



POCKET NEIGHBORHOODS FACT SHEET

WHAT IS A POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD?

Pocket neighborhoods are clustered groups of houses or apartments gathered around a shared space — a garden courtyard, a pedestrian street, a series of joined backyards, or a reclaimed alley. They can be in urban, suburban or rural areas.



Photo Credit Austintinyhouse.com

Ross Chapin and Jim Soules developed the concept in 1996 in Langley, Washington. They designed the Third Street Cottages, a group of eight small homes clustered around a garden. According to Chapin: “They just seemed like jewel boxes; tucked away off of a busy street. And I said ‘this is like a pocket neighborhood’.”

POCKET NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE...

- **Shared outdoor space.** Residents surrounding this space take part in its care and oversight, thereby enhancing a sense of security, identity and community.
- **Privacy.** The houses ‘nest’ together: the ‘open’ side of one house faces the ‘closed’ side of the next. The open side has large windows facing its side yard, while the closed side has high windows and skylights. The result is neighbors do not peer into one another’s homes.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- ♦ Successful pocket neighborhoods start with the central idea of a limited number of dwellings around a shared commons. Beyond 8 or 12 units, the clusters should form around separate shared commons, connected by walkways. Multiple clusters can form a larger aggregate community. These communities connect with and contribute to the character and life of the surrounding area.
- ♦ Cars and traffic do not enter the shared pedestrian space. Although designs vary, some pocket neighborhoods have detached garages placed discreetly around the perimeter of the property.
- ♦ The active rooms of the homes, including the porches, face the common space. The public and private space are layered and careful placement of windows helps ensure privacy.
- ♦ Residences in pocket neighborhoods can be any style—Craftsman cottage, contemporary, Spanish Mission, Solar, Modern Modular. They can be detached single-family homes, attached townhomes, or clusters of urban apartments.



Photo Credit: RossChapin.com

“There are a number of design principles that make pocket neighborhoods successful, but style is not one of them.” - Ross Chapin

LIVING IN A POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD

Pocket neighborhoods have a great appeal across demographic lines. From Baby Boomers and empty nesters to Gen X and Y and Millennials, from singles to families—pocket neighborhoods appeal to people looking for smaller, lower maintenance houses with an opportunity for shared green space.

For people who want to live in a close, tight-knit neighborhood, pocket neighborhoods encourage informal interaction among residents which can develop into the basis for a healthy, livable community.

For families, pocket neighborhoods offer a protected traffic-free environment for children to play and explore while interacting with neighbors in the shared green space.

“People who want a private lifestyle have many conventional housing opportunities to choose from. But for a growing segment of people who want a stronger sense of community, pocket neighborhoods offer a welcome option.” - Ross Chapin

ZONING AND POCKET NEIGHBORHOODS

Zoning ordinances may need to be amended to allow for pocket neighborhoods due to restrictions such as minimum lot sizes, maximum lot coverage, setback requirements, density limitations, etc. Some municipalities have created overlay districts to allow pocket neighborhoods in specific areas where there are opportunities for infill development and higher density residential housing.

“Living in a rather large, high-maintenance home is not a dream for retirement.” - Ross Chapin



Photo Credit: Pocket-Neighborhoods.net

Sources:

Huffington Post - Michelle Minetti

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