

# Affordable Design

Santa Barbara News-Press Series  
On Affordable Housing

is given to make the units visually pleasing and consonant with the surrounding environment.

Affordable design is in fact how most of the rest of the world has been living for centuries. European dwelling sizes are smaller, for instance, because so many amenities and services are located in the neighborhood and local community. And all of this is usually close to the workplace and reachable by public

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By Harlan Green

A 2002 study by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) on home sizes tells us in a nutshell why affordable design is both demanding and rewarding. In 1987, for example, the average size of a new home was 1,900 square feet. By 2001 it had increased 20 percent to an average of 2,300 square feet, according to NAHB. The percentage of new homes larger than 3,000 square feet has almost doubled—from 11 percent in 1988, to 20 percent in 2003, as have 'McMansions' 4,000 square feet or larger. One major builder reported that its average new

home size is growing by 150 to 200 square feet per year!

While home sizes are increasing, household size has been decreasing. The average household is down from 3.11 in 1970 to 2.59 persons in 2000, according to U.S. Census data. This is while average lot sizes have been shrinking—by 6.5 percent to 16,454 square feet between 1987 and 2002, according to NAHB.

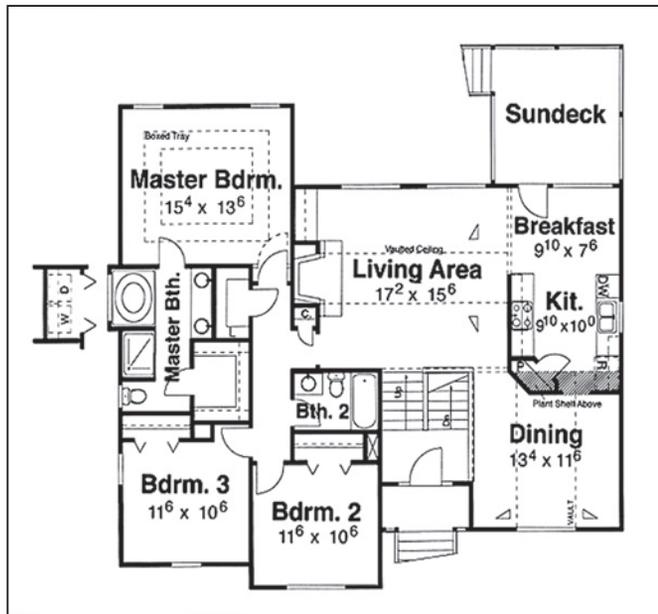
In suburban areas, particularly, large homes on small lots are increasing in popularity. Planners and developers are promoting smaller lot sizes to save costs in infrastructure and to encourage more efficient use of land.

What is wrong with this picture? Why is it that smaller families need larger homes!

Affordable housing, on the other hand, must follow the same design guidelines and building codes as market rate housing, have many of the same amenities, yet fit it all into a much smaller building pad. Living spaces range from 1,000 to 1,600 square feet. It must make more efficient use of land as well as building features and amenities to save costs, in a word.

Affordable designers are somehow able to do all of this and create very livable environments. Much use is made of landscape design, since affordable housing tends to be clustered, which

leaves 40 to 70 percent as open space. This is even with the higher 'bonus' densities that are accorded affordable housing by agency planners. So extra effort



California Craftsman Style Is Early Example Of Affordable Design.



Village Gardens Clusters 40 3-story Units Around Beautifully Designed Courtyard.

transportation.

Santa Barbara County is beginning to emulate the small community model as land values continue to escalate. An example is the upcoming Ted Zenich Gardens, a 24-unit affordable rental project in Santa Maria designed by Blackbird Architects. Its 1.16 acres is 70 percent open space, which allows families and children to live outside as well as inside.

Blackbird President Ken Radtkey says it is an infill project that removed objectionable housing from a neighborhood.

It is also beside a major traffic artery. Affordable dwellers create less traffic, because the housing tends to be closer to corridors that have alternate transportation modes. The County Housing Authority says its projects average one vehicle per occupant, for example, versus the one and one-half to two spaces required for market rate housing.

Paseo Chapala, for instance, abuts Paseo Nuevo on Chapala St. This puts it at the heart of our downtown district, of course, where more and more residents desire to live rather than buck the increasing commuter traffic.

Another element of affordable design is the centralized living space. Detlev Peikert of the Peikert Group Architects calls Santa Barbara's California Craftman homes that were built in the 1920 and '30s one of the earliest examples of affordable

design. The front entrance usually opens into a large living/dining room that then adjoins the kitchen and any other downstairs rooms. There is almost always a second story, which allows for a smaller building pad, and few hallways so that more area is devoted to living space.

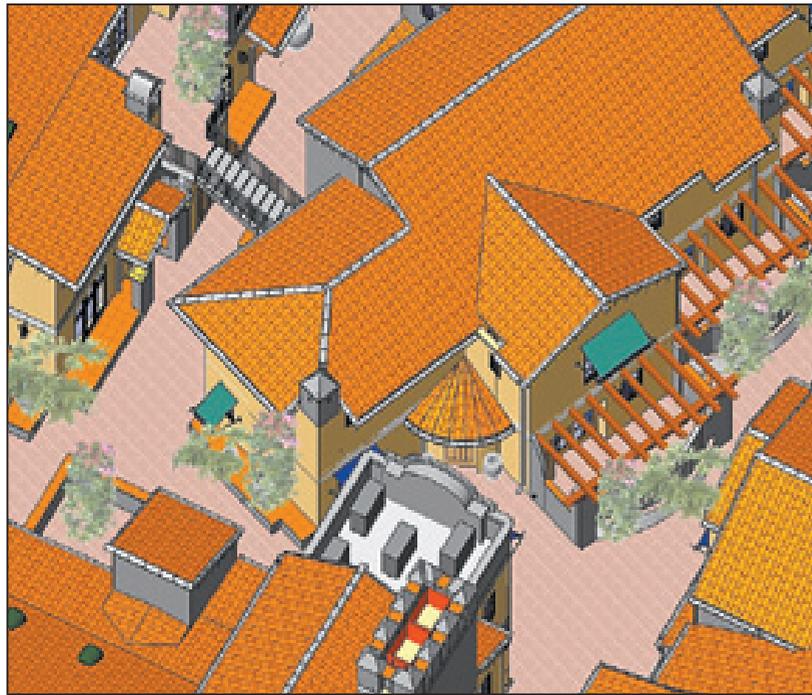
Many energy-saving features of affordable design result from the smaller unit sizes and common walls of attached dwellings. Many contain split-levels, which merely means that rooms have varying elevations to make them more visually interesting.

Landscaping is an important component of affordable design, as we said, since buildings are usually clustered around an open courtyard or common area. It gives the sense of village living. The 40-unit Village Gardens project in Carpinteria built in the mid-1990s done by the Peikert Group Architects are an excellent example. Their 3-story height enabled

Peikert Group to include 3 and 4-bedroom units within only one acre of grounds.

Santa Barbara County is both a unique environment because of its exceptional beauty and a unique challenge because housing prices have escalated so quickly in recent years. Yet a very talented corps of local architects and designers, who are finding ways to combat the suburban sprawl that characterizes so much of America, is meeting these challenges. We can no longer afford to waste our valuable resources, especially ever scarcer land and water. Affordable design is fast becoming the 'smart' way to design our communities.

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**Paseo Chapala--Its 29 Units Will Be A Great Example Of Split Level Living.**

**Ted Zenich Gardens--An Infill Project That Has 70 Percent Open Space**

