CITY MAKERS

THE CULTURE AND CRAFT OF PRACTICAL URBANISM

CASSIM SHEPARD

such as those governing courtyards, are less restrictive than in conventional residential construction, allowing for the development of difficult infill sites; there is no minimum unit size; and there are no requirements for providing parking." This team prepared three schemes along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx that extended the logic and regulations of supportive housing to general population housing. The first scheme reimagines the SRO as adjoining live-work 150 square foot units. Every two units would share a bathroom accessed from a semiprivate work area screened off from the sleeping area and opening into a day-lit and naturally ventilated, multi-use corridor that includes communal eating, working, and gathering space and a kitchen that serves a set of six units. The second scheme combines densely packed, self-sufficient units of 275 square feet (each with its own kitchen) for singles or couples with an array of shared spaces. The third scheme is "a large, flexible apartment building that can be easily adapted to the changing needs of a household of friends or multiple generations of a family. Each apartment features connectable rooms of similar sizes, which are suitable for living, sleeping, or working. Spaces also can easily be separated to create an independent office, rental apartment, or accessory dwelling unit (for a nanny or in-law). Apartments range from eight to twelve rooms, or a total of 1,700 to 2,300 square feet."

The New York Times architecture critic Michael Kimmelman praised the schemes presented at the Making Room symposium. He called out a few of his favorites, including Kirschenfeld's ideas for the Grand Concourse, and proposals by a team led by Deborah Gans that "retrofitted Tudor Revival cottages in immigrant-rich areas like Astoria, Queens, so they could house an evolving assortment of singles and families who might want to live together. Her plan, with buildings cleverly massed and fitted into the existing fabric of the neighborhood, conceived of up to seven apartment "pods" ("barnacles" became another operative metaphor) clinging to a 4,000-square-foot house." Kimmelman also liked a proposal by a team led by Peter Gluck and Terri Chiao that "envisioned a five-story walkup on a town-house-size New York lot. The building would accommodate twenty micro-lofts, as the team termed them, some 150 square feet each. With mini-kitchens, fourteen-foot ceilings, and public spaces for residents to socialize and work together on each floor, the plan trades basics like an elevator for private space and lower building costs."[29]

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The growing demographic that would most benefit from this type of housing is single-person households. And, indeed, when Kimmelman summed up the entire premise of the Making Room project, the unmet needs of this group seemed to carry more weight than the other two challenges the project was also intended to address, those that promoted new forms of shared housing and those that provided accessory dwelling units for extended families or additional renters:

> In the past New York has adapted to changing household patterns. For example, grand Upper West Side apartments from a century ago were chopped up to provide more units for smaller families that no longer employed live-in servants. The question now is can the city become nimble again? Boston has zoned for micro-units to accommodate the young population and others struggling with market rates, on whom civic competitiveness and social equity ultimately depend. Can New York also meet the social and economic needs of the twenty-first century?[30]

The Bloomberg administration was much more deeply concerned with the notion that young, single professionals were finding the costs of moving to New York City to start their careers prohibitive than it was by the prospect of fostering joint-family or co-living arrangements. And so it announced a pilot program, called adAPT NYC, to develop a building of 275 to 300 square-foot apartments on a City-owned property on 27th Street between First and Second Avenues. These "micro-apartments" are smaller than the current minimum legal size for a living unit in New York.

The Mayor, in announcing the initiative, explained that, "We want people to come here to start their careers here, to start out here, to start their families here. If they can't afford to live here, then that's a problem." Stated in this way, the Mayor was clearly aware that supply is not meeting demand for the kinds of people the City seeks to attract. The primary objective of adAPT NYC thus appears to be to increase affordable options for young professionals. But it's not just young professionals who can't afford to live in New York. Across the socioeconomic and demographic spectrum, the housing options available to New Yorkers are nowhere near as diverse as the households and real estate preferences of New Yorkers themselves.

Fulfilling part of CHPC's goals for the Making Room project, the adAPT NYC experiment prompted hope that, if successful, it might lead to the easing of some of the zoning regulations and housing codes and standards that constrict the amount (and inflate the cost) of New York City housing units. That hasn't happened yet. For obvious and non-obvious reasons, policymakers find it far easier to create a new, circumscribed zone where the outdated regulations don't apply than to roll back the regulations themselves.

In theory, the enforcement of government regulation maintains a measure of flexibility: agencies administer laws, interpreting and enforcing a law's intent with respect to facts on the ground that can shift more quickly than traditional legislative processes. In practice, regulations that increase costs create counterintuitive incentives to maintain the status quo, especially in the context of urban housing markets where the financial interests of mortgage holders (banks) diverge from
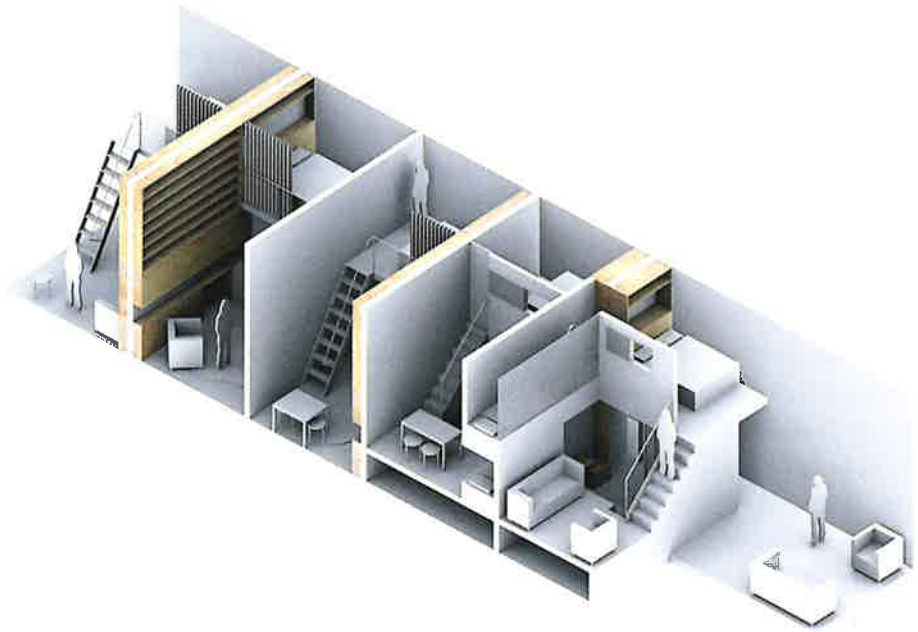
As part of the Making Room design study, a team including Peter Gluck, Terri Chiao, Leigha Dennis, Deborah Grossberg Katz, and Joseph Vidich developed the idea of "micro-lofts," which offer flexible and private spaces for inhabitants while doubling the density of the typical residential townhouse lot. The 232 square-foot "micro-loft" unit typology has a smaller footprint than a typical studio but is much taller, with a 15-foot floor-to-ceiling height and a large mezzanine.

those of residents (especially renters).[31] As we have seen, the regulations and codes that govern housing in New York were enacted to ensure a principle of public health in the first few decades of the twentieth century. For example, the preamble of the Multiple Dwelling Law of 1929 states that "the establishment and maintenance of proper housing standards requiring sufficient light, air, sanitation and protection from fire hazards are essential to the public welfare."[32] As Jerilyn Perine reminds us, there were other priorities at play: overcrowding was seen as "a menace" not only to "health," "safety," and "reasonable comfort," but also to the "morals . . . of the citizens of the state."

Today, I would argue the most urgent principles of public welfare that forward-thinking housing policy can meaningfully confront are sustainability and afford-ability, rather than public health. Don't get me wrong: ensuring public health is still a proper office and responsibility of government, but housing regulation is

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[30] Ibid.

[31] The more expensive it is to create new housing supply, the greater the value of existing housing, thus property owners and banks stand to profit from maintaining the status quo.

[32] The full text of Clause 11 of Chapter 713 of the New York State Multiple Dwelling Law can be found archived at http://www.tenant.net/Other_Laws/MDL/mdl01.html.

very high and creating the most innovative housing models in the world. That's not happening right now."

In order to stimulate that innovation, Perine and her team at CHPC conceived of Making Room, a multi-year initiative to demonstrate how people are currently living, to conceptualize new housing types forged from within our existing building stock to accommodate contemporary living patterns, and to identify the regulatory impediments that would prevent developers from providing those new types. The project, Perine told me, started with a simple idea. In 2007, the Bloomberg administration launched PlaNYC, an ambitious series of 127 initiatives (updated to include more than 400 in 2013) intended to prepare the city for the expected one million more inhabitants by 2030. Perine and her colleagues at CHPC wondered, "how would one million more people actually fit into our housing stock? So that led us to ask ourselves, well, how are people fitting into the housing stock today?"

The project began with several years of research CHPC had undertaken to understand trends in New York City households, culminating in a symposium that featured architects from around the world at the vanguard of reimagining housing design, from reconceiving miniature homes as a mode of luxury in Tokyo to manipulating building code loopholes to create higher density shared housing in low-density neighborhoods in San Diego.[26] From there, CHPC initiated the Making Room Design Study, partnering with The Architectural League to commission four teams of architects[27] to work on solutions for what CHPC research had identified as the three most common challenges: "1. Small, efficient studios designed for single person households; 2. Legal shared housing options for unrelated adults; 3. Accessory units to make a single family home more flexible for extended families or additional renters."[28]

The design schemes generated by the four teams were remarkable for their ingenuity. Each team took on one or more of the three challenges and developed a startlingly original solution. For example, Stan Allen, an architect also well-known as an educator and theorist, worked with Rafi Segal to lead a team of designers that wrung housing from an unlikely yet woefully under-utilized resource: "the millions of square feet of commercial office space constructed in the 1960s and 1970s that are rapidly becoming obsolete today." Their design treats the typical Midtown Manhattan office tower "as a platform for . . . a fine-grained mixture of domestic, commercial, and public programs . . . At the upper levels of the building, the higher floor-to-floor dimensions of the existing structure allow the insertion of three residential floors within two office floors, yielding a flexible matrix of living units, from duplexes for families to micro-units for singles. The shifted section creates a new urban typology that allows both proximity and separation of activities: living and office spaces sometimes share single floors yet can function independently."

Another team was led by Jonathan Kirschenfeld. This team benefited from Kirschenfeld's extensive experience designing supportive housing in New York, a category of housing that includes support services for the mentally ill, formerly homeless, recovering addicts, and other special needs groups facing diverse challenges. In supportive housing's specific zoning rules, "certain minimum dimensions,

such as those governing courtyards, are less restrictive than in conventional residential construction, allowing for the development of difficult infill sites; there is no minimum unit size; and there are no requirements for providing parking." This team prepared three schemes along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx that extended the logic and regulations of supportive housing to general population housing. The first scheme reimagines the SRO as adjoining live-work 150 square foot units. Every two units would share a bathroom accessed from a semiprivate work area screened off from the sleeping area and opening into a day-lit and naturally ventilated, multi-use corridor that includes communal eating, working, and gathering space and a kitchen that serves a set of six units. The second scheme combines densely packed, self-sufficient units of 275 square feet (each with its own kitchen) for singles or couples with an array of shared spaces. The third scheme is "a large, flexible apartment building that can be easily adapted to the changing needs of a household of friends or multiple generations of a family. Each apartment features connectable rooms of similar sizes, which are suitable for living, sleeping, or working. Spaces also can easily be separated to create an independent office, rental apartment, or accessory dwelling unit (for a nanny or in-law). Apartments range from eight to twelve rooms, or a total of 1,700 to 2,300 square feet."

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no longer the primary or exclusive way to address it. A wide range of contemporary laws now govern health and environmental factors, including the Clean Air Act (1963), the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974), and many more. A range of technological advances, from energy-efficient lighting to air-conditioning to modern plumbing and glazing, have ameliorated the conditions that were once prima facie unsanitary such as windowless bedrooms or shared bathrooms and kitchens. In order to move us toward a more sustainable and affordable urban future, housing policy must be geared toward enabling responsible density in housing.

The new housing prototype proposals produced for Making Room would add density in ways that would yield more use out of our housing stock, utilizing a combination of new construction and adaptive reuse of existing buildings of various types (including office buildings). Of course, doing so in a way that wouldn't lead to overbuilding or overburdening existing systems would require long-range planning to guide these new types of development into neighborhoods with the appropriate carrying capacity in transit, schools, and other necessary facilities. With some sensible planning in place, they would move us in the direction of accommodating the needs of diverse household types, including new kinds of sharing, joint families, and singles. They would lower costs. Intelligent densification also has the potential to lower urban dwellers' carbon footprints.

We have to create the capacity for more adaptation in our housing stock through design, but we also have to make our regulatory framework nimble as well, including but not limited to zoning, that allows for urban housing markets to be more nimble and therefore more sustainable and affordable. One real estate analysis of the Bloomberg era rezonings uses a strikingly appropriate sartorial analogy: "The legacy 1961 zoning created an invisible city with a loose shape, like a dress bought a few sizes too big, that the physical city had plenty of room to grow into. The Bloomberg administration has left behind a building envelope that's more like a corset, pulled tight to the city's body, cinching around places that were already small and boosting its curves."[33]

At the scale of the building, New York City is home to virtually every housing typology found throughout the country, from skyscrapers to single-family homes. At the scale of the living unit, there is much less diversity. Our accretive regulatory framework has created a structural disinclination toward designing innovation, effectively homogenizing what's available to middle- and lower-income individuals and families to two- or three-bedroom apartments with proprietary kitchens, bathrooms, and windows of a certain size. New kinds of coalitions between policy and design will be necessary to jumpstart innovation, meet dynamic needs, and maintain a dense, sustainable, and affordable supply of housing.

At the same time, fetishizing innovation for its own sake has serious drawbacks. There is a limit to how much permanent shelter can ever adapt to changing social or economic circumstances. And we must not fall into the trap of maligning older forms of existing housing as tastes change and awareness evolves about how the physical environment enables or constrains different kinds of social experience. The capacity to adapt, broadly considered, also means remaining analytically agile

enough not to let philosophical shifts blind us to the nuances of place that offer up surprising benefits in forms of housing otherwise considered outmoded, if not obsolete. One such shift is the gradual move away from publicly funded high-rise housing for the poor and towards a system of vouchers and subsidies to incent the private development of below-market housing.

Unfortunately, meeting the needs of the day — whether urban poverty is facing a crisis of abandonment, of foreclosure, or of unaffordability — has often led policy-makers to devise short-term solutions. Specializations within urban planning education specify particular types of spatial scale but not particular ranges of time; you can concentrate on neighborhood planning or regional planning but you can't focus on, say, long-term planning. Citymakers should neither be slavishly devoted to precedent, tradition, and the built environment status quo, nor should we be in the business of predicting the future; we are still doing damage control for the faulty mid-twentieth-century belief that retrofitting our cities for unimpeded car traffic was a forward-looking, progressive strategy. Learning from recent history, even if the conditions seem totally distinct to those of the current day, offers an important corrective to our structural inclination towards short-term urban solutions. The ethic of adaptive capacity, especially with regard to the durable bricks and mortar that house us, will help citymakers foster generative and equitable urban development for conditions we can neither anticipate nor wholly control. In order to step confidently into this uncertain urban future, we must remember to look into the past. We must also train ourselves to look anew at existing built forms.

TYPECAST: UNCOVERING ASSETS HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

By the early 1970s, the apparent deficits and failures of government-supported housing for the poor were much discussed, and the architecture was often unfairly blamed for poor maintenance, crime, and massive economic shifts taking place at the time. Most notably, the demolition of the notoriously unsafe Pruitt-Igoe housing project — a complex of thirty-three buildings of eleven stories each arranged uni-formly across fifty-seven acres of north St. Louis — signaled, to some, the dramatic demise of architectural modernism as a cause, if not a style.[34] The commentariat agreed that "with brute finality, the Pruitt-Igoe demolition seemed to mark both the bankruptcy of an important program of social transformation through modernist design, and, by implication, the return to traditional patterns of urbanism. Charles

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[33] Laskow, "The quiet, massive rezoning of New York," *Politico*, 2014.

[34] According to Katherine Bristol, "Anyone remotely familiar with the recent history of American architecture automatically associates Pruitt-Igoe with the failure of High Modernism, and with the inadequacy of efforts to provide livable environments for the poor." In an influential 1991 paper, she debunks the notion that architecture was to blame for the projects' failure, citing a complex wave of factors including deindustrialization, pre-existing territorial conflicts between rival neighborhoods flanking Pruitt-Igoe and poor maintenance. Katharine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth" in *Journal Of Architectural Education*, vol. 44, Issue #3, 1991. See also the film *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* by Chad Freidrichs, 2011.