



In Focus

Creative Housing Options

There's no single solution to the housing challenges we're facing in our communities. We need to become familiar with the diverse tools that are available and pick the combination that works best with our unique needs and priorities. In addition to financing and regulatory tools, we can consider the types of the homes that we build. For well over 50 years, communities around the country have been developing innovative kinds of housing to meet market demand for alternatives to the traditional single family home and high-density apartment complex. This In Focus looks at a handful of examples.

Cohousing

A cohousing community is a combination of private and communal spaces that support the development and growth of an intentional community. There are typically 20 to 40 single-family homes or duplexes clustered around shared spaces and facilities. Residents typically help design the layout of the community and participate in its self-governance systems. People form and join cohousing communities for a variety of reasons, including a desire to build relationships with neighbors, find safety in groups, share resources and maintenance work, and collaborate with others in transitioning to greener construction and environmentally sustainable living habits.

Most cohousing communities are designed to support aging in place and intergenerational relationships, and some are designed specifically for seniors. In senior communities, neighbors often share the costs of hiring a nurse or caregiver to meet their needs.



Highlands Garden Village, Denver. Photo by Placematters, CC BY 2.0



Photo by Nicolas Boullosa, CC BY 2.0

Downsizing your home brings a variety of benefits:

- Less maintenance
- Lower utility costs, more environmentally sustainable
- No or small mortgage
- Easier to relocate or own multiple homes

Tiny Homes

Tiny homes are fully-equipped, free-standing houses that average between 100 and 400 square feet. Some of them are mobile (i.e. mounted on wheels), and some are completely disconnected from the utility grid. Most are intended for people living alone, but they can also be designed for families. It's estimated that 40% of tiny home owners are over the age of 50. Tiny homes can be built to meet the special needs of their owners. They have proven to be an effective and affordable option for governments and relief organizations to shelter those experiencing homelessness and those displaced by disasters.



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Bungalow Court

A bungalow court is a small group of free-standing homes arranged close together around a central open space, or court, typically with side or rear parking. Instead of each home having a private backyard, neighbors interact in the shared space right out their front doors. Bungalow courts sometimes incorporate shared indoor spaces, such as an activity room, communal kitchen, caretakers' quarters, or rooms for visitors.

Homes are usually small (500 to 800 square feet) and have a lower price point, which makes them more accessible to first-time buyers. The cluster of homes is typically arranged perpendicular to the street.

This efficient use of space allows for more families to be housed while still blending into existing low-rise, low-density development patterns. A local example of a bungalow court is pictured to the right.

Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing is a combination of housing and flexible services for individuals and families who are struggling, with minimal conditions for receiving assistance. This approach recognizes that a person's ability to find and keep their home is influenced by many factors in addition to income, such as access to food, counseling, or recovery care.



Bungalow Court in Springfield, VT

Photo by Braxton Freeman

Depending on the structure of the local program, supportive housing clients may live together in a building or neighborhood, or independently in apartments or single-family homes that are integrated into the wider community. Regardless of the location, they usually pay no more than 30% of their income toward rent, and there's no time limit on tenancy. Tenants have voluntary access to services that support their health, employment, housing stability, and other needs. They choose what services they receive, as well as their personal goals. While tenants don't lose their housing if they refuse services, case managers stay in close contact so they can quickly access help if they change their minds. Services are provided in the home or at a place of the client's choosing in the community.

Supportive housing has consistently proven effective at helping people achieve housing stability and avoid crisis situations. In so doing, it helps to prevent overburdening of shelters, hospitals, and other publicly-funded response services.