

February 27, 2003

Creating suburban living in the city

Small lot subdivisions can mimic their larger country cousins

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Some developers and builders are creating alternatives to traditional subdivisions and downtown condominiums for empty nesters, professional couples and single adults. These buyers want the best of both worlds — a home located near a downtown core with the spaciousness of a traditional single-family subdivision. To meet this demand, developers are putting a new twist on the traditional single-family home — homes in small lot subdivisions in urban neighborhoods.

Because many people in this buyer profile have active lifestyles, they are willing to forego owning a large lot to live close to a downtown core. What hasn't changed, however, are their expectations that the space will feel like a larger suburban home. Meeting the needs of these buyers and fitting these small lot subdivisions into the existing urban fabric can be a challenge.

Developers and builders are working with design consultants to give these denser communities subtle nuances that remind people of the comforts of traditional subdivisions. As Triad Associates works on these projects, we have found these design principles helpful in achieving this goal:

- Bring the outdoors indoor to enhance interior spaces
- Give streets a human scale
- Create transitions and distinctions between public and private space
- Develop a sense of community



Photos courtesy of Triad Associates

Third Avenue Bungalows has 12 single-family homes squeezed onto a 1.4-acre infill site in Kirkland. Landscape elements and home layouts help create a feeling of spaciousness.

To apply these principles effectively, design consultants need to understand the site and how the design will affect the residents' living experience.

A project that is successfully attracting this buyer profile is Third Avenue Bungalows — an urban infill project in Kirkland developed by CamWest Development. Remaining homes in the development are priced between \$499,950 and \$529,950.

CamWest found a parcel of land hidden next to an office park, below an arterial, and at the dead-end of a narrow street of an existing neighborhood. With the potential for tapping into views of Lake Washington and with easy access to Kirkland's chic downtown core, the company saw a diamond-in-the-rough.

CamWest joined forces with the Dahlin Group and Triad Associates to design and build 12 single-family homes on the 1.4-acre site. Dahlin provided architecture and site planning services, while Triad provided landscape architecture, engineering and surveying services.

By developing the project as a condominium with common ownership of the land rather than as fee-simple lots in a subdivision, the design team was able to situate the homes so that a surprising amount of openness, privacy and individuality could be achieved through site design and landscaping.

Openness

The design of the homes, the site and landscaping at Third Avenue Bungalows gives residents a feeling of space between themselves and their neighbors. For homes with recessed garages, Dahlin placed large windows facing the driveways (which doubled as private courtyards). This made the interior space of the homes feel more expansive.

When deciding to place landscape elements, Triad visited each home during construction to make sure the views from these windows had attractive focal points.

Triad's landscape architects selected colorful plant material and trellises to cover walls and fences and to screen views of neighbors. By creating an inviting view from the windows, residents would more likely leave their blinds open, again making interior rooms feel more spacious.

A small pocket park was strategically placed at the end of the cul-de-sac to create a sense of community and a central point of visual interest. A staircase ascends from the park up a tiered retaining wall to connect pedestrians to Sixth Street.

An arbor perched atop the stairs draws residents' eyes beyond the homes, while a decorative fence along the retaining wall separates the community from the busy street. As an added touch, we tucked a seating area in the park so that residents could enjoy the view of Lake Washington.



Common spaces are open, yet private.

Privacy

Triad's landscape architects looked at alternative ways to create useable and private outdoor areas. In homes with recessed garages, we used arbors and gates to turn driveways into useable private courtyards.

Rather than use the front yards just as transitions between the street and the front door, we created courtyards in the front yards to increase the amount of useable outdoor space. Low walls and specially selected plants create visual interest and privacy.

With little outdoor space in the rear yards, small outdoor patios were designed in the backyard where neighbors' windows did not overlook. We made these areas inviting by using trellises and plants as screening.

Individuality

To help distinguish these homes from condominiums and attached single-family units, Triad landscaped each home differently from side to side and back to front. The style and richness of the landscaping adds depth to the front yard, giving each home a sense of space and a pedestrian-friendly face.

In a small lot subdivision, every foot of ground must add value to the owners' living experience. Using outdoor areas for multiple purposes gives these homes many of the functional amenities of their larger suburban counterparts. Creative landscaping designs and colorful plants that distinguish one home from the next create an inviting outdoor view from inside the homes. Strategically placing windows near open space gives interior rooms a sense of spaciousness.

Creating places for privacy through the absence of windows and use of enclosed patios is equally important. To do all of this successfully, designers and builders must create custom designs appropriate to each site.

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