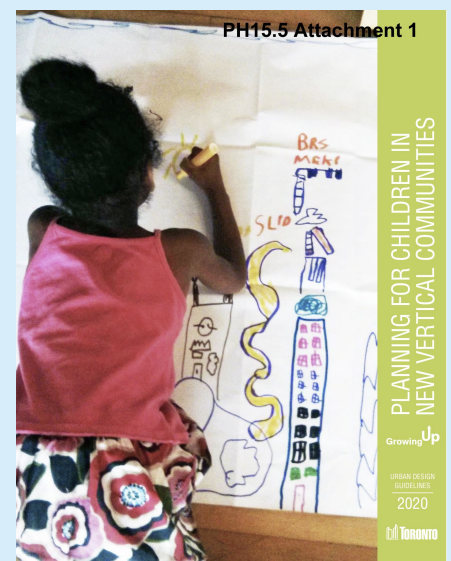
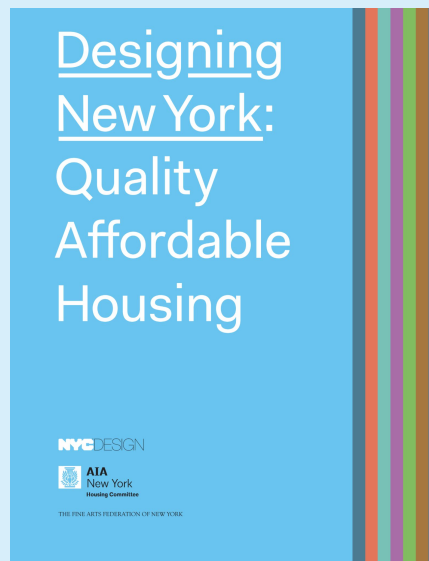
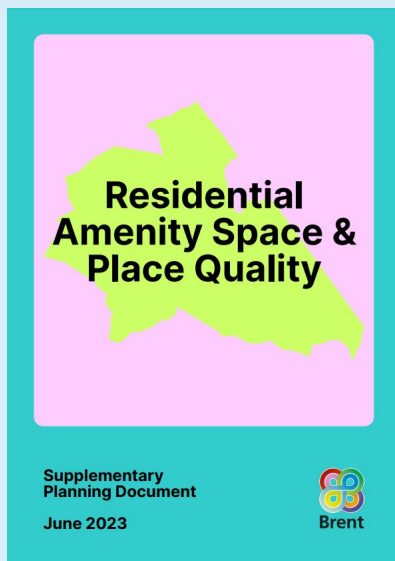


July 2024

# Building social connections

Innovative housing policy examples for social wellbeing



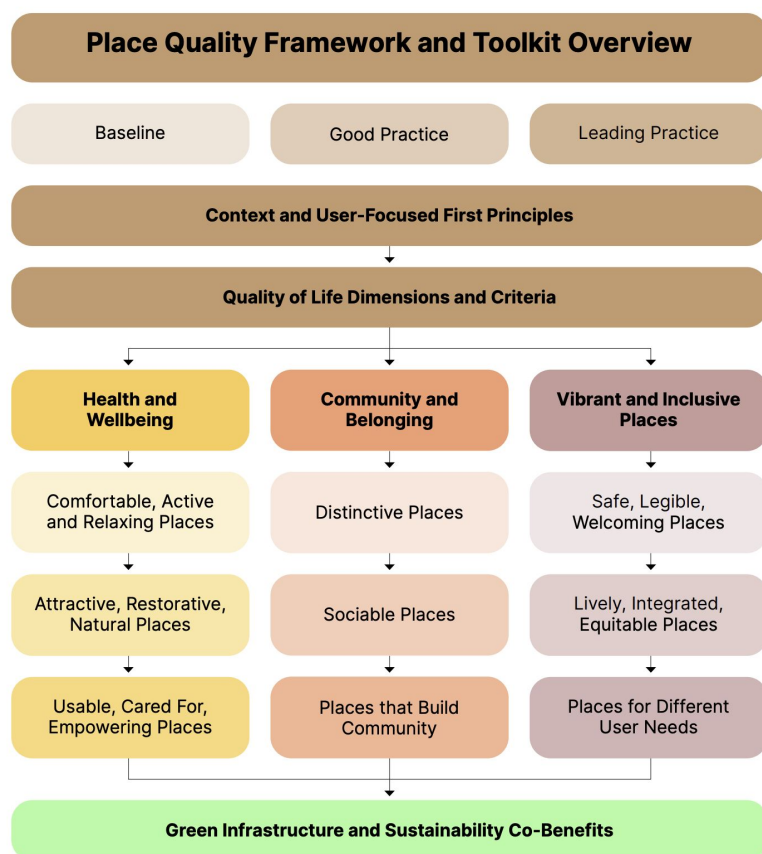
## Policy case study #1

### Residential Amenity Space and Place Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

*Borough of Brent, London, UK (2023)*

This regulatory document provides expectations for designing spaces to provide a high quality of life across a range of developments and densities. The values-based policy was created with flexibility in mind, seeking to promote systems change around wellbeing considerations in the built environment. The document includes worksheets for developers to provide statements around how their proposed design supports a high quality of life. Guidance is broken down into three categories: baseline, good practice, and leading practice. The policy seeks to address long-time inequities in the region and ask for additional amenity space requirements.

[https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s133329/Appendix%20B.pdf?\\_ga=2.216539158.1260970256.1689794106-847853312.1648718990](https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s133329/Appendix%20B.pdf?_ga=2.216539158.1260970256.1689794106-847853312.1648718990)



*Above: Place Quality Framework and Toolkit Overview*

*Source: Residential Amenity Space and Place Quality Draft SPD*

#### Submission requirements

- Master plan statement that describes the overall strategy for amenity spaces that are high quality
- Individual statements for each amenity, using the Place Quality Indicators
- Key plan identifying each space and the area considered amenity space
- Amenity space schedule
- Drawings marked with the “Place Quality Indicators”

## Policy highlights

**Equity lens:** Section 2 sets out the diversity of Brent’s population and key challenges for the borough. There will be an expectation of an understanding of who the amenity space is being provided for. There should be a recognition that households and communities contain a variety of different people. E.g. different age groups, disabled people, people with a variety of sensory requirements as well as different socio-economic factors and race.

**Values-based approach:** The document is built around core values for creating high-quality places in Brent, using a “Place Quality Framework” to identify “three dimensions of impact and nine qualitative criteria or outcomes based on human experience considerations.”

**Illustrated examples:** Diagrams help the reader understand concepts and supplement text. For example, diagrams help to clearly illustrate what is counted as outdoor amenity space and what does not (because it does not meet requirements).

**Building on existing policy:** The policy specifically builds off the applicable [London Plan Policy D6](#), Housing Quality and Standards, making references to the policy throughout and providing comparisons on what is required by the London plan and how this policy goes beyond (for instance, for family-oriented private outdoor spaces).

**Scale specific:** The policy provides different requirements for both minor (under 10 units) and small major (10 to 24 units), and large major (50 to 149 units), High density and co-living.

**Stewardship, management and maintenance:** Beyond the design of the built environment, the policy includes guidance on maintenance and management of spaces that can pose operational challenges, such as community gardens. It also discusses active design programming as important for building community.

**Case studies and evidence:** Provides examples of developments that are providing high-quality amenity spaces that meet the intent of policy, as well as wellbeing evidence, principles and the Space Quality Framework.

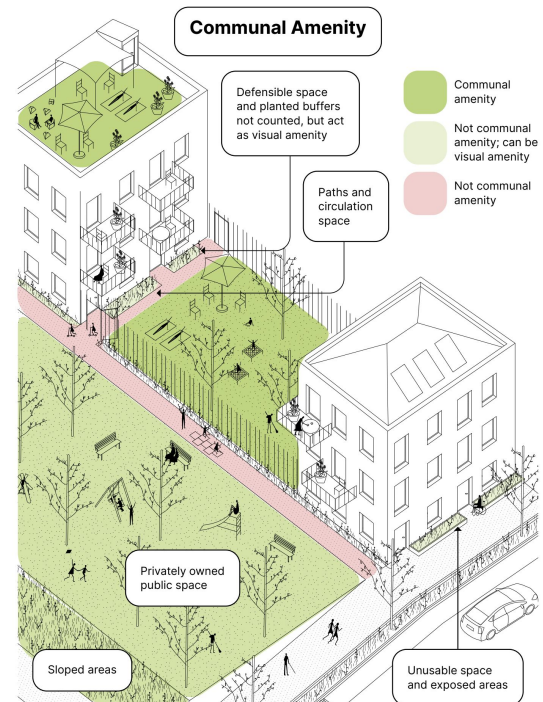


Figure 5: Examples of what is and is not communal amenity space

Above: Illustration of what can be considered communal amenity space.

Below: Place Quality Framework

Source: Residential Amenity Space and Place Quality SPD



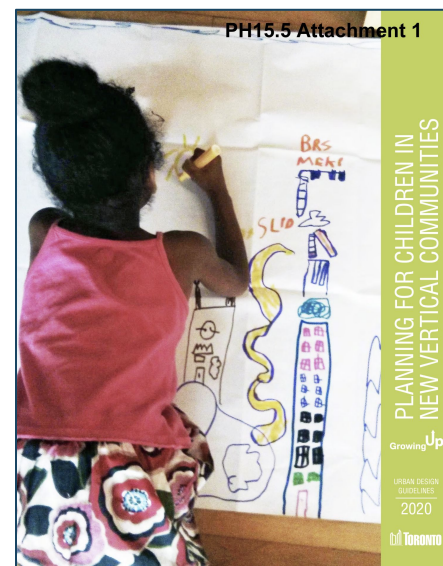
## Policy case study #2

### Growing up: Planning for children in new vertical communities

City of Toronto, Canada (2020)

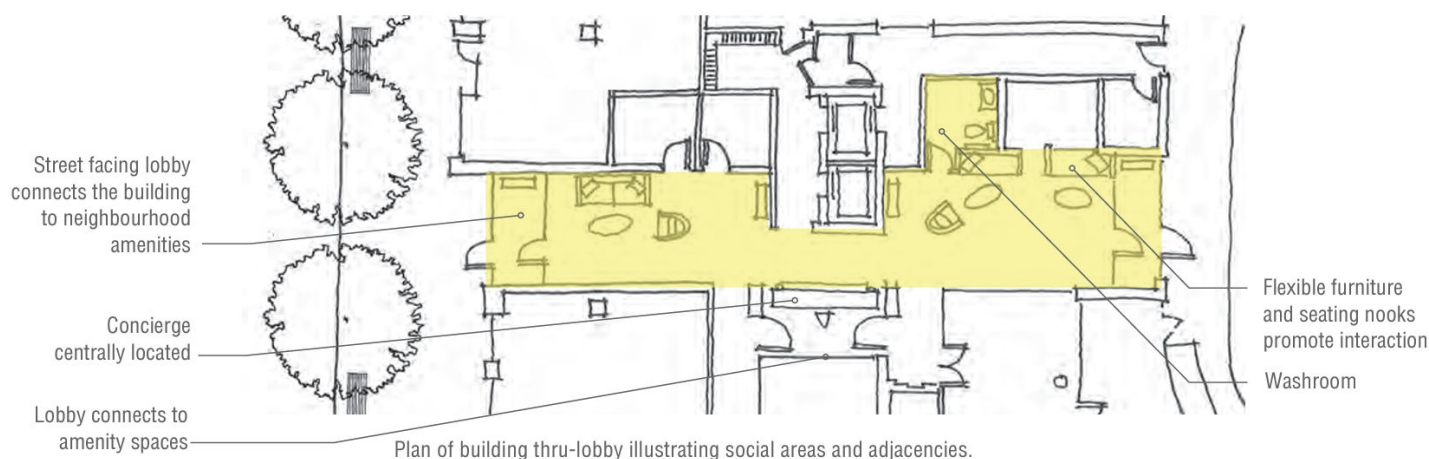
These guidelines include strategies focused on how new mid- and high-rise buildings (20+ units) can be designed as “vertical communities” that connect neighbours, recognizing that buildings planned from a children’s perspective can help better meet the needs of all community members. The document’s goals include promoting a diversity of housing, livability, and quality, with innovative design ideas for maximizing social space. The guidelines are organized into three scales: the neighbourhood, the building, and the unit. The guidelines are not currently mandatory, but have informed other City of Toronto policy requirements, such as guidance around unit sizes in the Housing Now Initiative.

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/planning-studies-initiatives/growing-up-planning-for-children-in-new-vertical-communities/>



*Below: Diagram of a building thru-lobby with adjacent social areas and circulation spaces.*

*Source: Growing Up: Planning for children in new vertical communities*





## Policy highlights

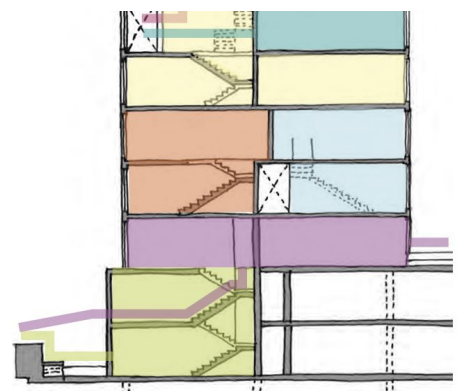
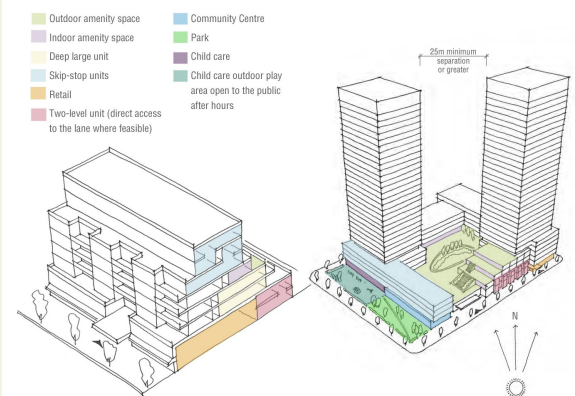
**Family-oriented housing:** The policy prioritizes designing high-quality, family-oriented multi-unit housing, recognizing the lack of family-appropriate housing in Toronto. In addition, the guidelines recognize that family-appropriate housing in high density areas and housing forms need more social spaces, which can help improve quality of life for everyone.

**Building on existing policy:** The guidelines align with various municipal and provincial policy goals and frameworks, including the [Provincial Policy Statement \(PPS\)](#), [Government of Ontario Growth Plan \(A Place to Grow\)](#), and [City of Toronto Official Plan](#). Since their creation, the guidelines have informed policies in several secondary plans that have been adopted by Council. For example, in 2020, Council set new program targets for the Housing Now Initiative, one of which is that all new market rental and ownership units are to be provided in accordance with the unit sizes set out in the *Growing Up Guidelines*.

**Design scale and categories:** The guidelines are broken down into three primary scales: neighbourhood guidelines, building guidelines, and unit guidelines. Each scale includes a list of several design guidelines, with associated descriptions and considerations.

**Diagrams and photos:** The document includes a wide range of illustrations and photos to show examples of social, family-oriented design. These diagrams show elements including flexible and family unit layouts, building massing and site layout, innovative design solutions (like skip-stop sections), and more. The document includes photos of existing developments in Toronto that exemplify strategies in the *Growing Up Guidelines*.

**Implementation and monitoring:** The guidelines were implemented through a multi-phase research, testing, and engagement process. After background research, case studies, and population and market analysis, the document was developed in consultation with stakeholders, City staff, and the public. A draft version was first adopted by Council in 2017, followed by two-year implementation period. In 2020, staff wrote a [Final Recommendation Report](#), recommending adoption of the guidelines and a monitoring program.



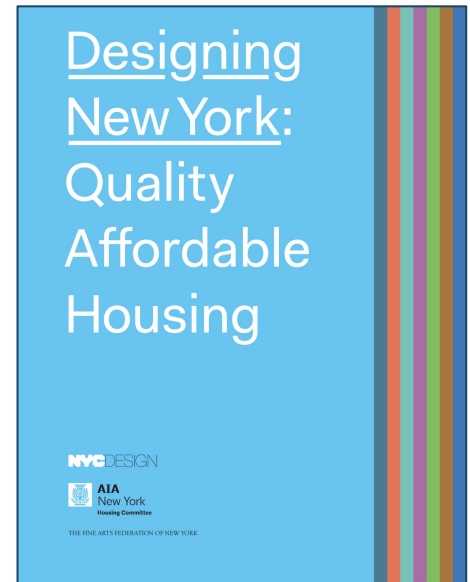
Above: Various diagrams from *Growing Up: Planning for children in new vertical communities*

## Policy case study #3

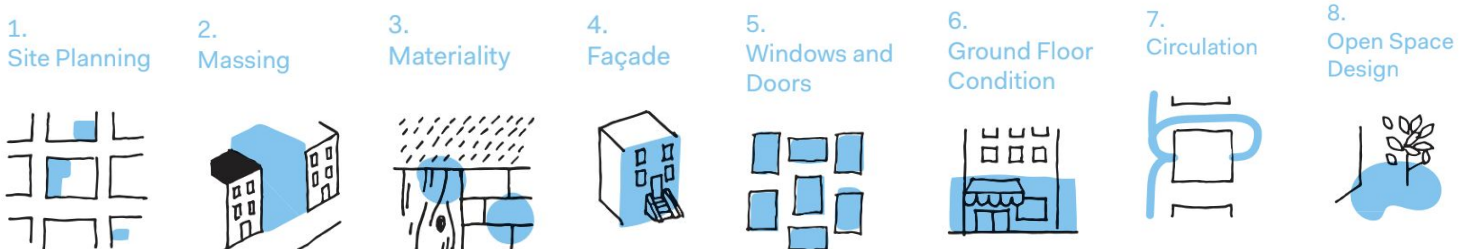
### Designing New York: Quality Affordable housing

New York City Public Design Commission, U.S.A. (2020)

This document outlines eight guiding principles for the design of new affordable housing developments, which the NYC Public Design Commission considers when granting approvals through the affordable housing review process. Rather than stating strict regulations, the policy is designed to allow developers to flexibly respond to the guidelines to create high-quality affordable housing that promotes resident health and wellbeing. The document compiles case studies and research from New York City to illustrate best practices for affordable housing design. The document provides broadly applicable learnings around sustainable, healthy, affordable housing design and includes an appendix of case studies and resources from other contexts.



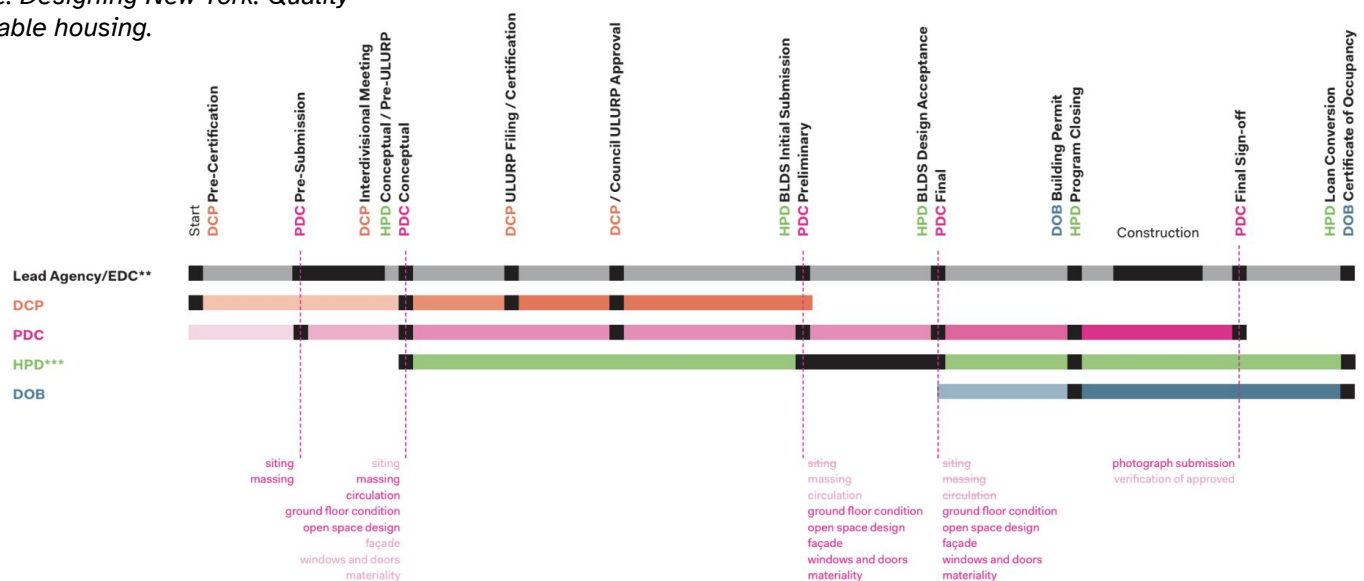
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/designcommission/review/design-guidelines/affordablehousing.page>



Above: Eight guiding principles

Below: Affordable housing review process

Source: Designing New York: Quality Affordable housing.



*Below: Photos and floor plan example from the Creston Avenue Residence case study.*

*Source: Designing New York*

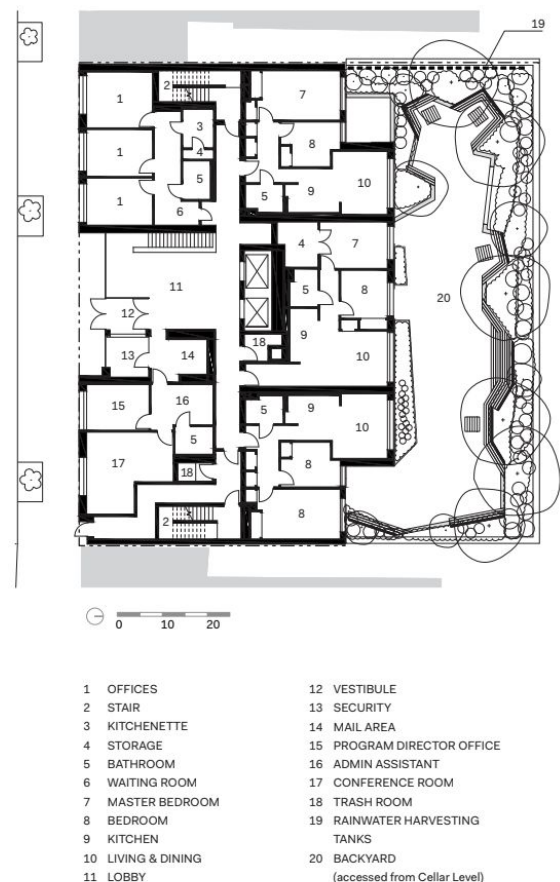
## Policy highlights

**Affordable housing focus:** This document is notable for its focus on improving the supply of affordable, equitable, healthy, and sustainable housing stock in New York City. All case studies in the document showcase projects that meet the City’s affordable housing definition, with some also including supportive housing units. The guidelines aim to contribute to a more equitable city by fostering “a new generation of affordable housing that contributes to the quality, character, diversity, and experience of New York City’s communities.”

**Guiding principles:** With this document, the Public Design Commission created a set of eight guiding principles (design categories) that are meant to “inspire sensitive and holistic approaches to quality affordable housing design.” The principles are site planning, massing, materiality, façade, windows and doors, ground floor conditions, circulation, and open space design. The principles are not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, the Commission recognizes that varying site contexts pose different constraints and challenges. It offers the eight guiding principles as a starting point for developers to consider “contextually responsive” designs that meet the underlying health, sustainability, resilience, and equity goals of the policy through various design realms.

**Case studies:** There are seven case studies of affordable housing developments in New York City that respond creatively to the eight guiding principles, demonstrating “design excellence” and a commitment to a more equitable New York. The case studies offer detailed information on each building’s size, layout, cost, and design, including building performance in terms of sustainability and health. The example projects range from 16 to 925 units each.

**Integration with existing policy:** The review of affordable housing proposals by the Design Commission takes place through a multi-stage process. A diagram (p. 90-91) explains which design categories (guiding principles) are reviewed and applicable to each step of the NYC affordable housing review process. Through the case studies, document also highlights examples of projects that comply with the NYC Active Design Guidelines and sustainability certifications, such as LEED.





## Policy case study #4

### Active design guidelines

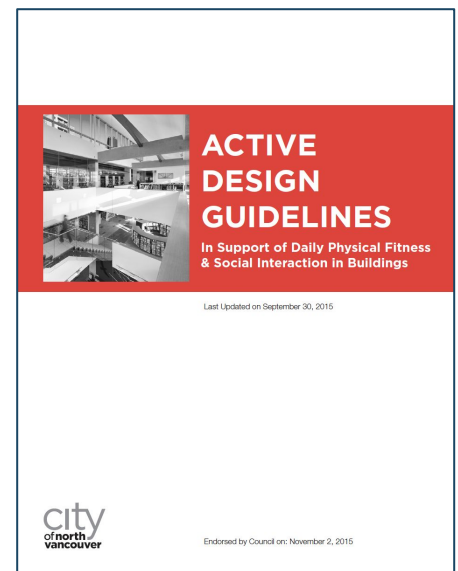
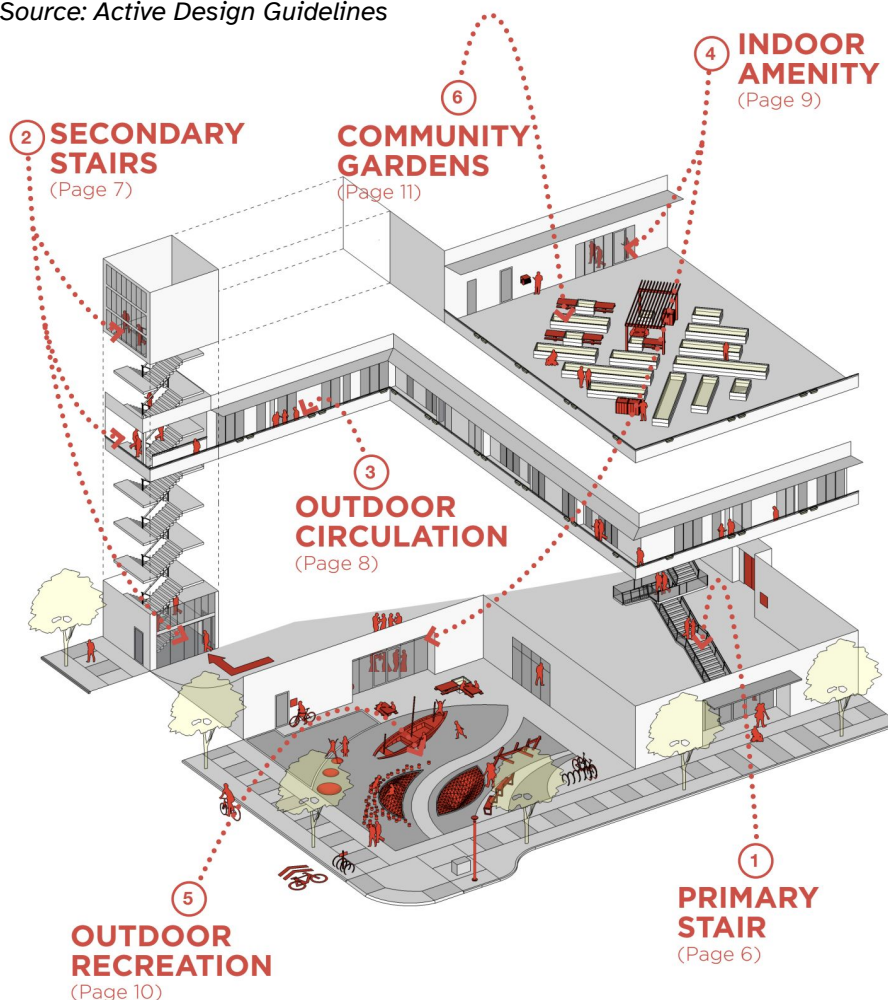
*City of North Vancouver, Canada (2015)*

This policy seeks to encourage “active design” by offering incentives for development applications that comply with various guidelines. Active design seeks to encourage physical activity and social interaction through the built environment, recognizing that both are essential elements to support overall wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle. The short document includes six different design categories with corresponding guidelines and incentives, in the form of floor area exclusions.

<https://www.cnv.org/Community-Environment/Housing/Active-Design>

*Below: Illustration of the six types of spaces covered in the Active Design Guidelines.*

*Source: Active Design Guidelines*



### Submission requirements

- Checklist (included in the Active Design Guidelines) to indicate which active design elements an application includes
- Indication of active design elements in architectural drawings
- Notation of FSR exclusions on cover sheet



## Policy highlights

**Incentive-based approach:** This policy is the first of its kind in the region to offer developers incentives for healthy, social multi-unit housing design. The policy recognizes that, by default, current building standards indirectly create building typologies and designs that discourage people from using the stairs or lingering in shared spaces to connect with neighbours. The Active Design Guidelines seek to reverse this trend, by offering developers greater density in exchange for intentionally designing spaces to support physical activity and social connection. The incentives primarily take the form of gross floor area (GFA) exclusions for spaces that meet the active design criteria outlined in the policy, including active stairways, outdoor circulation, and amenity spaces.

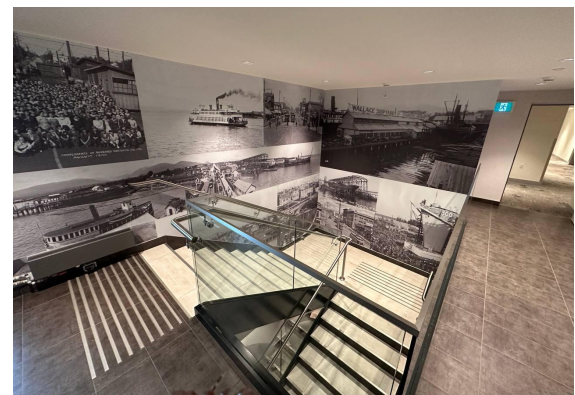
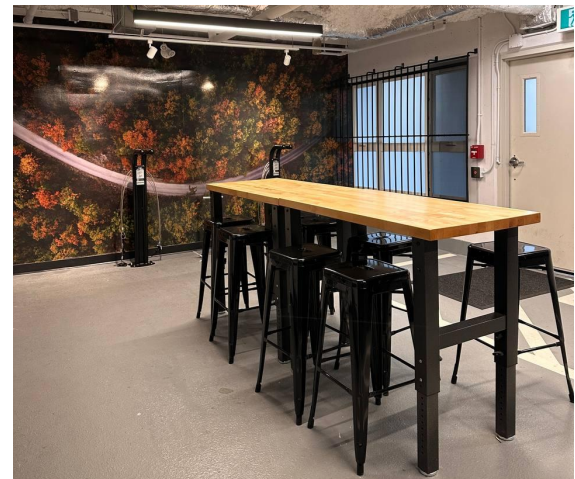
**Design categories and guidelines:** The document offers guidelines and incentives for six different types of spaces in multi-unit housing: primary stair, secondary stairs, outdoor circulation, indoor amenity, outdoor recreation, and community gardens. Through these categories, the guidelines recognize that physical activity and social interaction occur both in designated amenity spaces and along more functional spaces like hallways or stairways. The guidelines seek to contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of the community, recognizing that the majority of North Vancouver residents live in higher-density neighbourhoods and buildings.

**Integration with existing policy and BC Building Code:** For each of the six categories of spaces, the document includes a list of relevant City of North Vancouver policy and links. It also highlights how each guideline and category of space integrates with the BC Building Code, demonstrating how active design can comply with these provincial requirements. The policy responds to the City of North Vancouver OCP, which identifies wellbeing as a policy priority.

**Concise document and application checklist:** The short, 14-page document offers a clear overview of the applicability of the guidelines and how to achieve the incentives. The document includes a short checklist at the end, to be filled and included with applicable development applications.

*Below: The bike repair room at the Bowline in North Vancouver, the interconnecting lobby stair at the Bowline in North Vancouver, and the exterior walkways at Driftwood Village in North Vancouver. These buildings all applied principles from the Active Design Guidelines.*

*Source: Hey Neighbour Collective / Happy Cities*



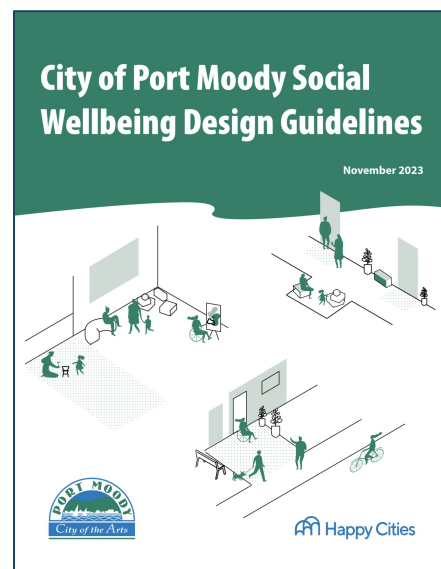
## Policy case study #5

### Social wellbeing design guidelines (Draft)

City of Port Moody, Canada

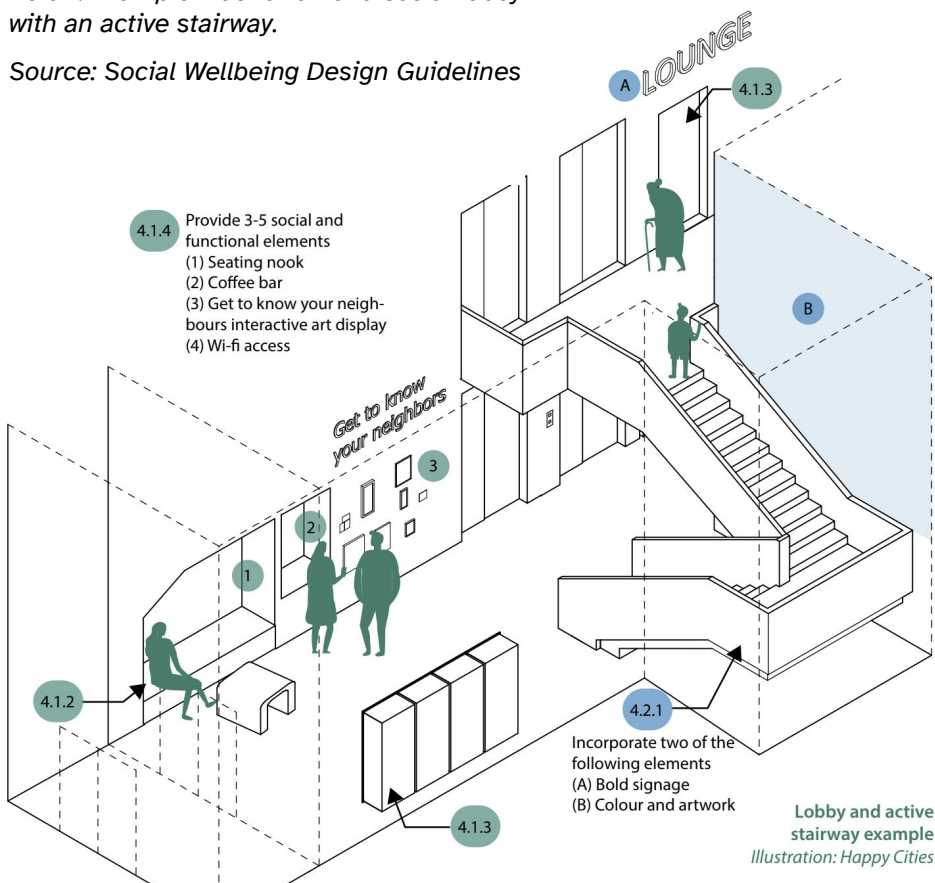
This incentive-based policy offers detailed design guidelines and criteria for supporting social connection and health in multi-unit housing. By complying with the criteria, developers are eligible to receive various incentives, including floor area exclusions and reduced parking requirements. The Guidelines cover site layout and use, entrances and transition spaces, parking, circulation, shared amenity spaces, and best practices for programming and policy. The Guidelines were adopted by Council in June 2024.

<https://happycities.com/projects/port-moody-social-wellbeing-design-guidelines>



*Below: Example illustration of a social lobby with an active stairway.*

Source: Social Wellbeing Design Guidelines



### Submission requirements

- Rationale statement for each incentive, explaining how the proposed design meets the criteria in the Design Guidelines
- Worksheet with specifications around amenity space size, design, and incentive calculations
- Reference to relevant drawings and plans

## Policy highlights

**Incentive-based approach:** The Social Wellbeing Design Guidelines offer a range of incentives for developers to incorporate elements that support social connection, inclusion, and physical activity in new multi-unit housing developments. Applications that comply are eligible to receive incentives including floor area exclusions, floor area subtractions, and reduced parking requirements. By offering a wide range of incentives and guidelines, developers are able to choose which actions they wish to pursue.

**Values-based approach:** The document is built around guiding principles for creating multi-unit housing that promotes wellbeing, affordability, inclusion, equity, and health for people of all ages, household types, and abilities.

**Design categories and guidelines:** The design guidelines are organized into five primary categories: site layout and use, prominent entrances and active transitions, purposeful parking, social circulation, and shared amenity spaces. The document offers additional best practices around social programming and policy in multi-unit housing (not eligible for incentives). Each high-level category includes a set of specific guidelines or actions, which are each accompanied by a detailed list of criteria and an incentive for meeting those criteria.

**Illustrations and examples:** The document provides illustrations and photos for the various guidelines, providing innovative examples of how development applications can configure social spaces to meet the criteria and support resident wellbeing.

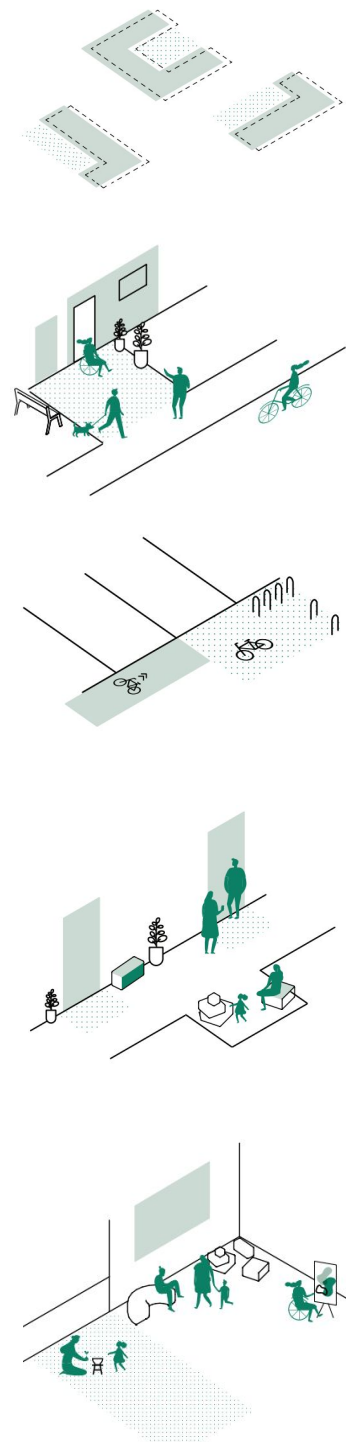
**Integration with existing policy:** The guidelines respond to City of Port Moody policy goals, including those identified in the OCP, Family-friendly Units Policy, and Sustainability Report Cards.

**Scale and priority:** The policy distinguishes guidelines based on their priority (low, medium, or high) and the scale of building they apply to: low-rise (2-3 storeys), mid-rise (4-8 storeys), and high-rise (3-8 storeys).

**Application checklist:** The guidelines are accompanied by a worksheet that applicants must complete and submit should they wish to be considered for the incentives. The worksheet allows applicants to check boxes regarding which incentives they plan to pursue. Applicants are required to write a short rationale statement for each guideline, explaining how their proposed design meets the criteria in the guidelines. The worksheet also includes prompts for applicants to state specific dimensions of amenities and other spaces, and to calculate the relevant incentive.

*Below: Illustrations for the five guideline categories: Site layout and use; prominent entrances and active transitions; Purposeful parking; Social circulation; Shared amenity spaces*

*Source: Happy Cities*





## Additional resources and design guidelines from Happy Cities and Hey Neighbour Collective

### **Aging in the right place: Designing housing for wellbeing and older adults** (2023)

*This research report produced by Happy Cities, Simon Fraser University, and Hey Neighbour Collective examines design for aging in the right place.*

<https://happycities.com/projects/aging-in-the-right-place-designing-housing-for-wellbeing-and-older-adults>

### **Case studies to inspire socially connected multi-unit housing** (2023)

*This document profiles seven innovative multi-unit housing developments in Canada, the U.S., Singapore, and Denmark. The case studies highlight relevant policy and explore how each project tackles affordability, accessibility, cultural inclusion, and sustainability.*

<https://happycities.com/s/case-studies-oCT-30-2023-compressed.pdf>

### **Dementia-friendly community guidelines** (2023)

*These guidelines produced by the Simon Fraser University DemSCAPE project and Happy Cities look at neighbourhood design for people living with dementia*

<https://happycities.com/projects/dementia-inclusive-planning-and-design-guidelines>.

### **Evidence Backgrounder** (2022)

*This document from Hey Neighbour Collective examines how social connectedness between neighbours supports health and wellbeing*

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/HNC-Evidence-Backgrounder-01.pdf>

### **The happier missing middle** (2024)

*This report shares design and policy learnings from Our Urban Village, an innovative, missing middle “cohousing lite” development in Vancouver, BC.*

<https://happycities.com/projects/tomo-on-main>

### **Happy Homes toolkit** (2017)

*This comprehensive toolkit looks at best practices for designing multi-unit housing for better health, happiness, and social connection*

<https://happycities.com/happy-homes-project>

### **Practice Guide #4** (2023)

*This guide from Hey Neighbour Collective examines roles for local government in strengthening social connectedness and resilience in multi-unit housing*

<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2023/02/guide-4-roles-for-local-government-in-strengthening-social-connectedness-and-resilience-activities-in-multi-unit-housing/>

### **Social wellbeing in modular housing** (2021)

*This comprehensive set of guidelines shares best practices co-developed with Lu'ma Native Housing Society and CMHC*

<https://happycities.com/projects/social-wellbeing-in-modular-housing>