1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Los Angeles has enacted the Small Lot Ordinance (No. 17354) to allow the construction of fee-simple, infill housing on small lots in multi-family zones. The housing can take the form of single-family homes, duplexes, or triplexes. Small lot developments can offer a space-efficient and economically attractive alternative to the traditional condominium development.

Additionally, the ordinance offers a welcomed smart-growth alternative to the suburban single-family home. However, it brings a new set of spatial complexities. Lots may be both small and awkwardly shaped. Driveways and parking can take up much of an already limited lot size. Adjacent structures and neighborhood context may effectively limit building heights above two stories. In short, these spatial constraints and complexities require innovative design solutions.

This handbook provides design guidelines and suggestions both for addressing these complexities, and for ensuring that each small lot development benefits both its residents and the neighborhood.

Looking at small lot design from three levels

Constructing infill housing offers a unique set of design challenges not simply on the parcel level, but also on the neighborhood level and within the public realm. Developers and architects must therefore consider both the design elements of each townhouse and how these designs will enhance the overall neighborhood character and vitality of the street and sidewalk.

Parcel

Small lot design and layout is fundamentally a site planning challenge. It requires simultaneously addressing practical spatial requirements while creating high-quality living environments. Those practical requirements include: parking and automobile access; small lot sizes and awkward configurations; adequate access to air, light, and ventilation; outdoor space and privacy. Developers must address these issues in ways that ultimately enhance the living environment of each dwelling unit. Additionally, each home must exhibit a high level of design quality: well-articulated entries and facades, proportionate windows, quality building mat erials, contextual landscaping.

Neighborhood

By its very nature, infill development occurs in neighborhoods with preexisting development and preexisting characteristics. In some cases, the neighborhood will be predominantly residential; in others, the neighborhood might be predominantly commerical. Whatever the case, the design should enhance the overall quality of the neighborhood. At this scale, developers and architects must consider not simply the aesthetic nature of each townhouse, but the three-dimensional nature of the entire development: height, massing, siting and orientation. These characteristics must relate to the surrounding built form, respecting the overall neighborhood character and existing topography.

Public realm

Each infill project, however small, must add to a vital and coherent public realm—streets and sidewalks that are pleasant, interesting, and comfortable to walk down. To do so, one must consider the three-dimensional relationship between the infill project and the street and sidewalk. Key variables to consider are: building siting and orientation, height and massing; articulation of facades and entryways; placement and type of street trees; landscaping and transitional spaces; and location of driveways and garages.

Comprehensive goals:

-Create high-quality indoor and outdoor living environments for all residents
-Design and configure housing to mesh well within the existing neighborhood context
-Enhance the public realm
-Provide fee-simple home ownership opportunities for greater numbers of people, of a range of income levels
-Consolidate service and access areas (parking, driveways, garbage) to minimize their adverse effects on both the public and private realms
-Create high-quality public spaces or common areas (i.e. shared driveways, landscaped areas)