THE CITY OF NORFOLK

Building Homes and Neighborhoods:
DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENT

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WPA WORK PROGRAM ARCHITECTS

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City of Norfolk, Virginia
DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENTS
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PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of these design principles is to express the City's desire to facilitate high quality multifamily development that provides a mix of type and cost of housing accommodation. These principles will be used to evaluate multifamily housing in all neighborhoods and character districts.

NOTE TO DEVELOPERS AND ARCHITECTS

The City of Norfolk recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to sites or building design. These principles are aspirational and should be considered as starting point for design considerations, as they have been developed from years of feedback received from the Architectural Review Board, the City Planning Commission, and City Council hearings. Developers and architects should be able to thoughtfully discuss the relevance of each principle to their design and explain how and why the principles can or can not be met within the specific parameters of their site and design, and how your design can advance the City's goal for high quality multifamily development.

The American Traditional* Neighborhood

When asked to describe the qualities they cherish most in their neighborhoods, people often describe childhood memories. They always felt safe walking around the neighborhood passing the front porches of houses, knowing that neighbors would see them and offer help if they needed it. They behaved well because they knew word would get back to their parents if they did not. It was easy for a child to learn how to use the city. The first venture from the house would be to play on the sidewalk and then eventually, be allowed to walk around the block. Contact between neighbors on pedestrian-friendly streets contributed to a strong sense of community. People could rely on each other. It was easy to walk to shops, restaurants, schools, playgrounds, churches, and libraries. There was a mix of type and cost of homes so neighborhoods included people at different stages of their lives: starting out with a small apartment, then a larger one, then a small row house, then a big house and finally a condo or apartment when they become empty-nesters. This diversity has proven to provide long-term sustainability and stability for neighborhoods.

Eyes on the street create safe streets for all

Traditional neighborhood with pedestrian-scale streets and blocks connected to a larger city

**The use of the term "traditional" is not to be confused with "traditional character district." These principles apply citywide.*

Neighborhood green space for residents of all ages

Attributes of Great Neighborhoods

The most loved and stable traditional neighborhoods have the following physical attributes:

1. Streets
An inter-connected network of pedestrian-scale streets provide safe pedestrian access to many of the functions of daily life within walking distance. They are spaces for social interaction. The shorter the distance between intersections, the more connected the neighborhood will be.

2. Access
Convenient public transit provides access to opportunities for education, employment and cultural experiences.

3. Neighborhood-scale Blocks
Blocks less than 3-acres provide a more walkable community and connectivity than do larger ones.

4. Perimeter Blocks
The blocks provide sites for a variety of building types which line the perimeter of the block with their front façades facing the street. Service, parking and private yards are in the middle of the block, screened from public view by the buildings.

5. Diverse Building Types
Within each block, there is a wide variety of building type, ranging from small cottages to large homes and including a number of duplex and houses, row houses, small and large apartment buildings.

6. Mixed Income
The diverse building types support diverse residents, naturally creating mixed income communities.

7. Mixed Use
Many of the functions of daily life are provided within a 10-minute walk in the neighborhood, including shops, offices, services, schools, health facilities, and recreation.

8. Active Street Frontages
In each block there is a variety of front porches and entrances to houses, apartments, and shops which provide more activity on the street. Together with many windows, these provide natural security for the street by serving as “eyes on the street.”

9. Amenities, Parks and Open Space
A diverse range of spaces from small parks to play fields, serve people of all ages.

The Challenge

Traditional American neighborhoods were badly eroded in the course of the 20th Century by:

- **Suburban** expansion and **sprawl**.
- **Total reliance on automobile transportation** resulting in lack of public transit and high volume traffic eroding the quality of life in city neighborhoods.
- Mass produced building methods which produce standardized **"products and projects" instead of individualized "homes and communities."**
- **Zoning and development practices that segregate neighborhoods** into areas by different home types have eliminated the mix of type and cost of homes that is so essential to long-term neighborhood stability. Many of these were designed to perpetuate racial segregation in spite of national legislation calling for integration.
- **Large concentrations of low-income** families in distressed neighborhoods **cut off from access to opportunities.**

This degraded physical configuration of our cities is a root cause of the social inequity that causes so much pain for residents, crime and loss of economic activity.

We are in the midst of cultural and demographic change which is predicted to diminish the demand for single family homeownership and dramatically increase the demand for rental housing of all types including multifamily rental.

We also continue to have a serious shortage of affordable housing. To satisfy this demand, there are a number of subsidy programs, including Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), which make it financially feasible to build new low and moderate income housing. However, the cost and financing constraints of these programs have caused many developers to build a single building type — garden apartments. Large complexes of garden apartments stand out as separate from neighborhoods and have become associated with low income housing. Existing neighborhoods, concerned about their quality of life and safety, associate this type of project with other projects that they believe have crime and social problems.

Segregated neighborhood cut off from opportunities

Concentration of low-income housing adjacent to downtown, but isolated by high speed roads

Principles for Multifamily Development

The goal of these principles for the physical design of multi-family housing is to re-establish the American Tradition of diverse neighborhoods and create a full range of housing opportunities for all. The guidelines suggest ways in which neighborhoods can be strengthened by the introduction of multi-family homes and new multifamily developments that are sufficiently diverse to **become neighborhoods instead of projects**.

Public participatory design process

1. Neighborhood Context:

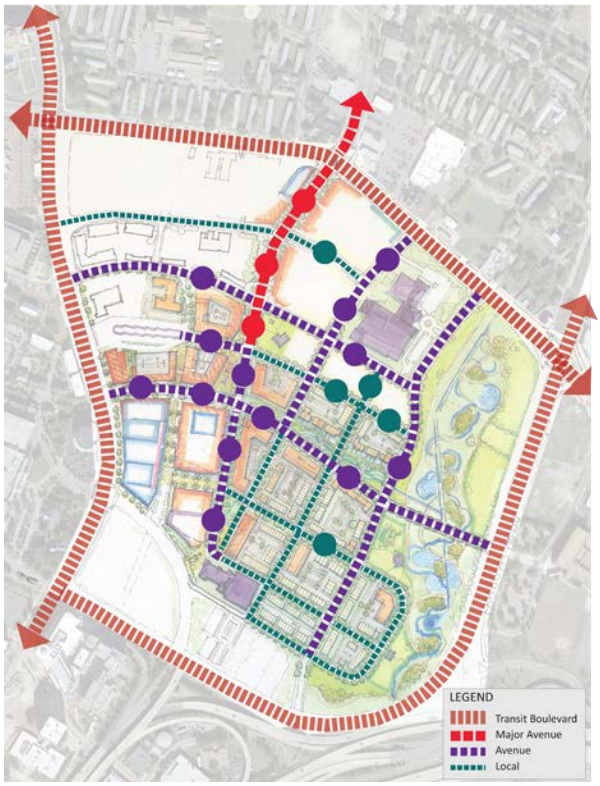
When inserting new development into or adjacent to an existing community, document and analyze the existing physical patterns including street types, block types, building types, architectural character, and community amenities. This becomes the basis for design. Architects and Developers should consider what is needed in the neighborhood and look to add those uses on the ground floor.

Note to Architects and Developers: Norfolk is a 400 year-old city and often less is more. Please study the simple compositions Norfolk's historic buildings before beginning a design. Never mix-and-match building styles on one façade. Remember that words matter, and homes are not a "product" and communities are not "projects."

2. Street Network:

Neighborhoods have a fine-grained, interconnected network of streets. Streets vary in width and design depending on their traffic role. These include small scale local streets, local avenues, Avenues, Boulevards and Bus Boulevards. **All types should be pedestrian friendly.**

- **a.** Developments should connect to the street and pedestrian network.
- **b.** Developments should be built within traditionally-scaled blocks and maintain the existing street grid.
- **c.** Developments should not vacate existing streets that are part of the network.
- **d.** Developments larger than 4-acres should be subdivided by one or more streets or by on-site drives with the character of streets to replicate the pattern of small blocks.



Hierarchy of streets

PHASE 1
Understanding the issues

PHASE 2
Testing some ideas

PHASE 3
Deciding on a forward path

3. Diverse Building Types:

Neighborhoods are not a mono-culture of only one building type. Multi-family complexes can introduce variety into existing neighborhoods but should be in a form that is compatible with that neighborhood. **There should be no buildings perceived as full-block buildings.**

a. Building types include:

- **i.** Detached and attached Single Family Homes.
- **ii.** Triplexes and Quadruplexes.
- **iii.** Town Houses.
- **iv.** Mansion apartments: Two or three floors with one stair hall and two or three units per floor.
- **v.** Walk-up garden apartments with a maximum of three floors and a maximum of 24 units.
- **vi.** Elevator Apartment Buildings: All buildings over three stories, or more than 24 units.
- **vii.** Mixed Use Buildings with ground floor, active uses such as retail, services, commercial, community rooms, etc.

b. Developments of **more than 100 units should appear to have more than one Building Type.**

c. Building types should be compatible with and make respectful transitions to their neighborhood context:

- **i.** If located in a predominately or historically single-family neighborhood, the development should include detached or attached single family homes, townhouses, or mansion apartments in the parts of the site closest to its neighbors. Walk-up garden apartments or elevator apartment buildings should be located elsewhere on the site.
- **ii.** If located in a neighborhood with apartment buildings, the development should include a mix of apartment buildings in a similar form to the existing, but also add smaller scale building types to provide diversity.

Building types

Dwelling as a Mirror of Self:

People naturally see their homes as a reflection of themselves. It is directly tied to a person's self-image and therefore self-confidence. If a person's house is beautiful and well-maintained, it lifts spirits and gives a person hope and the promise of upward mobility. Conversely, if a person's home is poorly constructed, poorly maintained, and lacks the basic amenities that provide dignity (adequate windows for natural light, porches and balconies to interact with neighbors), it will dampen spirits and decreases the capacity for upward economic mobility.

Dwelling with poor (left) and positive (right) self-image

iii. Blocks in Downtown locations can have continuous building façades and large mixed use and apartment buildings. These should be articulated as a series of urban scale buildings to respond to the traditional scale of Downtown streets.

4. Neighborhood-Scale Blocks:

Small blocks contribute to the character, livability and social life of neighborhoods.

- **a.** Small blocks provide accessibility to more places within walking distance than large blocks.
- **b.** Small blocks promote community identity by connecting more neighbors than large blocks.
- **c.** Developments larger than 4 acres should read as divided into two or more blocks.

5. Block Perimeter:

Buildings should be placed around the perimeter of blocks:

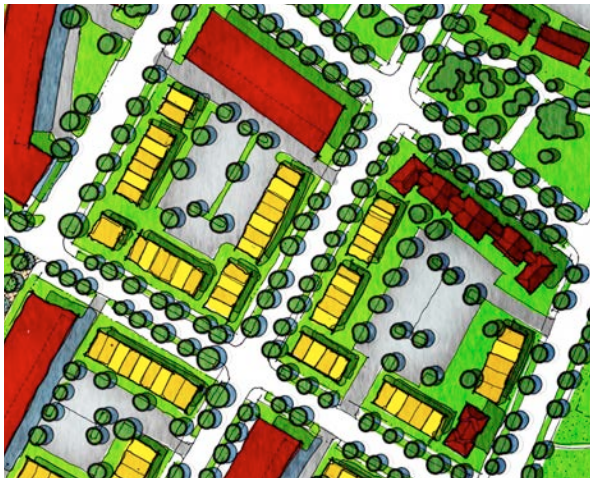
- **a.** Front façades and front yards should face the streets.
- **b.** Parking, service access and back yards should be in the center of the block screened from public view by the buildings.
- **c.** Buildings should occupy a majority of the block perimeter. In more suburban areas, the buildings should read as more dominant than parking lots.
- **d.** The building façades on the perimeter should have active uses.
  - **i.** Public and Retail use should have untinted and unobstructed glass façades providing transparency between indoors and outdoors; solar shading should be provided by canopies, awnings, or trees.
  - **ii.** Ground floor residential façades should include direct entry connected to the sidewalk.
  - **iii.** Inactive façades such as parking garages or blank wall should be screened and landscaped.
- **e.** Primary areas of frontage without buildings should be limited in order to provide good pedestrian experiences.

6. Block Security:

Buildings on the perimeter of the block provide a human-scale and neighborly security system that is much more effective than fencing without its negative connotation:

- **a.** Individual buildings should be placed close together with minimum space between them to create a continuous “fence”.
- **b.** Small lengths of fencing can connect buildings but should be set back from the front façade and screened

Multiple building types on one mixed-use block



Blocks: parking in middle with front façades on perimeter

Blocks with multiple building types
Charleston Innovation District

Typical perimeter block with diverse building types

by landscape material to be unobtrusive.

c. Fencing in larger open areas should be architecturally compatible with the buildings and well screened with landscape material to be unobtrusive.

7. Streetscapes and Public Open Space:

Streets should be well-landscaped and lined with shade trees to provide shade, cool and clean the air and provide storm water storage capacity that is much needed in this region.
The goal is to create a pedestrian friendly street space that will foster social interaction and community.

a. The design of streetscapes should respond to the scale and type of street as well as the type of building use. Buildings on streets with heavy traffic will need more buffering than those on small, local streets with low traffic volumes.

b. Allow for the configuration of the sidewalk, planting verge with trees, public gathering space, street furniture, bus stops and amenities such as bicycle racks before establishing the line of building façade.

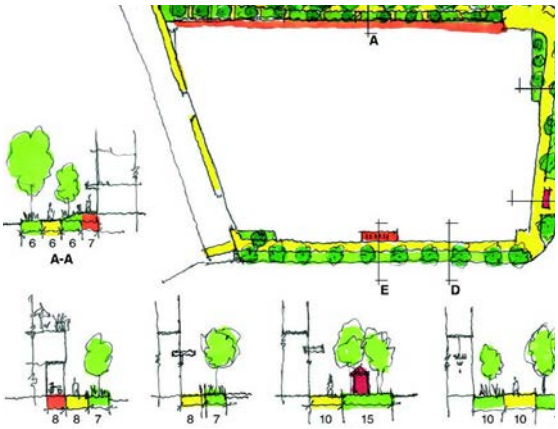
8. Amenities and Public Open Space:

Each new development should provide amenities for residents' quality of life and improve the neighborhood. Furthermore, equitable access should be provided for all elements. Every unit, amenity, and the like, should be visitable by all, regardless of mobility or other restriction.

a. Each development should provide an amenity for the neighborhood such as public art, planting verge, bus shelter or a multi-purpose path along major roads or the waterfront.

b. Amenities for residents should include active and passive spaces that are age-appropriate for the residents, such as:

- **i.** Clubhouse, Fitness Center
- **ii.** Pool, Cookout Area
- **iii.** Passive lawn, active game lawn
- **iv.** Wildflowers, native plantings
- **v.** Children's play area
- **vi.** Modern Technology
- **vii.** Package Pickup Area
- **viii.** Trash Chutes
- **ix.** ADA and rideshare drop-off and pick-up areas
- **x.** Bike Shelters/Storage/Maintenance Stations
- **xi.** Pet Areas
- **xii.** Public Art



Streetscapes around typical property


Interconnected network of pedestrian scale streets and open space


Barbecue area with native plants


Public open space with water management

c. Elevators — All multistory buildings with more than 24 units and all buildings over three stories must have elevators.

d. Walk-up garden apartments, elevator apartment buildings and mixed use buildings will have lobbies and stairs with no outside, exposed stairways or walkways. Access from structured parking should be through the building lobby and hallways.

9. Building Placement based on Street Type:

The scale, volume of traffic and character of streets determines the distance perimeter buildings should be offset from the street curb as well as the landscape buffer between the buildings and the curb.

a. Small Scale Neighborhood Street: Streets with one travel lane in each direction and parallel parking on both sides are pedestrian-friendly and supportive of small scale residential.

- **i.** Buildings should be set back from the curb based on existing setbacks in the neighborhood.
- **ii.** Provide 7'-0" minimum planting verge to accommodate shade trees and water management.
- **iii.** Provide 5'-0" minimum sidewalk.

b. Avenue and Boulevard: Streets with cartways with either three or four lanes, carrying moderate through traffic which may or may not have bicycle lanes or parallel parking on street.

- **i.** Buildings should be set back from the curb coordinated with existing setbacks in the neighborhood.
- **ii.** Provide 7'-0" minimum planting verge to accommodate shade trees and water management.
- **iii.** Provide 6'-0" minimum sidewalks.
- **iv.** Provide adequate space for steps, porches and planting.

c. Mixed Use Street: Streets with cartways with either two or three lanes, carrying slow moving traffic. Bicycle lanes and on-street parking are recommended for mixed use streets.

- **i.** Buildings should be set back from the curb depending on the volume and speed of traffic coordinated with existing setbacks on the mixed use street.
- **ii.** Provide either a 8'-0" minimum for planting trees. For higher speed streets, the verge should be up to 12'-0" wide.
- **iii.** Provide a minimum 10'-0" sidewalk.

Mixed use street with wide sidewalk

Small scale neighborhood streets

Separated bike lane

d. **Major Road or Highway with high volume, high speed traffic:** Streets with two or more travel lanes in each direction. The verge and sidewalk widths should be scaled to the street width and volume:

   i. Buildings should be set back significantly from the curb.

   ii. Provide greater than 15'-0" planting verge to accommodate shade trees and water management.

   iii. Provide 10'-0" multi-purpose path, preferably curving through the landscape area.

   iv. Provide densely planted front yard to provide further buffering.

72Foster, Holst Architecture
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10. Architectural Design Principles:

In order to create a lively urban environment, there should be a variety of architectural styles and character to be designed by a number of different architects. This variety is an essential aspect of real communities and neighborhoods as opposed to the uniform design of developments or projects. Innovation is encouraged but the result should be recognizable as belonging to Norfolk. For these different buildings to work together to create coherent urban places, there needs to be some shared urban qualities and patterns. The following principles are intended to provide the unity without diminishing the vitality of diverse styles of architecture.

a. **Massing:** The massing of buildings should be compatible with the scale of adjacent buildings.

   i. In a residential neighborhood with single family houses, row houses and small scale apartments, new buildings should continue the pattern. Larger buildings should be designed to have smaller scale elements.

   ii. In mixed use and Downtown locations, the ideal form is a mixture of building types on each block, but with continuous façades. Larger scale buildings that occupy a majority of the frontage of a block should be articulated into a series of smaller scale elements.

b. **Vertical Articulation:** Full-block buildings should be articulated into building-size elements. This can be accomplished with façade composition, changes of plane, breaks created by balconies or stairs, change of roof line or changes of material.

c. **Horizontal Articulation:** Every building larger than a single family house or townhouse should have a base,

Bill Sorro Community, Kennerly Architecture and Planning

middle and top to provide human scale and a common element among individual buildings.

d. **Windows and Doors:** It has been said that “The best security system is a nosy neighbor” and that “eyes on the street” provide security. Windows are those “eyes on the street” that provide views of the street from homes and send a signal to people on the street that they may be observed. Doors provide activity for the street. People coming and going add to public safety and are a means for residents to get to know each other and build a sense of community.

e. **Doors:** The more doorways on a street, the more safe and active it will be.

   i. Place doors along the façade, connecting to the sidewalk, oriented toward where people want to walk.

   ii. Distance between entrances should be no more than 60' along the street. For neighborhood scale streets and streets with appropriate streetscapes, provide direct access to entrances and porches for ground floor apartments. The doors should be front doors, not sliding glass patio doors.

f. **Windows:**

   i. A majority of lineal façade on each floor should read as windows and or balconies.

   ii. First floors should offer transparency into active spaces and uses.

g. **Porches and Balconies:** Porches provide an outdoor space overlooking the street which makes interaction between residents and passersby possible.

   i. Must be functional for people to sit together outside, with a minimum depth of 6'-0”.

   ii. Should be consistent with the architecture of the building.

Vertical and horizontal articulation; well-composed windows

Entrance lobby and communal terraces

Apartment Building doors

Luna Apartments by Cone Architecture

Multifamily porches