Some of the advantages of higher density, more compact housing are:

- **conserving open space** by enabling more homes on less land
- **creating walkable communities** and generating less traffic with homes near transit, services and stores
- **reducing crime** through design and use of public spaces that create a sense of ownership and control of these areas as well as additional “eyes on the street”
- **improving the efficiency and lowering the cost of public services**
- **neighborhood stability** – residents move less often because rents for affordable housing are stable and based on residents income

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Higher Density Development: Myth and Fact,**  
*Urban Land Institute in May 2005.*

This study as well as other research addressing higher density homes can be downloaded in PDF format from the website of the National Multi-Housing Council.

<http://www.nmhc.org/Content/ServeContent.cfm?contentItemID=3422>



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### 3 in 1: A Big House

By grouping three town homes in one building, Willow Court in Menlo Park has 15 homes to the acre.

Willow Court, Menlo Park, CA



### Grand Hotel

This design used for senior housing in San Leandro provides one-bedroom apartments with 40 homes per acre.

Broadmoor Senior Housing  
San Leandro, CA



### Auto Courts

Oakland's Lyon's Creek was designed to enable extra parking in interior courtyards while providing 35 homes to the acre.

Lyon's Creek, Oakland, CA



This is a partial list of additional studies that address density in contemporary affordable housing.

### Myths and Facts about Affordable and High Density Housing

*California Planning Roundtable, (published by the California Department of Housing & Community Development), 2002.*

The report presents a number of myths and counters them with facts, including impacts on property values, traffic, schools, existing buildings, and criminal activity.

[www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/property\\_values0805.pdf](http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/property_values0805.pdf) - 2007-04-04

### What Makes a Community Livable?

*American Institute of Architects (AIA), 2005.*

This report describes the many benefits of higher density housing and AIA's ten principles for liveable communities.

[http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/Liv\\_AIALivability101\\_LR.pdf](http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/Liv_AIALivability101_LR.pdf)

### Demystifying Design

*Affordable Housing Design Advisor (website)*

This is a two-part lecture series by Tom Jones, Dean of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at California State Polytechnic University, developed with support from the Fannie Mae Foundation to help explain the value of higher density housing.

<http://www.designadvisor.org/Density1.htm>

## CONCERNED ABOUT THE DENSITY OF A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT? HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Ask to see examples of the architects work on developments of a similar size.
- Ask to meet with the developer to discuss your concerns and determine which issues can be addressed through design.
- Ask how the street patterns, building scale and proportions of the existing neighborhood have been considered for the new building's design.
- Ask for a visual rendering of the proposed project design.
- Ask for a traffic model approved by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to determine the true impact of vehicle traffic as a result of the proposed development.
- Ask how you can get involved with the city's design review process.
- If community meetings are scheduled, bring photos of examples of architecture you like to illustrate aesthetic preferences.