

## **Step 6. Analyze the surrounding neighborhood and establish community-related design goals for the project.**

### **Why is this important?**

An affordable housing development which understands and responds well to its context has a much better chance of avoiding community resistance and winning acceptance.

The better you understand the physical characteristics of the community in which you are building, the easier it will be to define design goals that will help your development fit in to its context and enhance its neighborhood.

Of course, political, socioeconomic, legal and regulatory contexts are also important for any development. But none of them ensure good *design*. Analyzing and understanding the project's *physical* context – the surrounding buildings, streets, parks, etc. – does.

Undertaking this analysis of physical context can be an extremely useful part of the participatory planning effort, building support for the development not only among the project team members, but also in the immediate neighborhood, and beyond to the surrounding community as a whole.

### **When should this be done?**

During Predevelopment; preferably at the same time as the market analysis is being undertaken. See the **Design/Development Matrix**.

### **Who should do this?**

The owner/developer with professional design assistance (see **Step 4**).

If there is a **Community Design Center** in your area, it could be very helpful at this stage.

This step may also be part of a larger participatory planning/community design process.

### **What should I do?**

- Review the **Design Considerations Checklist** in preparation for a walking tour(s) of the neighborhood where your development is located. Take the print version of the Checklist with you on the tour(s).
- Go out – individually or as a group – to identify and catalogue key characteristics of the buildings in the neighborhood surrounding the site:
  - occupancy (who lives there), typical heights, numbers of floors, façade materials, color, types of roofs/windows/doors, relation to sidewalk, relation to street, etc.

- Use notes, sketches, photographs, or videotape as appropriate to document what you see.
- Analyze, preferably in a group setting, the key characteristics you have observed and determine how they might impact the design of your project:
  - should some of these characteristics be included?
  - if so, which ones and why; if not, why not?
- Use the **Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet** to help guide the context analysis process.

**How can doing this help me move my project forward?**

A rigorous, well documented context analysis can help convince lenders, funding agencies and regulators that this is a project that is committed to enhancing the neighborhood where it will be built and is taking the necessary steps to ensure that it does so.

**Additional resources available from the Affordable Housing Design Advisor DC-ROM.**

- An example of a **community input package** used in Richmond, VA to gauge potential occupants' design and amenity preferences.

## Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet

### Introduction

Use this worksheet to help guide your neighborhood context analysis. Through a combination of walking and “windshield” tours, look closely at the buildings (especially housing), streets, parks and other open spaces in the neighborhood immediately surrounding your development. Note what you like and what you don’t like. Talk to neighbors and note what they like and don’t like. Concentrate on the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, using the categories below as a guide.

It may also be useful to look at other housing developments in your community, but not in the immediate neighborhood, for additional ideas as to what to strive for—and what to avoid—in your own project. Use the worksheet to guide these analyses as well.

Document your efforts, using notes, sketches, photos or video—anything that will help you remember what you saw and what you thought about what you saw.

Analyze the results, preferably in a group setting. Decide which features, from the surrounding neighborhood and/or from other housing developments in your community, you would most like to see in your own project. Pay special attention to features that will help your project enhance the neighborhood where it will be built.

Use this list of desired features to create a Statement of Community-related Design Goals for the project.













**Example****Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet**

Project Name DOVE STREET  
 Location ALBANY, N.Y.  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

**BUILDING TYPES**

What are the building types, especially the housing, in the surrounding neighborhood (e.g. single family detached, duplex, rowhouse, courtyard, etc.)? What do you like/dislike about them?

MOSTLY HISTORIC ROWHOUSES - THERE ARE  
SCATTERED INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS,  
CARRIAGE HOUSES SCHOOLS & APARTMENT  
BUILDINGS.  
THE STRUCTURES FORM A PLEASANT  
STREETSCAPE. ACCESS IS RESTRICTED  
FOR PEOPLE WI. PHYSICAL  
CHALLENGES DUE TO STOOPS & SMALL  
MULTI STORY BUILDINGS. PARKING IS  
LIMITED BY CONTEMPORARY STANDARDS.

**PARKING**

How is parking typically handled in the surrounding neighborhood (e.g. on-street, driveway, garage on street, garage behind, parking lot, etc.). What do you like/dislike about parking in the neighborhood?

MOST PARKING IS ON STREET.  
THERE'S NOT ENOUGH PARKING ESP.  
DURING THE WORKDAY WHEN STATE  
OFFICE WORKERS USE THE AREA.  
OFF STREET LOTS ARE NOT WELL  
LANDSCAPED.

## Example Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet

### PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

What types of public open space (parks, playgrounds, etc) exist in the surrounding neighborhood? Will your residents be able to use it? What types of open space exist in the housing developments in the neighborhood (e.g. yards, courtyards, etc.)? What do you like/dislike about these spaces?

THERE ARE TWO PARKS W/ AMPLE  
PASSIVE & ACTIVE SPACES NEAR  
THE SITE

MOST ROWHOUSES HAVE SMALL REAR  
YARDS

STOOPS ARE USED FOR SOCIALIZING  
MORE GREENRY VISABLE FROM THE  
STREET WOULD BE NICE

### PRIVATE OPEN SPACE

What types of private open space does the housing in the neighborhood have (e.g. yards, patios, decks, balconies, etc.)? What do you like/dislike about these spaces?

REAR YARDS USUALLY HAVE PATIO  
& GARDEN SPACE

SOME BUILDINGS HAVE REAR DECKS  
ACCESS FROM UPPER UNITS TO YARDS  
IS OFTEN DIFFICULT

DECKS OFTEN BLOCK LIGHT  
ACCESS IS USUALLY IMPOSSIBLE  
FOR PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED  
RESIDENTS

## Example Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet

### LANDSCAPING

How is the housing in the neighborhood landscaped? What types of plants, trees and grass are typically used? What are the paved areas and outdoor furniture like? What do you like/dislike about the landscaping in the neighborhood?

MOST STREET TREES ARE LOCUSTS  
PLANTING AREAS AT TREE BASES ARE  
OFTEN OVERGROWN - GRASS & WEEDS  
GROW BETWEEN BRICK PAVING -  
WHEN IT IS NOT PROPERLY  
PREPARED

WINDOW BOXES ARE A HIGHLIGHT IN  
MANY AREAS

HOSTA, DAYLILIES, PANSIES, ROSES, DAISIES,  
VIOLETS, TULIPS, DAFFODILS &  
OTHER PLANTS THRIVE

### BUILDING LOCATION

How are homes in the neighborhood typically located on their lots? Are they right on the street or setback? How are they typically entered? How do cars come and go? What do you like/dislike about these building location strategies?

ROW HOMES HUG THE PROPERTY LINE  
WI. A PROJECTING STOOP  
STREET APPEARANCE IS EXCELLENT  
STOOPS ARE TOO STEEP FOR  
CURRENT CODES. PRIVACY CAN BE  
COMPROMISED BY SIDEWALKS NEXT  
TO WINDOWS. ACCESS IS LIMITED  
FOR PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED  
INDIVIDUALS.

## Example Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet

### BUILDING SHAPE

What are the basic shapes of the houses in the surrounding neighborhood? How high are they? What is their basic scale (e.g. short and wide, tall and thin, etc.)? What is their basic form (e.g. one big block, several smaller blocks, etc.)? What do you like/dislike about the building shapes in your neighborhood?

BUILDINGS ARE TALL (2 1/2 - 3 1/2  
STORY) & NARROW (16' - 28') WI.  
FLAT ROOFS.

VARIETY IS PROVIDED BY CORNICES,  
BAY & ORIEL WINDOWS

ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY IS EXCELLENT.  
FLAT ROOFS & UNCOVERED STEPS  
ARE A CHALLENGE IN A SNOWY  
CLIMATE

### BUILDING APPEARANCE

What do the buildings, especially the houses, in your neighborhood look like? Are they visually simple or complex? What are the basic roof shapes? What do the doors and windows look like? Are their special elements—porches, dormers, overhangs—that stand out? What are the typical materials and colors? Are there patterns to size and rhythm of the openings in the facades? What do you like/dislike about the appearance of the buildings in your neighborhood?

DOOR & WINDOW OPENINGS ARE  
VERTICAL - USUALLY DOUBLE HUNG  
CORNICES ARE A COMMON ELEMENT  
TRIM RANGES FROM SIMPLE TO  
ORNATE

MATERIALS INCLUDE CLAPBOARD  
SIDING, FACE BRICK, PAINTED  
COMMON BRICK & BROWNSTONE  
OPENINGS, BUILDINGS, & FEATURES  
FORM STRONG RHYTHMS

IT IS A DELIGHTFUL CONTEXT

## Example Neighborhood Context Analysis Worksheet

### LIST OF COMMUNITY-RELATED DESIGN GOALS

Based on the results of your neighborhood context analysis, especially your likes and dislikes, develop a list of the key features you would most like to see in your own project. Pay special attention to features that will help your project enhance the neighborhood where it will be built.

Transform this list into a series of community-related design goals for your project—goals which, if achieved, will help your development creatively respond to and enhance the neighborhood in which it is built.

Write down the list of goals here and refer to it throughout the design/development process, both as a guide to decision-making and as a tool for explaining the project winning acceptance for it.

GREEN SPACE & PLANTING IS IMPORTANT  
TO THE NEIGHBORS  
MATERIALS SHOULD BE EASILY  
MAINTAINED AND AGE WELL.  
THE DESIGN SHOULD COMPLEMENT  
AND BLEND W/ THE SITE -