

Cohousing: A Spatial Embodiment of the Collective Ideal

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Abstract

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Cultural narratives and art that are experienced and created are a way to understand how spaces are designed and how social relationships in private and public spaces are performed. This thesis argues that the ideals behind cohousing are the same values centered within Danish poetry from the 1960s to the present, as well as Danish literature and philosophy from the 1800s.

The exact order of how we organize our days and what we value may change, but life's daily rituals are a means of connection and should be given space. The everyday and the mundane offer an alternative way to shape the design of communities and new construction, particularly in the United States. There are many articles that speak of cohousing as a solution for loneliness, but this thesis argues that it's not a solution to get rid of it, but a way to have space to integrate those feelings. Life exists in the quiet and in-between spaces, and cohousing is remarkable because of this.

Cohousing, in its current form, began in Denmark and is an English translation of the Danish *bofællesskaber* (living community or shared accommodation). It is defined as a community of separate individual units, a common house/space, and shared common exterior space between units that focuses on the pedestrian rather than the automobile. Cohousing began as a spatial solution to two everyday problems of child care and meal preparation. The design focused on the integration of the public and the private through 32 units and a shared common house with space in between that facilitates community interaction. It is also a financial and contractual relationship where all parties create and maintain the spatial through a communal process of decision making.

Cohousing is a way to both acknowledge and embody interdependence that exists within nature and our larger society as a whole. This thesis proposes a design of a cohousing community in Columbia City in Seattle. This community is designed around the human and their everyday experience. Columbia City is historical area and in the beginning stages of upzoning to higher density. So much of current development is driven by the free market, and one of the key ideologies holding this in place is the idea that everyone is alone and self-reliant. This denies the reality of social systems, and that leads to everyday life being regarded as something to escape rather than live within and even celebrate.

Cohousing offers a way that redevelopment can design a spatial and a social means to center the human and their everyday experience.

**COHOUSING: A SPATIAL
EMBODIMENT OF THE
COLLECTIVE IDEAL**



Danish coffee pot, also called Madam Blå

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This is primarily a research thesis. The investigation began with many ideas about poetry, the everyday, architecture, American housing patterns, land use codes, financial lending practices, human connection and disconnection. This vast field of research with infinite interconnections was narrowed into investigating cohousing as a spatial embodiment of the collective ideal.

Cultural narratives and art are a way to understand how and why spaces are designed and what the social relationships are within both the public and the private realm. This thesis argues that the ideals behind cohousing are also the same values centered within Danish poetry from 1960s to present.

Cohousing began in Denmark, and is an English translation of *bofællesskaber* (living community or shared accommodation). It is defined as a community of separate individual units, a common house/space, and shared common exterior space between units that focuses on the pedestrian rather than the automobile. Cohousing began as a spatial solution to two everyday problems of childcare and meal preparation. The first design focused on the integration of the public and private through 32 units, a shared common house with in between spaces that facilitated everyday community interaction. It is also a financial and contractual relationship where all parties create and maintain the spatial through a communal process of decision making.

Dan Turell's "Tribute to the Everyday" was the beginning point for this research. The poem gives a feeling that resembles how I felt when living in Copenhagen. There is a lot of sociological research about the social structures that form our everyday experiences, but not a lot about the way literature and art from a place are embodied in spaces. Denmark is known for design that values the human and I was interested in understanding that link between the poetry I loved, and the spaces valued by architects and urban planners for their human scale and other qualities that are often felt but hard to describe exactly what makes them feel that way.

American architecture and urban planning often looks towards Denmark as an example of human spaces. Those examples can feel a bit like a lost in translation situation. Because architecture is the physical and spatial embodiment of the values from a place or cultural context, the spatial can also be used to reveal what narratives reinforce or keep those values in place.

Sociologists study the social structures that form our everyday experiences. This thesis is about understanding the ways the spatial forms our everyday experiences. Cohousing as a spatial typology acknowledges and is formed by cooperation and collaboration, and embodies the interdependence that exists within nature and larger society. A cohousing community designs housing that is designed around the human and their everyday experience. This thesis proposes a design of a cohousing

community in Columbia City in Seattle, WA. Columbia City is a historical neighborhood and is in the beginning stages of upzoning to accommodate higher density. So much of recent and new development is driven by the free market, and one of the key ideologies holding this in place is the idea that everyone is alone and self-reliant. This denies the reality of social systems, and that leads to everyday life being regarded as something to escape rather than live within and even celebrate.

Cohousing offers a way that redevelopment can design a spatial and social means to center the human and their everyday experience.

Chapter 2. Poetics & The Everyday

Poetry is both easy and hard to define. Poetry, much like prose is about communicating our experiences, feelings, and our humanity. In a podcast from the Poetry Foundation two Swedish poets and translators discuss what poetry is and how do you translate poems across different languages. I translated all of the poems included in this thesis from Danish. It was difficult to translate keeping the meaning and voice while also making it readable and coherent in English. Malena Mörling, one of the Swedish poets, quotes Tomas Tranströmer in answering the question of what is a poem and how do you translate it—"a poem is a manifestation of an invisible poem that exists beyond the convention of languages, therefore a translation of a poem into a new language is an opportunity to attempt to realize the original invisible poem, and, in this regard, poems are not static. They are ever changing as they travel from language to language. A poem is alive as long as it is being translated."

Poetry, literature, and the Danish language were the inspiration for this thesis. This is important because the modern form of cohousing started in Denmark. Language is a way of understanding ourselves and our relationship to others. The words one uses reveals a lot about what is commonly understood among a group of people. Poetry is not unlike architecture; it relies on constraint in form and uses language like space to convey and create a particular feeling or experience. Poems are written by an author from a particular context, but have the ability to function as a means of connection and communication to others giving a personal insight on what it means to be human. In Malcom Hebron's book *How to Read a Poem* he states, "Poems convey emotions-hope, despair, defiance, fear. It's hard to really separate the mind and the heart. The main two uses we make of language are to say what we think and to say (or show) what we feel. Poetry brings the two together."

¹ This is also why translation is so hard and why it is not a matter of direct translation but creation of a new poem with similar feelings. The first poem is Dan Turèll's "In Praise of The Everyday" (Hyldest til Hverdagen) in *Kom Forbi* published in 1984. Dan Turèll is widely known and beloved in Denmark. The poem is simple in both form and subject, and it is the simplicity that makes it so meaningful. It observes and creates the feelings one has as the experiences are described. These everyday experiences are often overlooked in favor of the celebrations and vacations that pull us out the banal of our everyday, and this poem celebrates the everyday for being exactly what it is.

Dan Turèll had great influence across Denmark among writers and people as a whole. The poem is widely known and understood. Its subject embodied within both the public and private realms in Denmark.

The everyday is also integrated in other realms of Danish society and it is hard to know if the ways spaces are designed influenced the author to write this poem or the poem, and others like it, influenced the spaces. This thesis is only a beginning in the exploration of this relationship.

Charlotte Strandgaard is a poet and novelist in Denmark. She grew up in Aarhus, Denmark the second largest city in Denmark. As the daughter of author Jens Kruuse and translator Annabeth Holland her house was filled with artists and intellectuals. Her experiences and relationshipShe is a self-declared socialist and wrote a lot about women's experiences and other feminist literature. This poem is in a collection called Uafgjort. It discusses a street and each person that plays a part in forming that community. The everyday is a central theme and those that sell things like cheese, milk, vegetables. It is both about the people, and the space, similar to cohousing.

Jørgen Leth is a famous Danish poet, author, filmmaker, and sports commentator. He is also known for being a voice for Danish poetic modernism in the 1960s. He studied anthropology in undergrad and often uses that as his lens to create his films and writings through. In an interview with film scholar Mette Hjort, he said, "It's true that I'm very interested in making the banal exotic. A good example is *Life in Denmark* [film], where I try to view the familiar with a stranger's eyes, try to adopt an analytic stance towards what is most natural, obvious, and mundane."² He also reveals that his process of writing poetry is similar to the goals in his film making, where the things we see so normally, when described, become charged and enchanted.

Michael Strunge was also a famous poet in Denmark. His poems are among the most analyzed and read in Denmark. His inspirations ranged from modernism, life in the city, death, and punk music from Great Britain.

Katrine Marie Guldager is a current writer in Denmark and writes poems, novels, short stories, and children's books. Her first few poems were about finding stillness in a chaotic everyday. Her poem here is a response and elaboration on what Dan Turèll's poem also is about.

Cohousing and the poetics of everyday life are a possible way to imagining human centered development. In *Architecture of the Everyday* Mary McLeod writes "Everyday life embodies at one the most dire experiences of oppression and the strongest potentialities for transformation. However inhuman, it reveals the human that still lies within us. "A revolution," Lefebvre claimed, "takes place when and only when...people can no longer lead their everyday lives."³ Attention and poetry about the everyday allows for the invisible to be visible, and lead to discussions about the set of spatial relationships that center the human.

Lefebvre is a central figure in the scholarship of urbanism, architecture, everyday life and the nature of space. His work was highly influential in French planning and contributed to socialist planning policies in the 1980s. His work entered the American cultural debate only in 1991 with the

Hyldest til Hverdagen
(In Praise of the Everyday)
Dan Turéll
1984

I am fond of the everyday
most of all I am fond of the everyday,
The slow awakening to the known views
that all the same are never quite so familiar
The family's at once both intimate but after sleep's distance unfamiliar faces

morning kisses
the smack of the post landing in the hall
the smell of coffee
the ritual walk to the corner market for
 milk, cigarettes, newspapers
I am fond of the everyday
even through all its irritations
the bus which clatters outside on the street
the telephone that incessantly disturbs the most beautiful, blankest
 standing-still nothing of my aquarium
the birds that chirp from their cage
the old neighbor that looks past
the kid who has to be picked up at school only just as one is getting going
the constant shopping list in the jacket pocket
with its regular demands of meat, potatoes, coffee and crackers
the quick little drink at the local
when we all meet together with our shopping bags and wipe our sweat from our brows
I am fond of the everyday
the daily agenda
also the biological
the unavoidable procedures of the bath and toilet
the obligatory shaving
the letters that must be written
the rent
the balancing of the checkbook

the dishes
the realization of having run out of diapers and tape
I am fond of the everyday
not in contrast to parties and colors, good times and applause
have that as well
with all its leftover ash
so much unsaid and approximated
floating and hanging in the air afterwards
like some sort of psychological hangover
only the everyday morning coffee can cure
fine enough with the parties! all the room for euphoria!
let the thousand pearls bubble!
and what happiness it is to afterwards lay oneself down
in rest and everyday's bed
with the familiar
all the same not quite so familiar

I am fond of the everyday
I am crazy about it
Cancel the holidays, I am fond of the everyday
I am *really* fond of the everyday

Katrine Marie Guldager
Styrt - Digte
Tømt

I should always keep at it in the commotion, I should do any manner other than I do: Namely not very much. I should feel shitty, because now a part of the morning is, grocery shopping and lists, because it is now sometimes the way, a human upholds a certain word-one, fragments of conversations, milk and eggs: I should give into should, yield to the spackle and moulding, door handles and screws, I should give into here, yield to now, give into everywhere, until I have no more to give, until everything is empty for anything other than that, who completely spontaneously keeps on with the following: namely that I should.

Michael Strunge
Everyday

Samlede Strunge
Digte 1978-85

Open the days
make them like the green plants
that grow wild throughout the weeks
- or the waves
that crash over us
with mussels, fish, coral, sea stars
- make them like the stars
with a bright and distant familiarity
and shelter,
(luminous blue and red sun
shaped by our hands
as we fortuitously floated past
the vast cloud of shining dust
and glimpsed a handful.)

In spite of the nights chill
the seas depth
and the earths darkness.

With water and fertilizer
with the wild storms
and freezing nights.

Open the days
with the suns light.
The shines on the ground and the sea
the glides away in the night.

Charlotte Strandgaard
uafgjort
Gaden

the grocer
raisins
spaghetti butter potatoes onions packaged bacon
caramel candy frozen food coffee tea
wine beer tobacco
the man and his wife
take the orders in the afternoon
to be picked up in the evening
they know the children they converse
they give discounts they deliver
they take messages

the butcher
he doesn't sell any meat he cannot guarantee
he rarely gives credit he is trustworthy
he has fresh lamb
chicken and eggs
he makes good leverpostej

the cheesemonger
his window glistens with water
he has 30% cheese
he has imported cheese
a row of smoked sausages
a bag of garlic
he also has crackers
and pretzels
he looks angry
he is kind

the produce market
red apples
carrots
cucumbers
radishes
they are in the basement
the wife has red hands
they also have some flowers
they life behind the store

the dairy
milk
butter
bread
they have good morning buns
they are up at 5
they come with milk by 7

movie theater
has red plush seats
it is rather large
the tram is close by
it plays children's films
on sunday afternoons
it once had a
Danish premier
it plays all types of films
the ticket lady lives on this street

the houses were built in the 30s
made of the red bricks
they are 4 and 5 stories tall
the steps are polished
stairways brown
the children are well cared for
the parents are good-looking
they have a map of the forest
it is small
they can see the water from it
on warm summer days
it happens
that everyone drinks juice
and beer in the garden
most have television
they have children and rarely come out
it is about 200 meters
to the allotment garden
they visit each other outside
root the plants
listen to the radio
eat
raise the flag
burn the trash
wash cars
drink coffee

it is a pleasant street to live on

Jørgen Leth
Hvad er det nu det hedder

The chair is important

Quite a few things
The sea that rolls in
The sea that is freezes
The legs that go
The path that pushes back
The hard stones on the path
The ugly yoghurt
The phrases
The words
The text
The shadows on the theater balcony
Horror
The sidewalk
The smile
The newspaper
The tennis match
Breaking news
Not more than must be
Rearrange the things
Moving freely from place to place
Twisting the body
Can you all understand it?
That it is about
transforming nothing
to something
Spin on the chair
The essential change
to something
Spin on the chair
The necessary change
in perspective

Look out the window
over the sound in early evening
A set of simple things
The wish to keep on
with loving
To keep on going
Keep on feeling
Material note motion
Get something out of it
Move a few centimeters
Sit down again
It is important, the chair
The chair is important
Sit on it
Get up, sit down again

translation of his famous work, *The Production of Space*. Henri Lefebvre thought art was important in the transformation of everyday life. In the 1950s was associated with the CoBrA group of artists and was “active in dialog with Situationists, who shared his disdain for avant-garde negation and were equally committed to a revolutionary transformation of everyday life.”³ Both of those groups had Danish origins but by the early 1960s they parted ways because of the way they thought revolution was brought about by short-term events rather than, as he believed, “a slower and more comprehensive process, less theatrical and individualistic, necessitating a more historically grounded engagement with everyday life.”³ Poetry has that quality, through feeling, This gives a way to talk about the role that poetry and other art can play a role in changing how development happens and why cohousing embodies the collective ideal.

Collaborative housing, or cohousing, were developed to meet everyday needs in a communal way. The Danish poetry names such needs, and allows for a spatial and architectural solution to meet and celebrate those needs of the everyday.⁴

Chapter 3. Danish Origins of Cohousing

Cohousing, the English translation of the Danish *bofællesskaber*, is defined as a community of separate individual units, a common house/space, and shared common exterior space between units that focuses on the pedestrian rather than the automobile. It also requires a social agreement of shared responsibility towards one another and the spaces themselves. It is both an architectural typology as well as a social and financial agreement between all residents; this is what makes it different from other multi-family and single-family housing. It is not just a way to help with the isolation of living independently within a single-family home in modern society, but a fundamental shift toward living interdependently.

Cohousing was first developed in Denmark between 1962 and 1966 by Jan Gudmand-Høyer and Bodil Graae. It was developed as an alternative to the multi-story apartment building and the suburban single-family home. Jan Gudmand-Høyer and Bodil Graae published two articles in national newspapers about how vital community is to children and the disconnect between community and the single-family home. These articles led to a group forming to design and develop the first cohousing community. There are now over 210 communities in Denmark, and 165 established communities in the United States, as well as other community housing types in Sweden and the Netherlands.

The 1960s and 1970s in Denmark were both politically and architecturally humanist. Cohousing was developed in the 1960s as a spatial response to human daily and weekly rhythms by architects “who created human architecture for people.” Carsten Thau, in conversation with Borsi Brorman Jensen and Kristoffer Lindhardt Weiss, continues to say that the 1980s, in contrast, says that the ideas about human centered architecture were displaced. They were replaced with the idea that humanity was embedded within the structure of language rather than it offering aspirations of a life well lived. “The assumption that we are forever constrained by the conventions of language, under the spell of more or less invisible power structures, led to a certain relativism and skepticism and suspended humanism.”⁵ Cohousing continued even in the 1980s and beyond to create human architecture for people. These ideals remained because of how it is developed through shared decision making and requiring the invisible power structures be visible.

Poetry and spatial definitions are not isolated from one another. The poetry in the previous chapter centers the everyday experience by describing feelings and observations, including the spatial, within rituals and objects of the banal. Associate Professor Louise Fabian of Århus University wrote an essay in *Art of Many: The Right to Space* that follows the development in the Danish architecture profession’s humanist self-image and, important to this thesis, “draws a parallel to the so-called spatial turn in the humanities.”⁵

Fabian traces the origins of this turn within Scandinavia that led to architecture being “involved in the production of the welfare state and defining its institutions.”⁵ Cohousing is a reflection of this. Architecture is a reflection of cultural values and a defining force of social institutions at the same time. This thesis is interested in this relationship particularly when it involves everyday spaces.

Sociologists study the everyday as a means of understanding the social constructs that organized how we relate to ourselves and each other. The humanities also can be analyzed and researched to identify what it means to influence and shape space and architecture, and there is also the intimate connection of poetry that regards how it feels to live and be a part of something on an everyday basis. This is why this thesis evaluates both the poetry and Danish ideas of cohousing. This interdependent relationship between the poetry about the everyday and humanness of cohousing is what makes it the spatial embodiment of the collective ideal.

In Denmark, the boundaries between “traditional” housing and cohousing are blurred. The social welfare state gives a base that regards certain relationships as obvious and simply a part of being human. In the 1960s there were larger apartments being developed, and tenants demanded more involvement in the design of the housing. As a response the Danish Building Research Institute stated that the cities have to be administrated by the people who dwell there, including the decision regarding programming, projecting, day-to-day functions must be made by the inhabitants themselves.⁴

There is also a built-in element of trust and responsibility to, and for, one another within Danish society. The social welfare state supports all people, including the disabled, seniors, immigrants, and poor in a way that places value on people being human rather than as a means of production.

Urban dwelling is often higher in density, but can still be isolating. Suburban single-family houses are spread out and also create fragmentation from the community and others. This fragmentation of the individual and community that currently exists in both suburban homes and also traditional urban dwellings is addressed in cohousing.

There are six defining characteristics that exist within all cohousing:

1. Participatory process: Co-developed, co-designed, and co-organized with the group. Genuine and authentic participating process.
2. Designs that Facilitate Community: Designed to facilitate community interactions (not auto-oriented, but every electric wheelchair, Segway or other personal vehicle necessary to keep the site auto-free except in rare occasions)
3. Extensive Common Facilities: Extensive facilities that supplement and facilitate daily living. Common facilities are perceived as an extension of each own household's private house.
4. Completely Resident Managed: Residents manage the development themselves, making decisions of common concern at community meetings.
5. No hierarchy in decision making: Responsibility for decisions is shared by the community's adults.
6. No shared economy: Residents have their own primary incomes. The community does not directly generate income for its residents, nor (with rare exception) do its residents share income from community-owned retail or office spaces. All the residents pay a monthly fee, in addition to membership dues, to a home owner's association to cover shared costs, as is typical of a condominium arrangement.

Communities are self-organized, and self-designed so the architectural form is developed from the needs and desires of the people who make up the community. Depending on the architectural needs and social desires, the spatial character might resemble traditional apartment buildings, townhouses, or condominiums, but they are not the same. While there is also a financial contractual relationship that connects and obligates people to one another, it is the social that gives cohousing most of its defining characteristics.

Chapter 4. Case Studies

There were three key case studies completed for this thesis. The three communities chosen are of different scales, and different phases of the development of cohousing worldwide: Sættedammen near Copenhagen, Denmark; Winslow Cohousing on Bainbridge Island, WA; and Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing in Seattle, WA.

Before discussing these case studies, it is important to revisit an idea about translation from the Poetics and the Everyday chapter. Cohousing is not remarkably different from many other housing forms but, as these three case studies reveal, it is about the set of relationships that join together to form the spatial. Each community is a manifestation of an invisible yet tangible set of relationships, and each iteration of a cohousing community is an attempt to realize the original set of relationships in a new context. The form and formation are not static and, therefore, so is the definition of cohousing. They communities are formed through this process of communal decision making with the goal of creating spaces that suit the everyday needs of the inhabitants in the best way possible. From *Art of Many*, "Space must be conceived as dynamic, relational and socially integrated part of everyday practices and processes. Doreen Massey has shown, place should not be understood as a fixed thing with a stable essence, but as something hybrid open, and porous."⁵

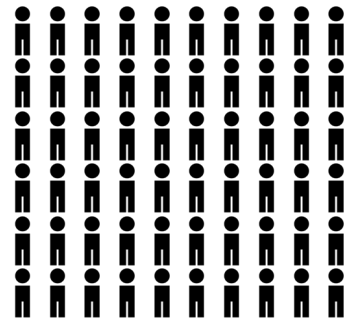
In *Redesigning the American Dream* Dolores Hayden describes several different housing types in the chapter "Rethinking Private Life." She describes cohousing as one strategy within the larger category of "The Neighborhood Strategy: The Cloister and the Village" Hayden breaks down the process in which the private [space] becomes a home: "it must be joined by a range of semiprivate, semipublic, and public spaces, and linked to appropriate social and economic institutions assuring the continuity of human activity in these spaces."⁶ And, more importantly, this strategy can suit not just the home, but one can evaluate this range of spaces on many levels including the neighborhood, city, and country. Cohousing balances this link between the private and public by providing the necessary range of private, semiprivate, semipublic, and public spaces.

In *Collaborative Communities* Dorit Fromm describes visiting Sættedammen with the intention of understanding how successful the community was in balancing privacy and community because, she states, "as a designer I had been taught how to create privacy, but community was, and is a gray area in planning and architecture."⁴

All three case studies demonstrate a different spatial response to this relationship of private, semiprivate, semipublic and public. They also reveal the role that the way the space between is vital to facilitate contact between residents as they go about their day, and allow for that spontaneity that Lefebvre describes.³

Sættedammen // Hillerød, Denmark
1972

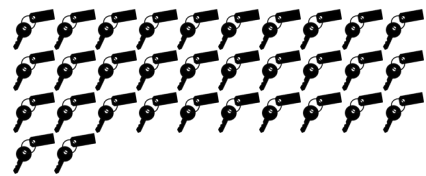
Adults



Children



Units

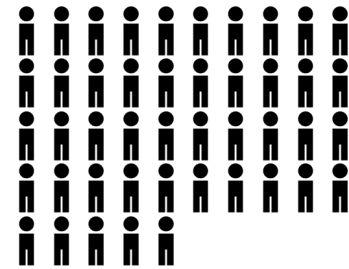


Buildings



Winslow Cohousing // Bainbridge Island, WA
1992

Adults



Children



Units



Buildings



Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing // Seattle, WA
2016

Adults



Children



Units



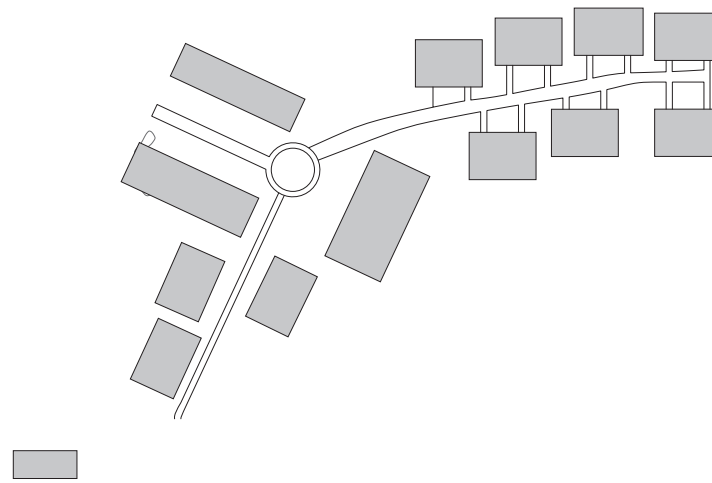
Buildings



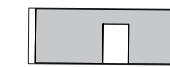
Figure 1. Case Study Diagram



Sættedammen
Hillerød, Denmark
1972



Winslow Cohousing
Bainbridge Island, WA
1992



Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing
Seattle, WA
2016

Figure 1. Case Study Plan Comparison



Sættedammen
Hillerød, Denmark
1972

SÆTTEDAMMEN

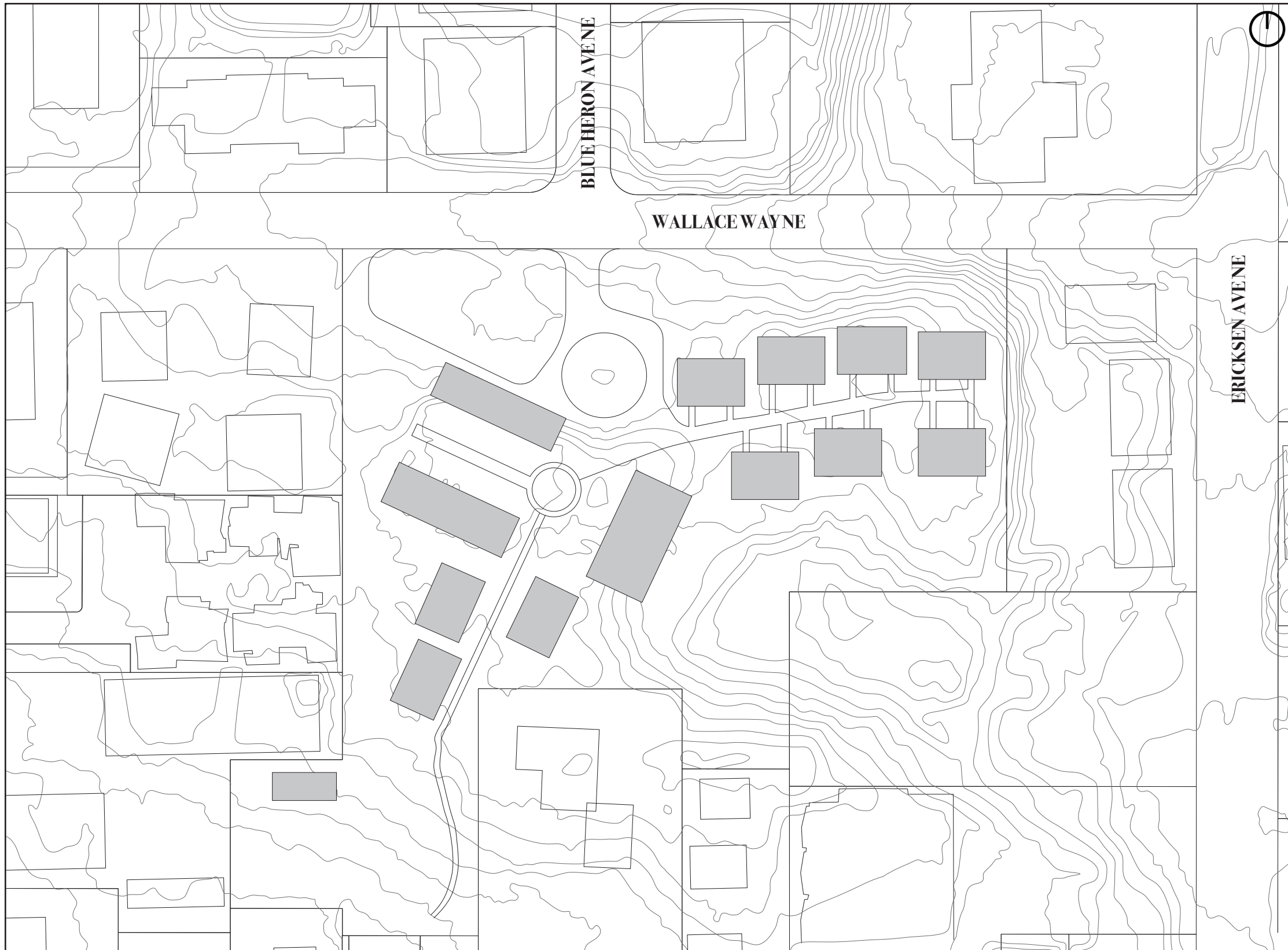
Sættedammen was the first completed cohousing community. The community was made up of people who had responded to both Jan Gudmand-Høyer and Bodil Graae's articles and joined together to build housing. The group had originally found a site in Jonstrup, another suburb of the larger Copenhagen area. Because of differing design desires the group split in two and the Sættedammen community was the second. Half of the group that split wanted larger homes and a smaller common house with front gardens, and the other half, just the opposite.

In the fall of 1972, the 27 families, with 54 adults and nearly as many children, moved into Sættedammen. The buildings are laid out on the site in four groupings around a common space that all of the homes look out on. Because this was the first community there was concern over making sure the boundaries of public and private were harder edges, and clearly delineated from the neighbors. Even though Sættedammen is located just to the north of Copenhagen in a suburb called Hillerød, it is outside the city center but is well connected to the larger metropolitan area with buses and trains. The parking, like all of the other communities after it, is located away from the residences and allows for the community to not be auto-oriented, but facilitate community interaction.

Architecturally, the common house is located centrally opposite the parking. The two-story homes are all located on one side of the site and are narrower than the single-story homes on the opposite side. The private residences ranged in sizes from 1,500-1940 square feet (140-180 m²) They were designed on a 4 x 3.3 or 4 x 2.2 meter module with a post-and-beam construction between concrete load-bearing walls. This was to build in flexibility to expand as housing and family needs fluctuated. When first designing the community, the floor area of each residence was reduced by 7% to afford the common facilities.⁴ This ratio of reduction of each individual house to the size of the common house was increased in subsequent communities as they realized the success of role of the common house. The homes are larger than the cohousing homes in later communities once the role of the common house was more understood therefore the homes could be smaller and still meet people's needs in cohousing.

Fromm writes about arriving at Sættedammen, "The sensation I felt on that afternoon is hard to describe. The comfort and familiarity was simultaneously exotic and rare—to be within a community that works."⁴ The success of such a community, even as the very first one, can be attributed to the collaborative development, management of the community, as well as the balance of privacy and community through the individual dwellings and the well-used common house.⁴

This community was chosen because it was the first community, but also for its (sub)urban context as well as an example project from Denmark. The community was radical when it first was developed, and now is considered quite conservative architecturally and spatially. It is still a successful and alive community, and many of the original residents are still there, and maintains a high demand for new openings.



Winslow Cohousing
Bainbridge Island, WA
1992

WINSLOW COHOUSING COMMUNITY

Winslow is a community located on Bainbridge Island just west of downtown Seattle and easily accessible by a 30 minute ferry ride. It was completed in 1992, just 20 years after the first cohousing community was completed. It is located in a central part of Bainbridge Island within walking distance of the downtown business district, but on a site that has a suburban form. Part of the site is also a heavily forested land trust that is set aside for the housing community and the larger neighborhood, with the guarantee that the land will never be developed. Parking is located away from the residences and the homes are divided into three main groupings located along three axes across the site, with a central pivot point that connects all three parts and is adjacent to the 5,000 SF Common House. The site has a gradual topography that works in conjunction with the arrangements of the dwellings. One of the most important aspects of the community is the relationship of the open spaces and walkways with the homes themselves.

There are ten (10) duplex buildings, one (1) fourplex, and one (1) two-story six unit building, also called the Carriage House. The duplexes range from two - four bedrooms but are all the same square feet. The additional bedrooms are built from filling in a porch area on the ground floor, and on the second floor by filling in an area that is open to the kitchen below, and by utilizing the space from two closets in the two bedrooms upstairs. The dwellings themselves range in size from 587 SF to 1632 SF.

The plans for the houses situate the kitchen and dining rooms towards the front, and the living room in the back. This procession creates a series of thresholds starting from the walkways, on to the porches, the kitchens and then the more private living room space in the back. It was important to give people a chance to have spontaneous encounters and to wave to one another from the kitchen sink while doing dishes, but still provide private spaces in the dwellings as well. Because the common house is so large and there is adequate space to have gatherings and cook for everyone, and for children to play in, the homes did not have to be so large to provide adequate space to live in. This actually encourages the use of the common spaces even more than if they were larger.

The Common House has three floors, but the largest room is a double-height open space that functions as the dining room and has nooks off to the side to create smaller spaces that give a feeling of intimacy. Because this was one of the first cohousing projects in the United States, the role that the Common House would play in the community wasn't as clear to the design team and architects. After it was built there were some acoustic issues with having so many people in a space that large, and the

scale gives a more institutional feeling. Aside from dinner five nights a week, (Sunday-Thursday), the building plays a role in the everyday of people's lives through the laundry in the basement of the building, a teen space upstairs, and a large play area downstairs that opens out to a large outdoor space adjacent to the forested trails on site. There is also a large guest room and bathroom downstairs.

CAPITOL HILL URBAN COHOUSING

Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing is in a neighborhood just East of Downtown Seattle. This community is made up of nine units in a single building. From the exterior it looks like the other buildings around it, and also has an office on the ground floor like a lot of the other new multi-family mixed-use buildings in the area. The office is an architecture firm and has its own entrance on the street separate from the entrance to the residences above it. Because it is an urban building, there is no parking provided in the building itself. There is bike parking and storage provided adjacent to the alley. The circulation for the building is at the center and the front doors of the units face the outdoor hallway that connects at each of the stair landings. What is often a separate common house in other communities is a community room on the first floor that in the back half. It is adjacent to a central court yard that is open to above. The community room, while smaller than many of the cohousing communities functions just the same. It has seating for 30 in the dining area, a full kitchen, storage, laundry, and a guest bedroom and bathroom.

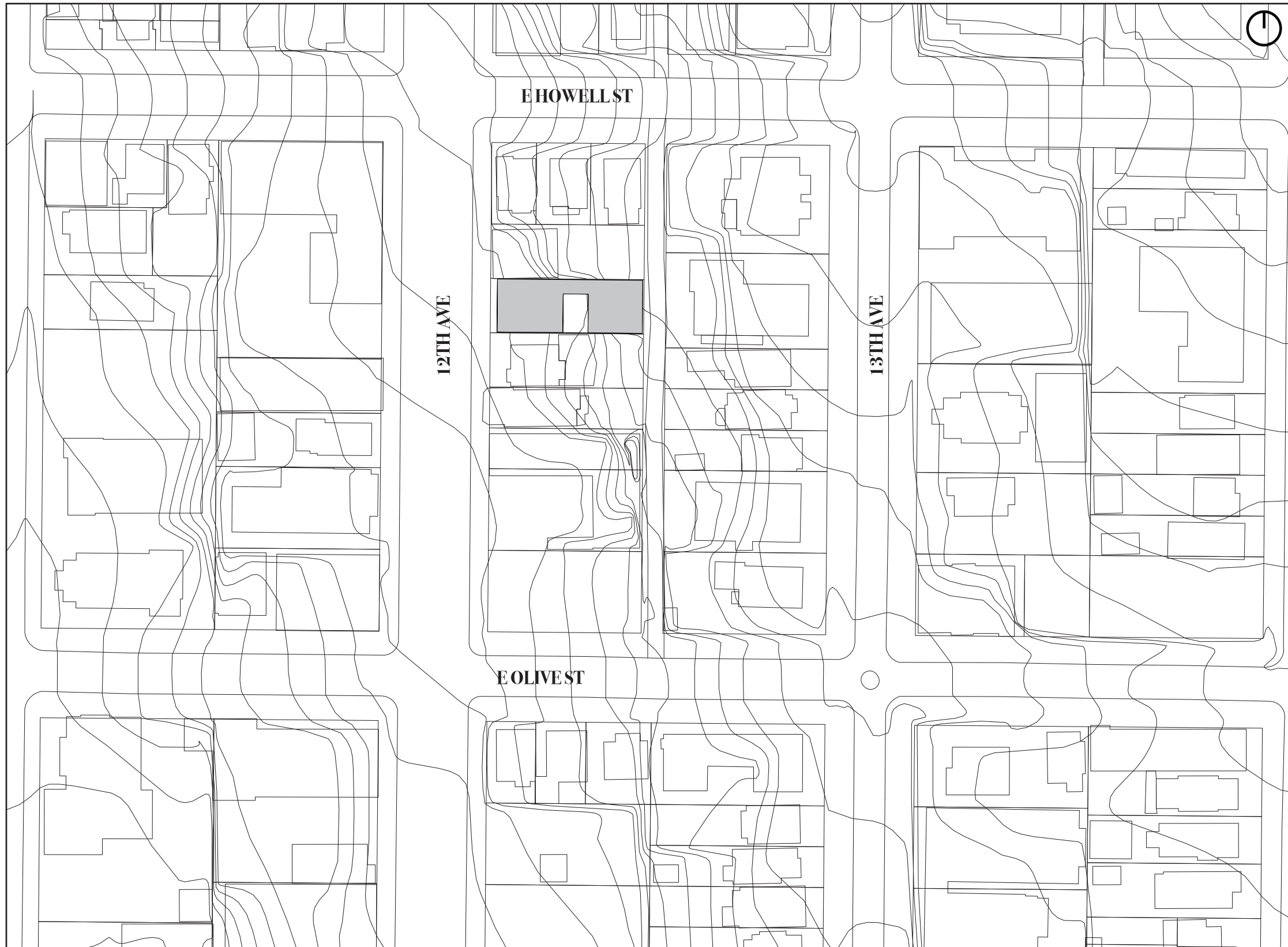
There are meals on either M, W, or T, Th depending on the week to allow for people who are not available on certain nights to still participate. People rotate head chef (selecting the recipe and shopping) and support help and each person just pays for the meal they prepare allowing people to spend as much or as little as they can budget for. Eating together is an important of connection and each community has some established schedule of meals and way of managing maintenance and other building responsibilities.

The community is a mix of people from single adults to families with kids, and the age ranges from young children to retirees. One of the residents moved from the Winslow Cohousing community because they wanted to live in a more urban context while still being in a cohousing community. The high cost of living in Seattle, as well as a lack of larger units, has driven out many families from the city. This cohousing community, and potentially others allows for families to stay, and also comes with the benefit of having other adults in the lives of children. Although the building does appear to be a typical infill structure, the central courtyard and open stair give that visibility and interactivity that facilitates community interaction.

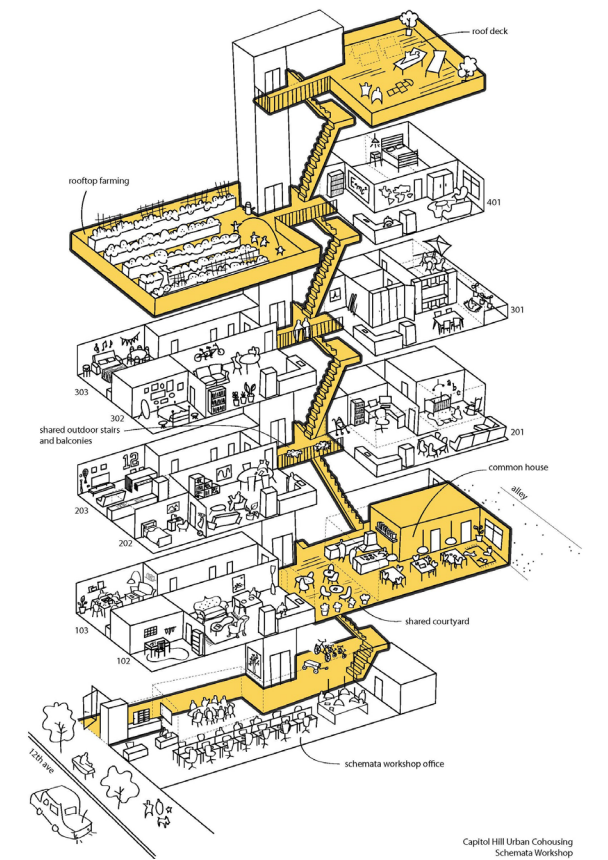
There was difficulty in securing funding for construction because there are few banks in the United States that will loan to these kinds of projects. The building is owned collectively and each of the units is rented by each of the occupants. The bank finally approved the loans for construction once it was clarified that the end goal is not to sell at a profit. There is potential to use this as an example

for other urban cohousing projects, and reveals why cohousing is a different way of development in contrast most projects in the United States.

The architects, Grace Kim and Mike Mariano of Schemata Workshop, who designed the building also live in one of the units with their family. Grace Kim has been speaking about what it like to design and live in cohousing, and also work on other similar projects for others forming their own cohousing communities.



credit: Schemata Workshop



credit: Schemata Workshop

Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing
Seattle, WA
2016

Chapter 5. Site Analysis

The poetics of the everyday, the Danish origins of cohousing, and the three case studies are the framework for this thesis and applied to a design for a cohousing community in Seattle in Columbia City.

The ideals found in the Danish poetry from the 1960s about the everyday were similar to those that formed cohousing in Denmark. A narrative that is pervasive in American culture, and has equal an impact in the built environment, is that of the rugged individual. The United States of America praises the individual as the hero. As a country certain ideas about success and how to live well revolve around being a self-made person. These ideas are embodied in both the public and private realms. This narrative is deeply embedded within capitalism and the idea of the free-market. Rebecca Solnit writes in her book, *Call Them by Their True Names: American Crises (and Essays)* a chapter entitled The Ideology of Isolation, "Taxes represent civic connection: what we each give to the collective good...But if you forget what you derive from the collective, you can imagine that you owe it nothing and can go it alone."⁷ The collective good in American culture does not drive the political framework for education, public policy, housing, and many other aspects of daily life like it does in Denmark.

The social and political affect everyday life. Dolores Hayden in *Redesigning the American Dream* also describes the link between the happiness of Americans and the role poorly designed public space and housing can affect those feelings. Our problems, in America, are often seen only as personal problems and not those of larger society.⁶ This is similar to how Solnit described the difference between isolation and connection and the pervasiveness of isolation in American culture. Acknowledging this is a start to addressing the way a design in Columbia City might be created around the human experience of the everyday. This community design is in contrast to the way the market forces, land use codes, or replicating what is already there produces. As one of the six characteristics that all cohousing communities share, facilitation of community interaction needs to be integrated into your everyday, and not solely through an organized schedule. It involves shifting the way you organize your daily rhythms to be open to other people, but also giving space for the private rituals of everyday life to exist in that range of spaces from the public to the private. It could be described as living alone together with other people.

Single-family and townhouses have similar site relationships with the public realm. The townhouse is an embodiment of this independent idea and lacks an everyday relationship with the ground level. To maximize space, there is usually a garage and maybe a front door access, but there is no life on the ground floor that prioritizes the pedestrian everyday experience. The single-family home does have a presence on the street level, and was designed to give a soft edge between the lived private space

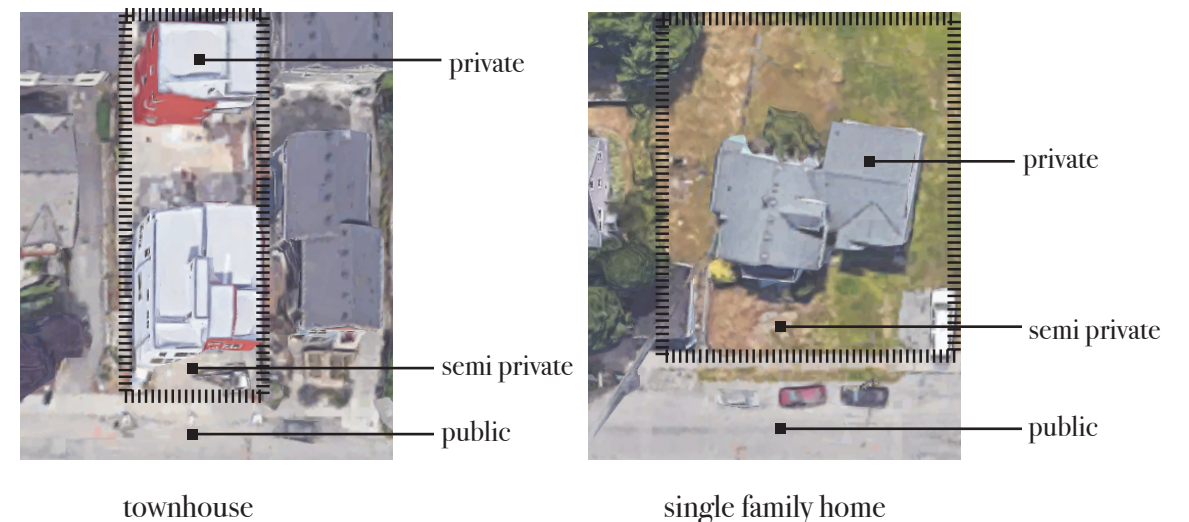


Figure 3: Townhouse & Single-Family Street Relationships

and the public space of the street. However the use of that in between semi private space is up to the responsibility of the private user. This leaves actions or inactions to the individual rather than the collective that cohousing is designed around. The soft edge though is a benefit to both the residents of the particular home, and the neighborhood as a whole.

SEATTLE

This thesis is also about cohousing as a response to the growth and change in Seattle and other urban city centers that have rapidly grown without clear means of keeping them accessible to a wide population of people. Seattle, specifically, has grown to be one of the top ten most expensive cities in the US over the last decade. This rapid change and major increase in residents whose incomes are above average has led to a high demand for housing and a displacement of long-time residents that now cannot afford to rent at the prices asked, or are displaced as the demand for previously affordable neighborhoods increases and raises property tax levels far beyond what middle to low income people can afford. The highest at risk for displacement are most often people of color, artists, LGBTQ, seniors, students, those living with disabilities, and other marginalized people groups. As development increases, the urban fabric of the city is drastically altered. Seattle has a history of redlining and restricting people of color from living in large parts of the city until relatively recently. Because of this the neighborhoods in the South end have been some of the most diverse areas in the region. While the neighborhoods are viewed and labeled as “up-and-coming” and prime spots for affordable land to redevelop, people have been living in them for a long time and need to be understood from this perspective.

The new developments particularly in older neighborhoods are often the result of tearing down older homes and replacing them with higher density narrow buildings on the same lots. While the higher density is an important change to address a shortage of housing, attention to the economic, diversity, and pedestrian experience has not been a large concern in the design and development of the new housing. Another popular housing typology that has increased in the last several years is the “Apodments” model of units as small as 160sf that have a bed, bathroom, kitchenette, and small living space in the units, along with a larger shared kitchen on each floor. These rent for the same price that one bedroom apartments were about ten years ago. There is also now an over abundance of studio and one bedroom units and not many two and three bedroom apartments large enough to accommodate families or at a price many families can afford.

The development process in Seattle is focused on individual buildings and what impact they have on

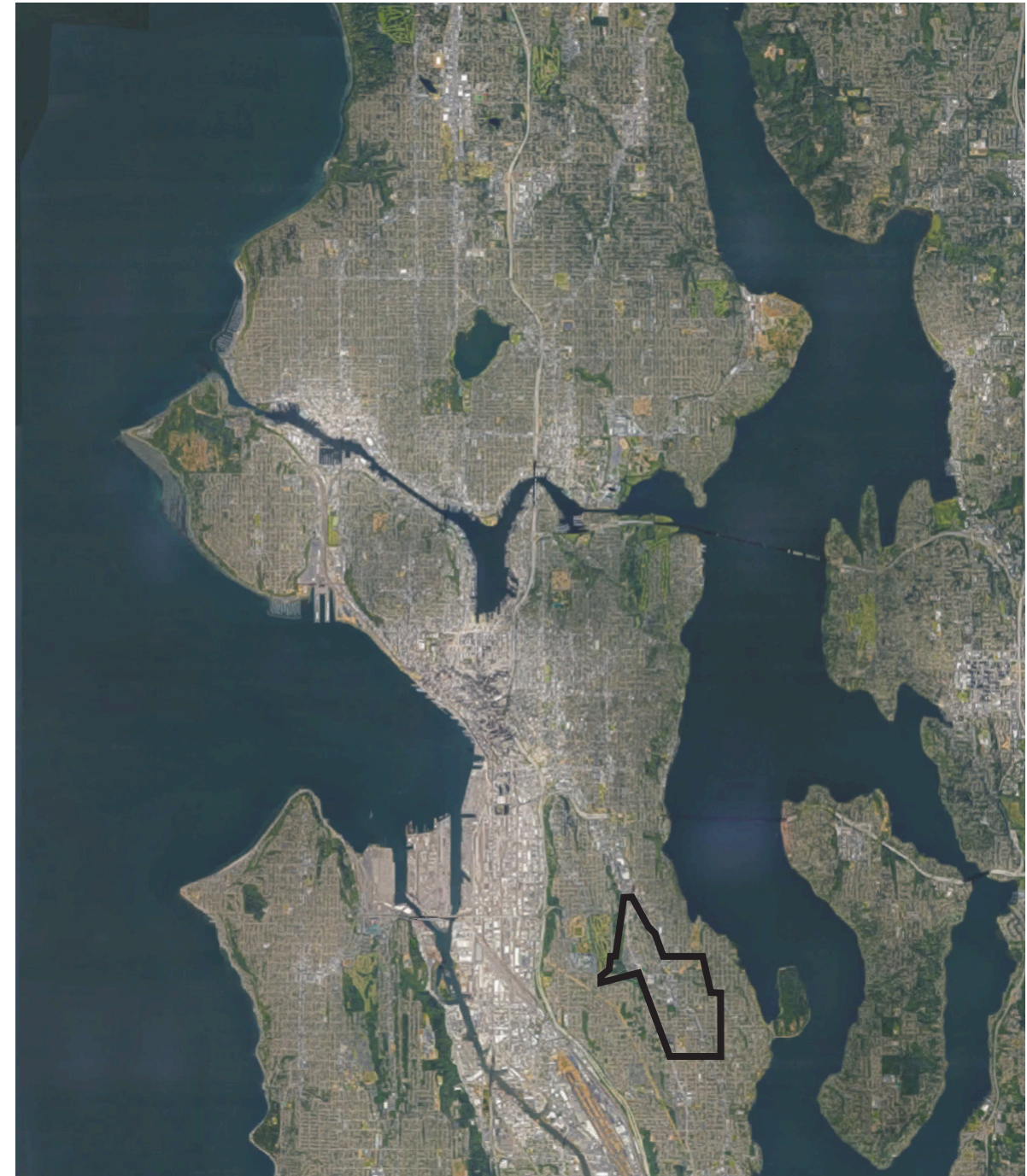


Figure 4: Seattle City Map

the site, but attention needs to be expanded to the social impact designs have on the people living in them and their relationships within, and also to the larger urban experience. Because of the need to maximize the units that can fit on a site, they are often in rows, and have a garage on the ground floor. This leaves the ground floor without a connection to the street and neighborhood. Even the newer developments without parking are still lacking in the spatial layering of the public sphere to private dwelling that makes a neighborhood a thriving community. When the free market is in control of the development of an area, the focus is on maximizing the density on the site and by what the land use requires. This is part of why, while an increase in density is encouraged, this still doesn't lead directly into well designed homes that integrate well into the larger urban fabric and provide spaces that prioritize the everyday of the humans that live within them.

COLUMBIA CITY

Columbia City is a neighborhood the Rainier Valley of South Seattle. It is well connected through the Link Light Rail Station, bus lines, and two major streets, Martin Luther King Jr. Way S and Rainier Ave S. This has made it attractive for new development. It has seen an increase in new construction like the rest of the city. Because it is an older neighborhood with few vacant lots, the development has largely been from tearing down single-family homes and replacing them with new row homes or town homes, and a few larger apartment buildings. The center of the neighborhood is a landmarked historic business district seen in Figure 6. Rainier Ave S is populated with shops, restaurants, a movie theater, the library, a post office, and many other business that give a neighborhood character and allow for people to live close enough to walk for most of their everyday needs.⁸

By the end of the 19th century Columbia City was on its way to being well developed, and the white settlers had displaced the Native Americans that were already living on the land. It was originally a forested area that was clear cut for the lumber and development of the railway. The electric train from downtown made for easy access to the area and combined with cheap land, businesses and homes quickly grew along the railway line. In the early 20th century, many of the neighborhood landmarks and institutions were established that still exist today. Seattle annexed all of Rainier Valley in 1907, and the ship canal opening in 1916 drastically changed the topography of the area by lowering Lake Washington. The electric trolley was taken out in 1936 and replaced with road for the cars and buses.

World War II brought many people in to work at Boeing plants and settled in the Holly Park and Rainier Vista housing projects. The Japanese families that had settled in the Valley were relocated to internment camps during the war, and many didn't come back. After the war the two housing projects

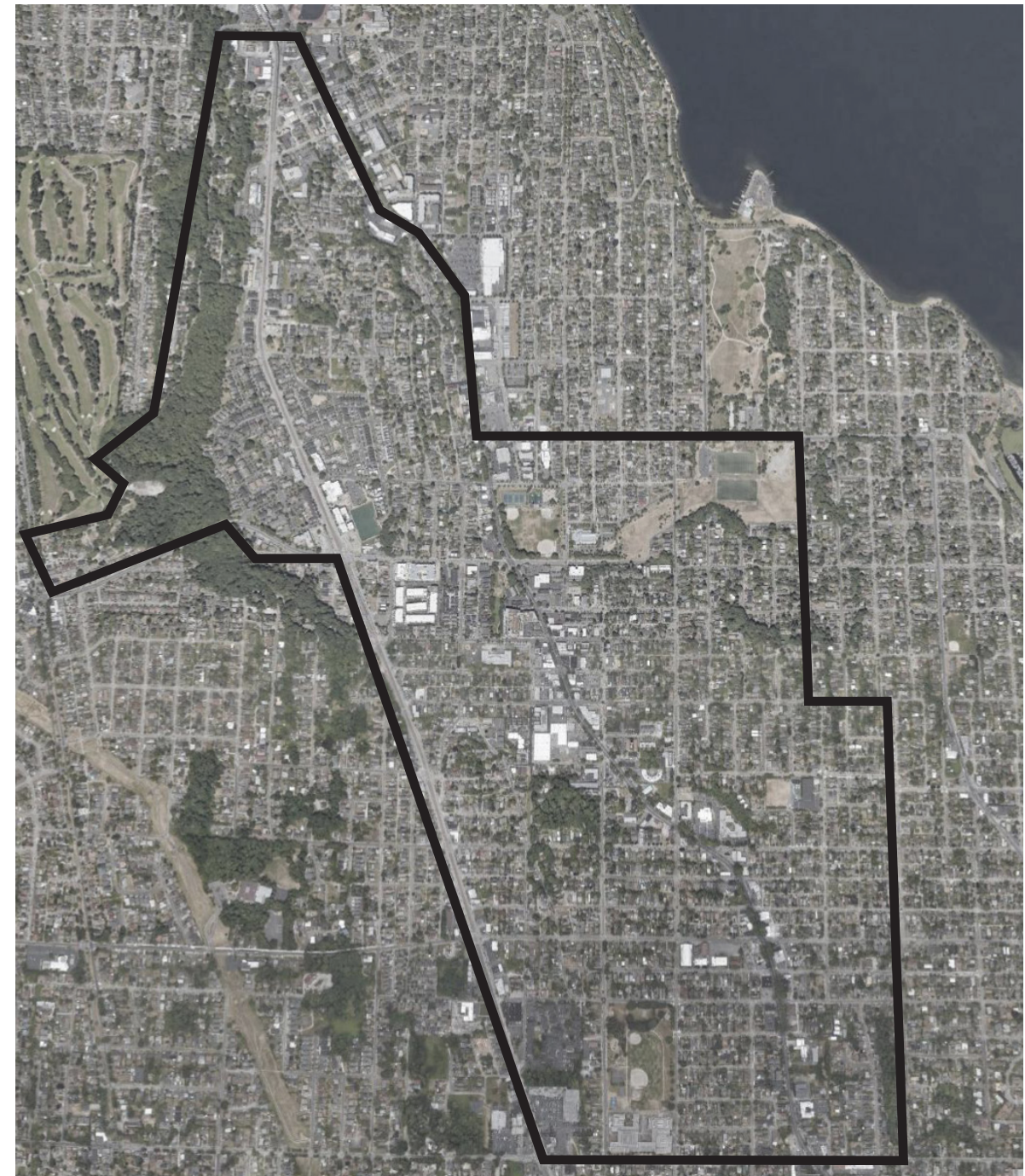


Figure 5: Columbia City

were made permanent and many local businesses were established during this time. Rainier Ave and MLK Jr. Way became casualties of the boom and bust of the Boeing economy and populations varied throughout those decades. It has now become a spot of development and gentrification as Seattle rises in cost and the Light Rail expanded access in the South end. Columbia City is still one of most diverse economically and racially areas in the city, but as Seattle grows the rise of gentrification expands. The walkability and scale make it an appealing neighborhood to live in and effort needs to be made to keep it accessible to the diverse population that lives there.



Figure 6: Columbia City Historic Landmark District



Figure 7: Current Development in Columbia City

Chapter 6. Design

SITE

The site is located just south of the historic landmark district of Columbia City. Rainier Ave S runs perpendicular to the E and it is located at the peak of the hill just adjacent to one of the city parks. This part of the neighborhood has not seen as many changes as other parts that are closer to the light rail station. (Figure 8) The site was chosen because of this. If the city is going to add additional density, attention needs to be paid to the way to integrate human designed density in areas primarily populated by single-family homes. The design of a cohousing community that centers the everyday experience could provide an example to the rest of the neighborhood before it is transformed into one that resembles the townhomes, condos, and apartment buildings that exist in other parts of the city and neighborhood.

The site is in a part of the neighborhood that is mostly residential and older single-family homes. The street that runs N-S has a sidewalk only on one side of the street, and the one running E-W has sidewalks on both sides. While this is a residential neighborhood, it is still focused on the car rather than the pedestrian experience. Figure 9 shows the particular site conditions that influenced both the selection of the site as well as the orientations of the buildings and, in particular, the edges and thresholds as the spaces move from public to semi public to semi private and then to the private. There is currently no access from 39th Ave S to S Brandon St and that corner is an unbuildable slope. The corner diagonal to the steep slope is the flattest point and also the highest from both sides. This was a natural connection point from the neighborhood into the cohousing community.

MASSING STUDIES

Figure 10 shows the different options for the site. Holding the edges along the slope was important, especially with a corner of the site having an unbuildable topography. Housing faces out towards the public but this means there is a front and a back. The role of the common house is vital to a cohousing community and its spatial relationship to both the public and also the residents is to be considered. It is not a space that outsiders use, but if there is a way that can connect visually and through the everyday it should not simply be a destination but a natural part of the everyday experience. There is no one way to design, but understanding the set of social relationships that are created by placing buildings on the site in certain ways is important. The process can allow for a configuring that values the human experience of the everyday.



Figure 8: Site Plans over 10 year span

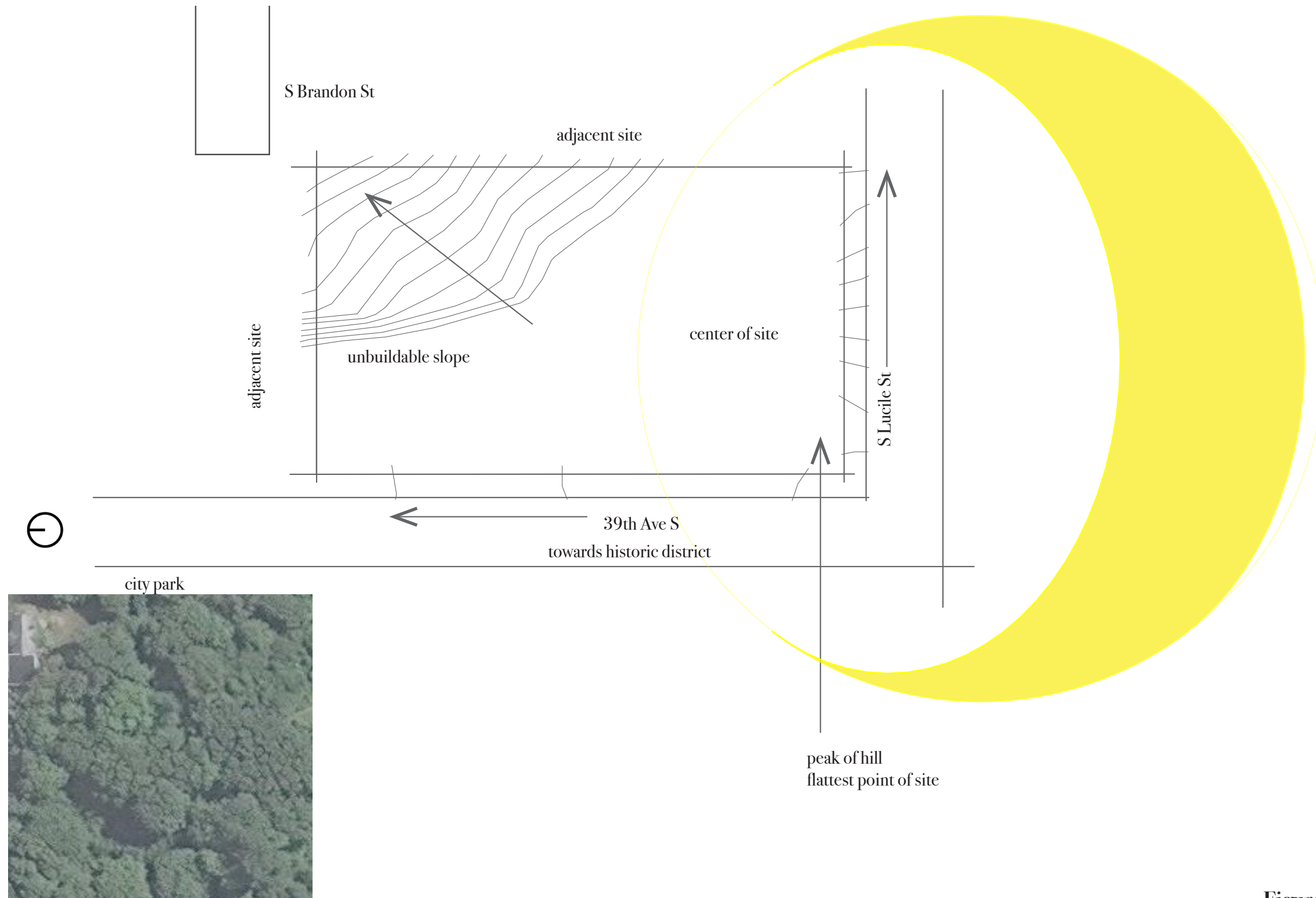


Figure 9. Site Conditions

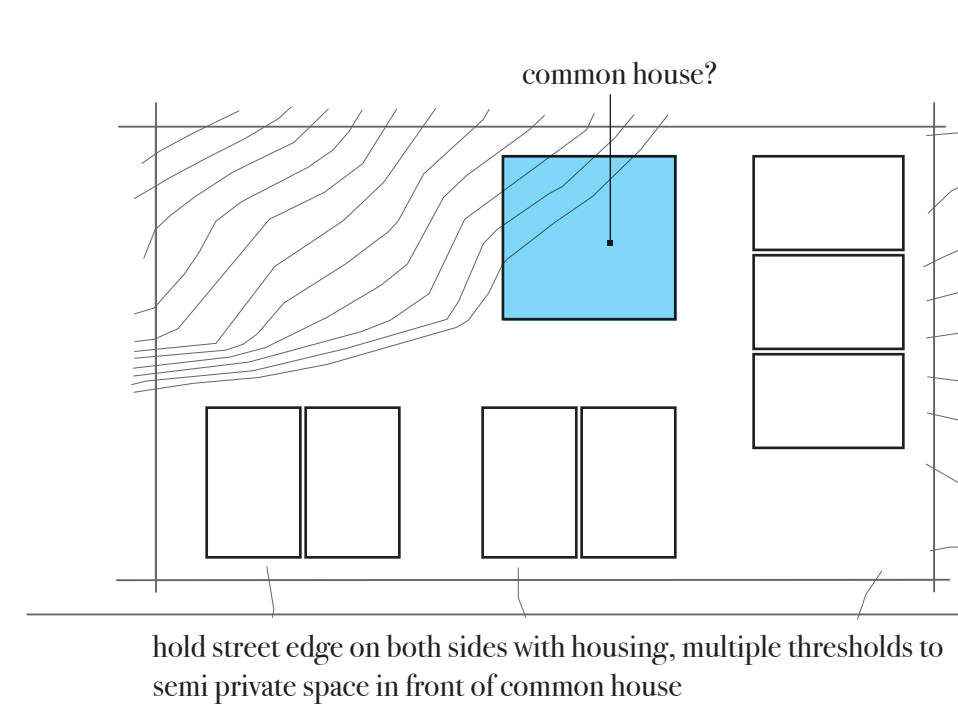
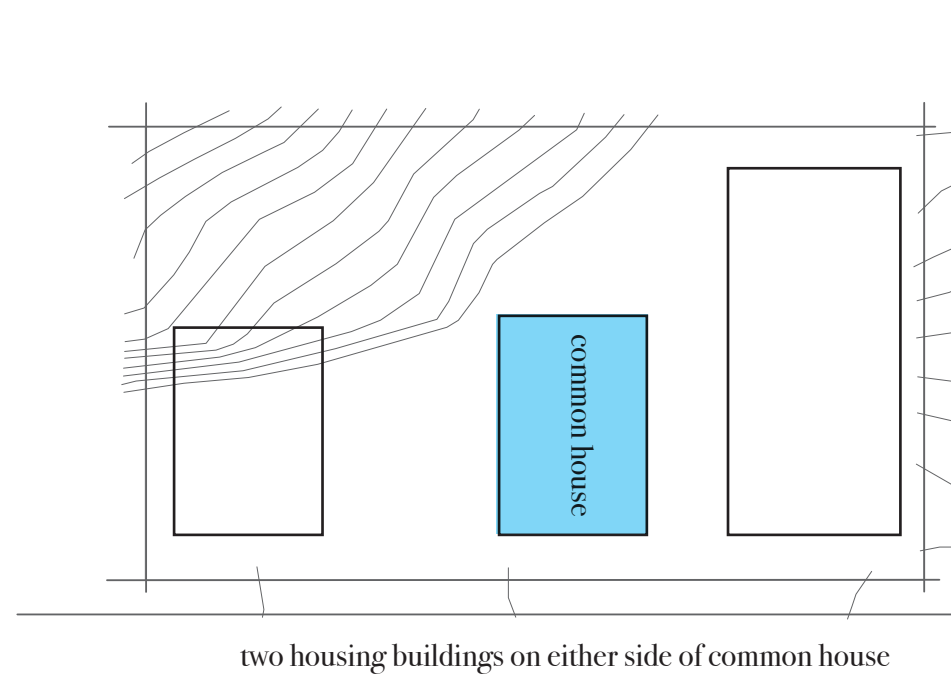
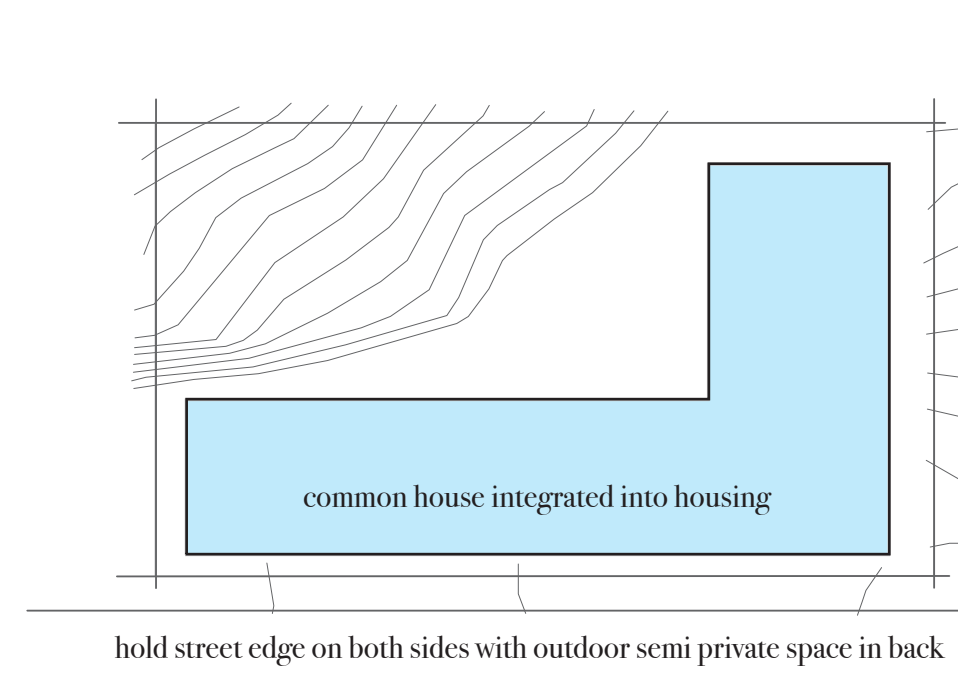
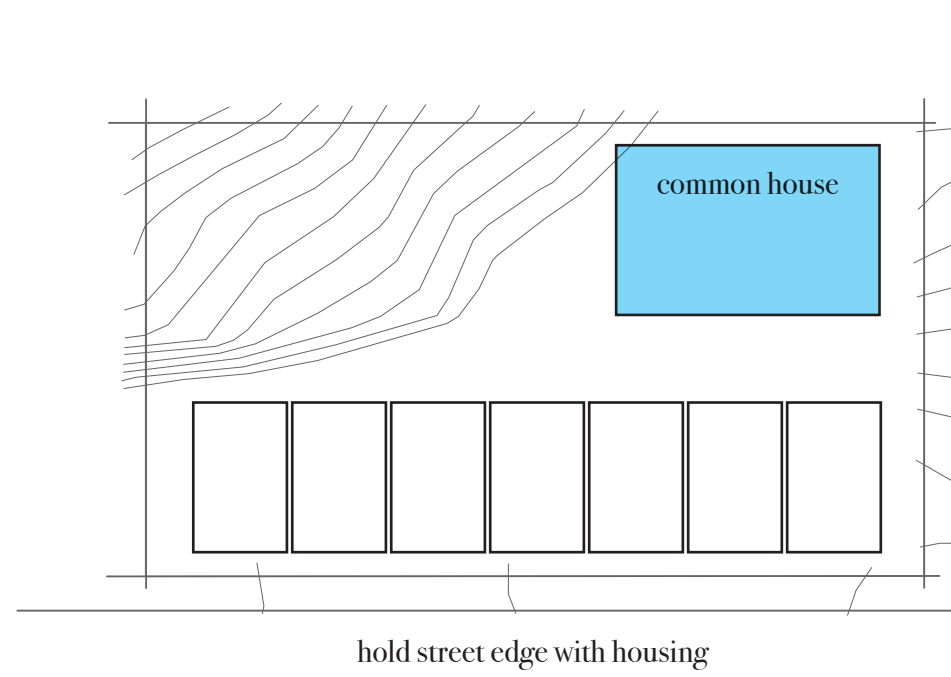


Figure 10. Massing Studies

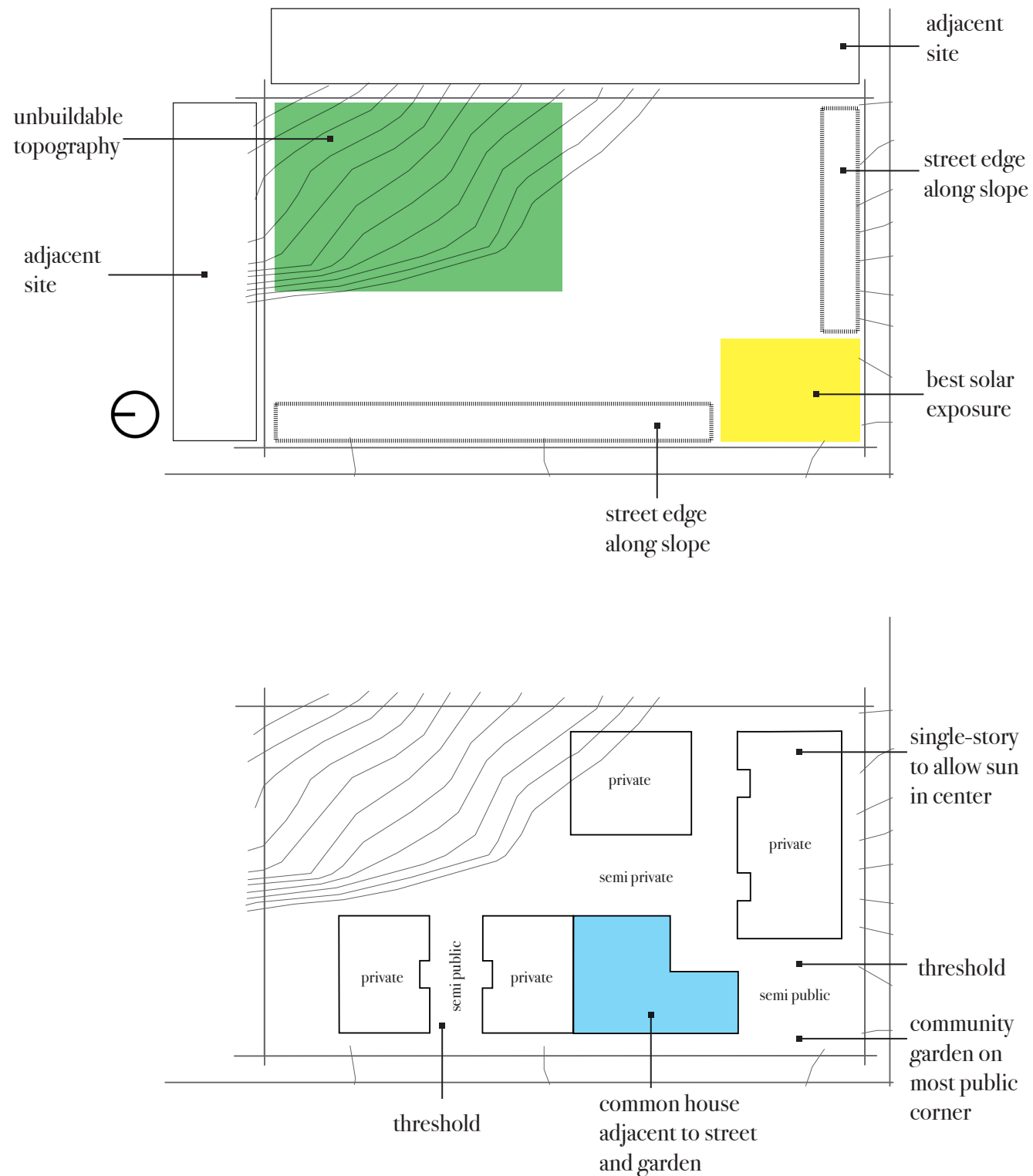


Figure 11. Final Plan Diagrams

FINAL SITE DESIGN

The final design was driven by site conditions as well as the progression of public to semi public to semi private and then private. The South corner was both the flattest point and the best solar exposure. Rather than infilling with a structure, a garden left the corner open to access and compliments the diagonal steep topography with a different kind of green space, meant for cultivation of food for the kitchen in the common house. The common house adjacent continues the semipublic space that both the pedestrians on the street can move around, and also gives the most opportunity to facilitate community interaction for those that live there. There are two main thresholds that lead to the common semi private space behind the common house.

Cohousing communities are self designed and self governed so rather than make a specific architectural model, this design was about understanding the set of relationships common to the case studies and imagining what it would be like on this site in this neighborhood within this larger city. In many ways this design is not remarkably different from many other housing types. What allows for it to be more human is the way the thresholds allow for community interaction to occur while moving throughout the spaces. Even small gestures like the vestibules in front of the individual units and the way the face each other rather than only outward towards the street give attention to how the social can be embedded within the architectural. The common house facilitates the mixing from the public realm into the community from the most visible corner, and can be seen in the rendering of Figure 18. The role of the common house could work in back like in the final diagram of Figure 10, however this changes the set of relationships that allow for the progression from the public to the private with the common house mediating that gradient and doesn't concentrate all activity in any one place.

In the ground floor plan, even within the units, the kitchens are in the front to allow for community interaction throughout the everyday as one washes their dishes or is cooking for themselves. Just as the public leads through to the private units through those series of exterior thresholds, so do the units themselves. The kitchen is the first space and then the bedroom is the final point in the back. The way spaces are organized give that feeling that one is alone together with others as you go about your everyday. Figure 19 suggests what an everyday could look like with both the kitchen and window facing the semi private spaces and how the vestibule works to give the series of thresholds into the private and form space to dwell on the interior.

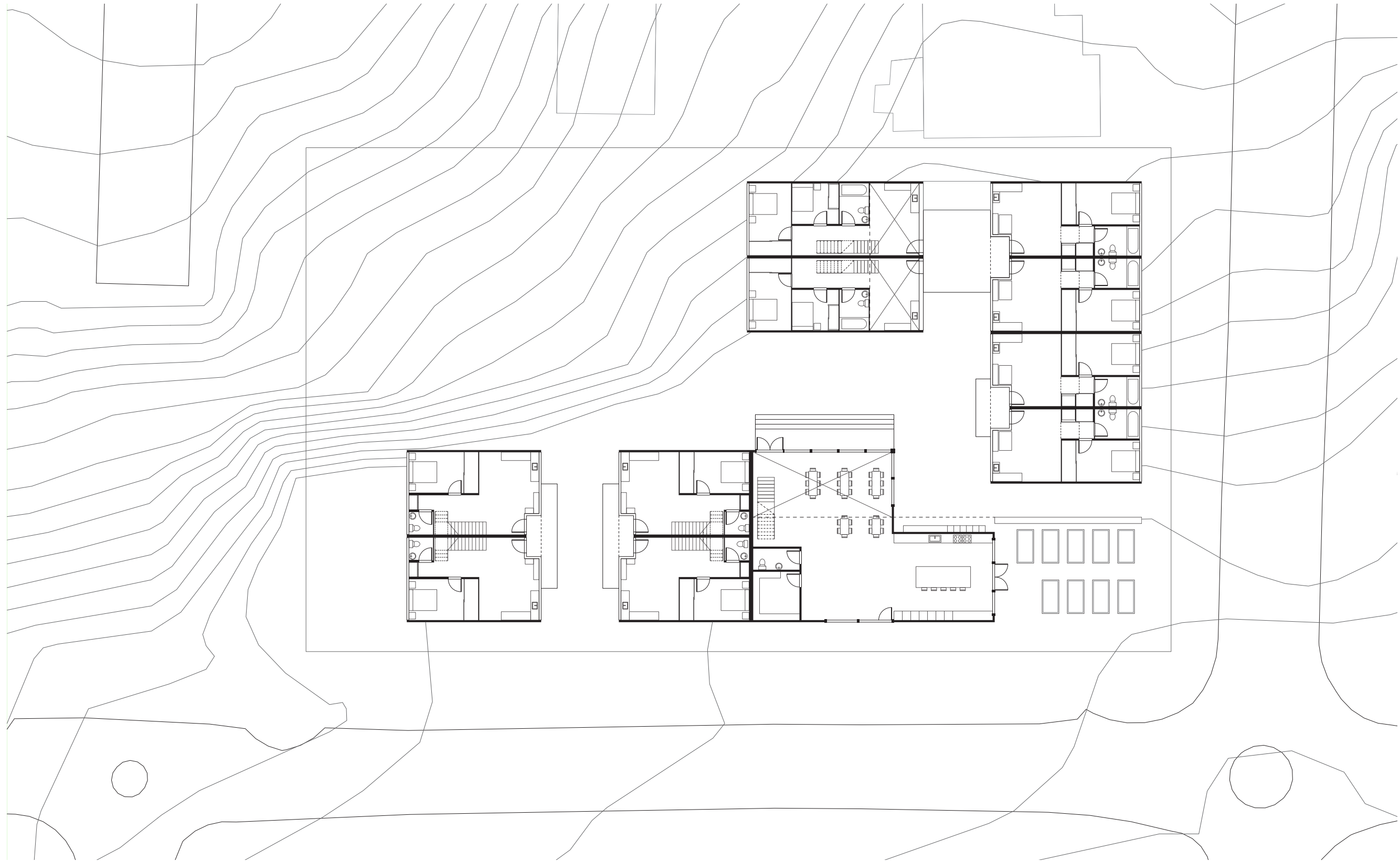


Figure 12. Ground Floor Plan



Figure 13. Rendered Ground Floor Plan

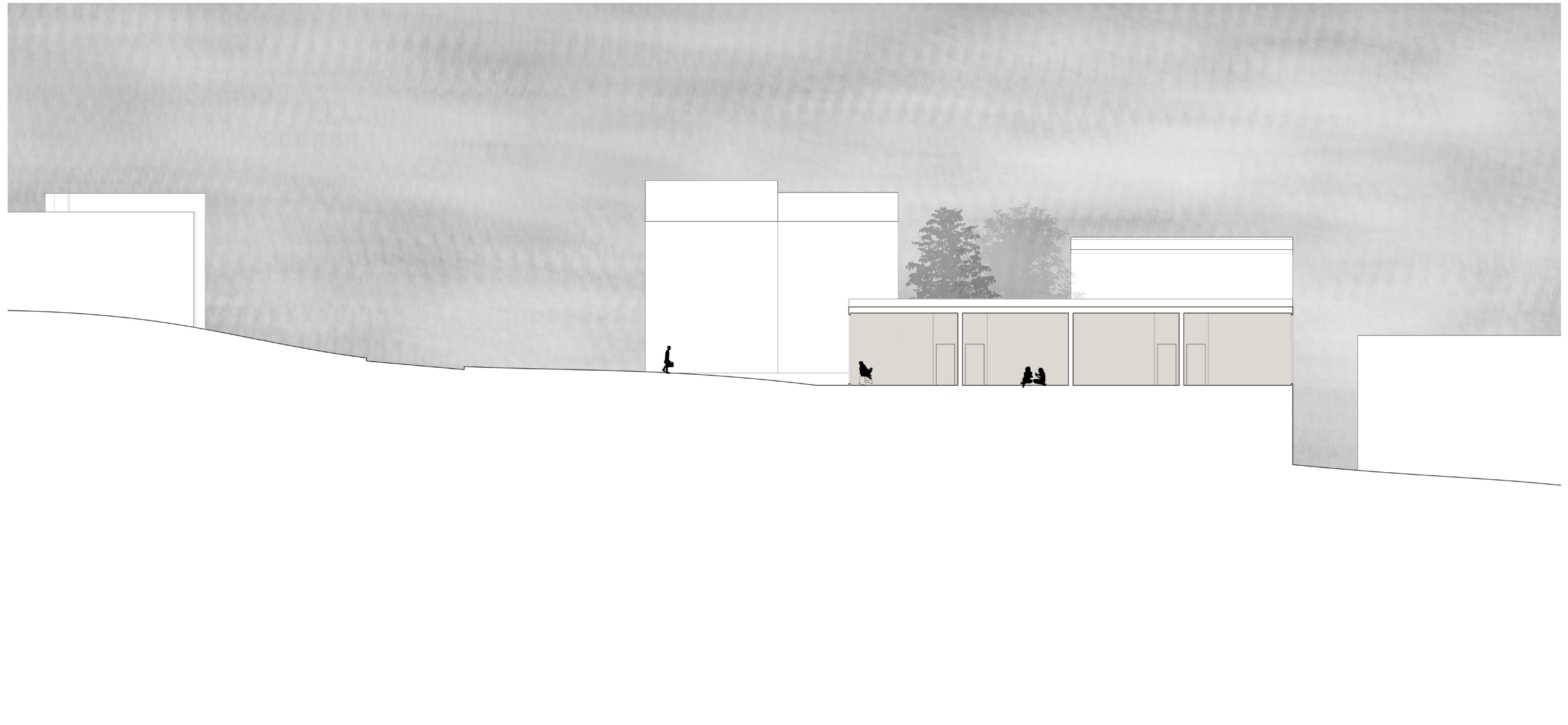


Figure 14. Rendered Section



Figure 15. Rendered Section

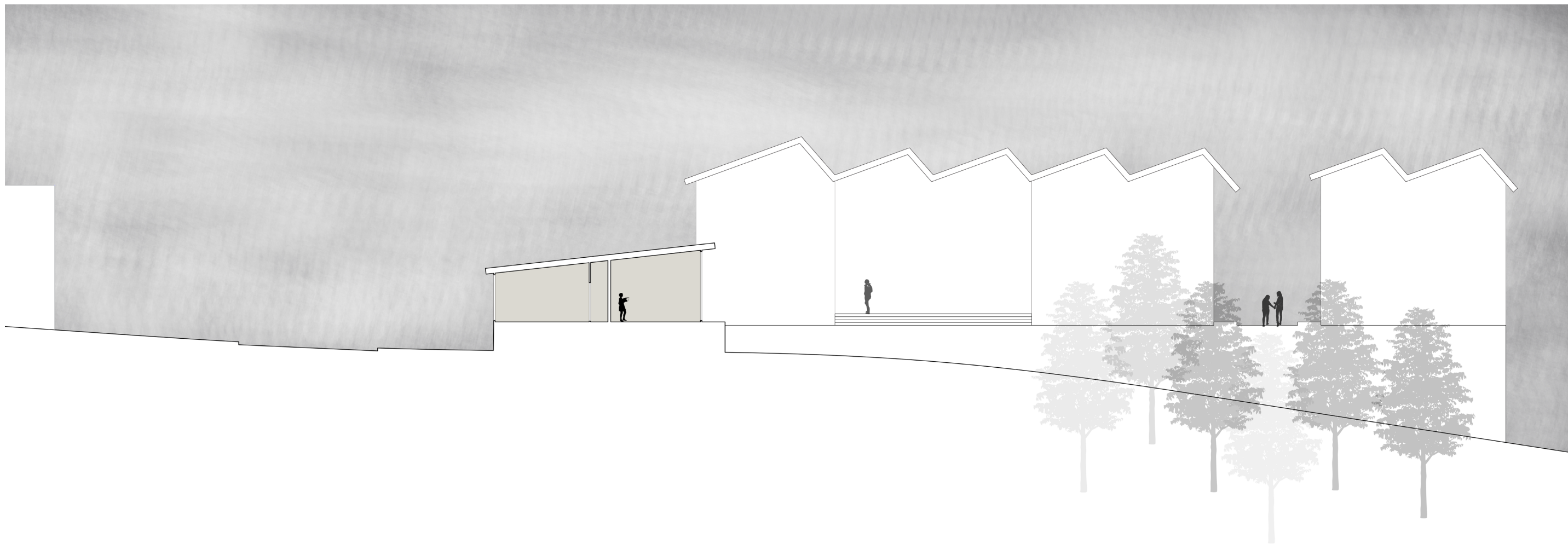


Figure 16. Rendered Section

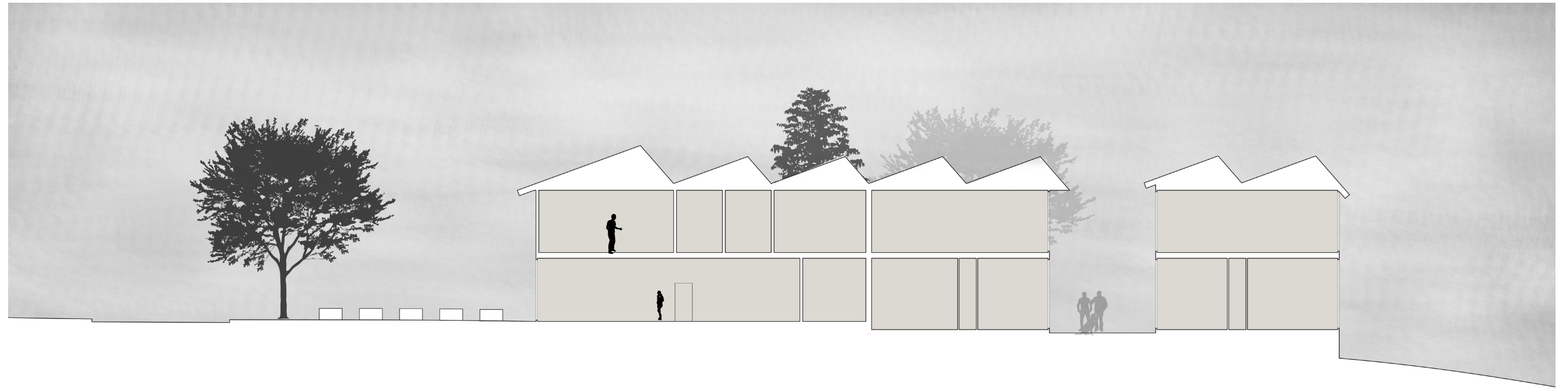


Figure 17. Rendered Section



Figure 18. Common House Rendering



Figure 19. One Bedroom Render

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Architecture and the humanities have a lot in common. This thesis presents just one mode of understanding this relationship through Danish poetry and cohousing, in particular, poetry about the everyday, and the Danish origins of cohousing. While the scope of this thesis was drastically narrowed from a range of topics including gentrification, inequalities, American housing design, ideas of the home, to just cohousing, it did open up a conversation that addresses the overlapping space where poetry and cohousing connect. These ideas can be used as a way to explore even more that relates to the everyday, cohousing, and cultural expressions of art and space. Poetry has a place in our lives and can inspire to see the everyday in a new way, and as a method to develop spaces for human well being. Cohousing also has great benefits for human connection through its set of spatial relationships that are defined by the everyday. It is through this exchange that it is a spatial embodiment of the collective ideal.

Endnote

- 1 Hebron, M. (2018). *How to read a poem : a practical guide which will open your eyes - and touch your heart.*
- 2 Hjort, M., & Bondebjerg, I. (2001). *The Danish directors.* Bristol: Intellect.
- 3 Harris, S., & Berke, D. (1997). *Architecture of the everyday.* New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- 4 Fromm, D. (1991). *Collaborative communities : cohousing, central living, and other new forms on housing with shared facilities.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- 5 Silver, D. H., Weiss, K. L., Jensen, B. B., Dansk, a., & International Architectural, E. (2016). *Art of many : the right to space : the Danish Pavilion - Biennale Architettura 2016 : catalogue.*
- 6 Hayden, D. (2002). *Redesigning the American dream : the future of housing, work, and family life.* New York: W.W. Norton.
- 7 Solnit, R. (2018). *Call them by their true names : American crises (and essays).*
- 8 Rainier Valley Historical, S. (2012). *Rainier Valley.* Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Pub.

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