

July 2023

CITY OF LANGLEY

Townhome & Plex-Home Best Practices Guide



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1.0

Introduction

Integrating Townhomes & Plex-Homes in Langley City

Over the next few decades, Langley City is anticipating significant population growth. According to the Official Community Plan (OCP), the current population of the City is expected to grow by 48% by 2050.

Acknowledging this growth projection and the need for more housing options, the OCP envisions “Ground Oriented Residential” land use areas allowing for townhomes and plex-homes (duplex, triplex and fourplex) along major corridors such as 200 Street and 208 Street. The intention is to create a wider variety of housing types south of the Nicomekl River, including additional family-friendly housing options near schools.

A survey provided residents with an opportunity to have their say on how to best integrate townhomes and plex-homes into primarily single detached neighbourhoods. Questions asked in the survey were reflective of the following categories that have helped organize this Best Practices Guide:

- Good Neighbourhood Design
- Parking and Transportation
- Green space and Landscaping

The feedback received from residents helped create this Best Practices Guide, which in turn will shape the actual design of future townhomes and plex-homes when they come forward to Council for approval.

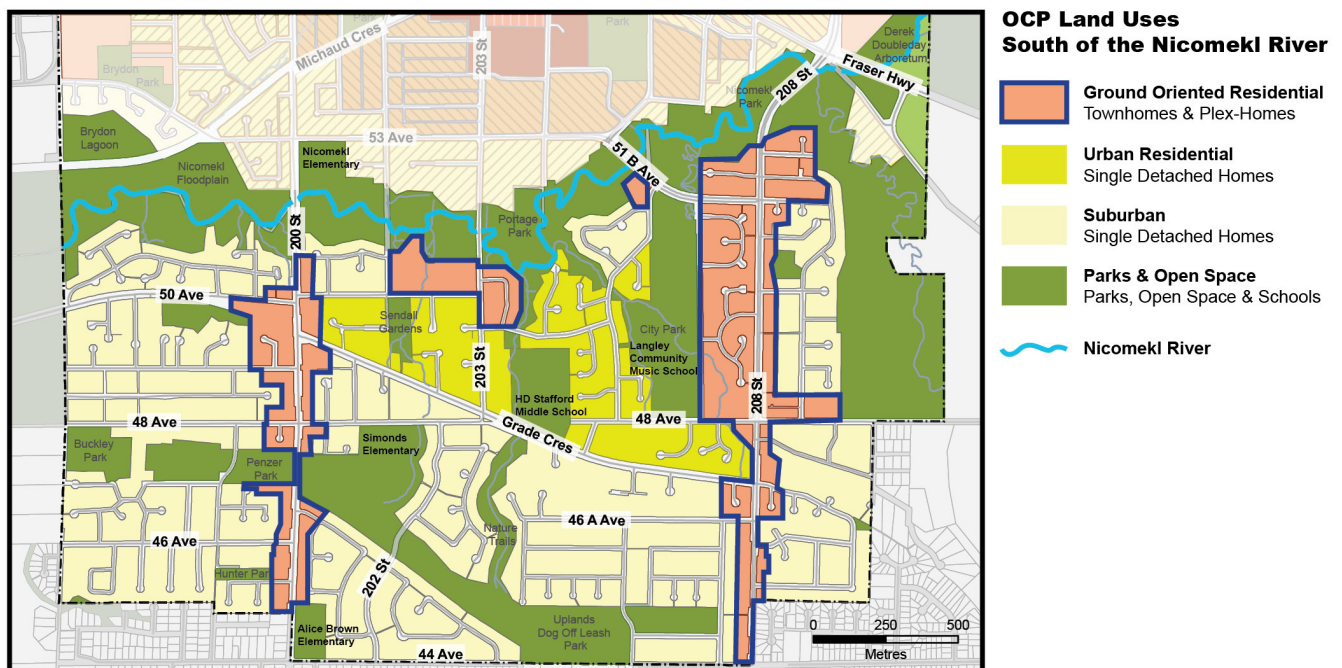
This Best Practices Guide serves as a valuable resource for effectively addressing various development considerations and concerns raised by residents. The guidelines within it are anticipated to be integrated into Langley City’s Development Permit Areas and Zoning Bylaw and will help refine the design guidelines for “Ground Oriented Residential” areas south of the Nicomekl River.

Ultimately, this Best Practices Guide serves as a tool for fostering a broader range of housing, sustainable development, enhancing quality of life, and creating cohesive and vibrant neighbourhoods for Langley City residents.

South of the Nicomekl River

The guidelines in this document apply to the areas south of the Nicomekl River that are designated “Ground Oriented Residential” in Langley City’s OCP, as illustrated in the map below.

These areas are primarily focused along the 200 and 208 Street corridors where future frequent transit service is envisioned. They are areas within walking distance of schools and parks and they have the potential to provide a greater range of options for family-friendly housing.





2.0

Community
Engagement

Engaging through an Online Survey



635 SURVEY
RESPONSES

What we did | A survey was conducted from June 1 - 19, 2023 to gather input from residents regarding the integration of townhomes and plex-homes into existing neighbourhoods. The intent of this survey was to understand how townhomes and plex-homes could best be integrated into existing neighbourhoods and what design considerations should apply to future development applications.



WEB PROMOTION

Website & Newsletter | The City's website and monthly e-newsletter were also used to advertise the survey and encourage residents to participate. These media were instrumental in publicizing the survey, creating awareness among residents, and encouraging their active participation.



MAILOUT WITHIN
100 M OF THE AREA

Postcard Mailouts | In addition, the City took further steps to ensure widespread awareness of the survey by conducting a postcard mailout campaign to reach residents within 100 metres of the Ground Oriented Residential land use areas.



LOCAL AD

Local Newspaper Advertisement | The City also ensured of having recurring advertisement of the survey in 2023 editions of the local newspaper on July 1st, 8th and 15th for a wider outreach encouraging an active participation of the community.



PROACTIVE
OUTREACH VIA
SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media | The City made proactive use of social media platforms to promote and amplify its outreach efforts for the online survey. Recognizing the wide reach and engagement potential of social media, it leveraged these platforms to effectively connect with the community and encourage participation. The City's social media posts emphasized the importance of community engagement and the opportunity for residents to have their voices heard on matters that directly impact their neighborhoods and quality of life.



Key Survey Takeaways

PRIVACY | Residents prioritize privacy and expressed concerns about being overlooked from adjacent developments. Architectural design, fencing, landscaping and height limitations were all common suggestions to maintain the privacy of residents.

CHARACTER & IDENTITY | Residents love the small town feel of Langley City and would like that spirit and appearance preserved as redevelopment occurs.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS | Respondents prioritized pedestrian/cycling infrastructure, traffic calming, expanded public transit, increased parking, enhanced road infrastructure, and improved safety measures to address population growth and the potential for congestion.

HOME HEIGHTS | The majority of respondents favoured stepping down plex-home and townhome heights to ensure privacy, visual harmony, and minimize shadows onto neighbouring properties.

SETBACKS | A majority of respondents preferred larger backyard setbacks between single detached and multi-family properties for increased access to green space, promoting well-being, environmental health, and community, while also reducing noise transfer and enhancing privacy between single-detached and multi-family properties.

GREEN SPACE | Highly valued by the community, where possible, maintaining and enhancing green space within new developments is a priority.



3.0

Best
Practices

A Vision for the Integration of Townhomes & Plex-Homes south of the Nicomekl River

The key takeaways from the engagement summary analysis serve as the foundation for drafting this Best Practices Guide. They have helped shape the vision below for the continued evolution of the neighbourhood and will facilitate sensitive infill of townhomes and plex-homes south of the Nicomekl River.

Vision Statement

The south of the Nicomekl River neighbourhoods will evolve to accommodate new townhomes and plex-homes incorporating sensitive ‘good neighbour’ building and design practices that prioritize residents’ privacy, needs and well-being, ensure a greater diversity of homes being woven into the fabric of neighbourhoods along key transportation corridors, and include new and enhanced green spaces and improved transportation features benefiting these neighbourhoods and generations to come.

The following pages outline key best practices to guide the design of new townhomes and plex-homes applications, according to these key categories:

1. Rooftop Patios and Balconies
2. Rooftop Styles
3. Transportation Improvements
4. Green Space and Landscaping
5. Building Heights
6. Building Setbacks
7. Garage Styles and Parking
8. Amenity Spaces

3.1

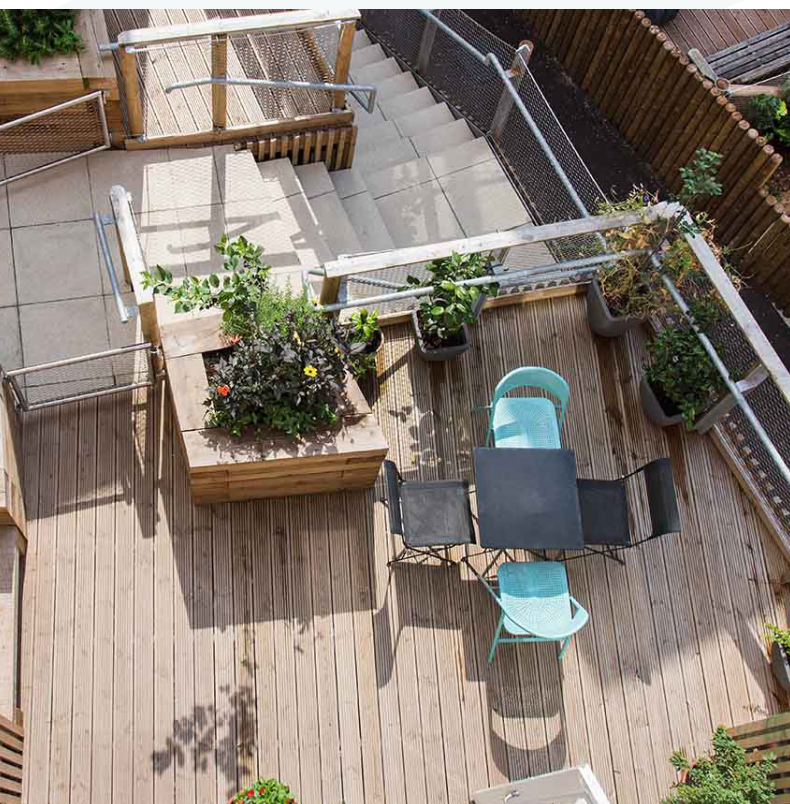
ROOFTOP PATIOS AND BALCONIES

Rooftop patios and balconies allow residents of townhomes and plex-homes to enjoy the outdoors. On the one hand, they are sometimes less used when they overlook a busy street because of the noise. On the other hand, some residents may have privacy concerns when they overlook other homes.

“ **This is a socially responsible decision that supports the privacy of citizens in their own domains. Rooftop patios can be beautiful additions but location plays a key role in plans.** ”

Best practice guidelines for rooftop patios and balconies include:

- **No rooftop patios facing single family detached lots (i.e. Suburban and Urban Residential land use designations).**
- **No balconies shall be provided on building sides facing Suburban/Urban Residential lots, unless separated by a lane or street.**
- **Ensure rooftop patios and balconies are designed to provide privacy for users and prevent overlook from adjacent rooftop patios, through patio design, party wall placement and design, and opaque privacy screens.**
- **Ensure rooftop patios and balconies are designed to provide opportunities for shade producing structures.**
- **Design rooftop patios to minimize sound transfer to rooms underneath the patio and adjacent units.**
- **Incorporate privacy-enhancing elements that prevent oversight of existing backyards. Consider using frosted glass or other opaque materials for the balcony railing.**
- **Explore creative architectural designs that maximize privacy while still allowing for outdoor spaces to enhance livability.**
- **Ensure elements that mitigate noise transfer between units are incorporated, such as sound proof barriers, wall and glass thickness, and strategic window placement.**



3.2

ROOFTOP STYLES

Rooftop styles are an important feature of townhome and plex-home designs. Peaked roofs are more traditional and reflect the design of most single detached homes in the City. Flat roofs present a more modern look and create opportunities for more outdoor space through rooftop patios. Understanding preferences on this is crucial to encouraging building designs that align with the character of the surrounding neighbourhood but also meet the needs and expectations of future residents.

“ A nice mix of different home types and not a cookie cutter design is very important for overall look and character. ”

Best practice guidelines for rooftop styles include:

- **Prioritize peaked roof designs. Flat roofs are generally supported where rooftop patios are incorporated, and where nearby single detached homes have flat or low pitch roofs.**
- **Encourage a range of peaked roof designs, including those that reflect nearby single detached homes.**
- **Use reflective or cool roofing materials that help reduce the urban heat island effect and improve energy efficiency.**



3.3 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

New townhomes and plex-homes will contribute to street improvements, such as new sidewalks, curbs and gutters, boulevards, public transit features, roads, and new street trees. New townhomes and plex-homes may also contribute to transportation and traffic calming improvements, as required, and will be generally located in close proximity to existing and planned transit and cycle-network improvements.

“**Ensuring there are good walking, cycling and transit connections to nearby amenities such as grocery stores is essential for reducing traffic congestion.**”



Best practice guidelines for transportation improvements include:

- **Construct new street frontages according to the City’s Design Criteria Manual, which include wider sidewalks, bike paths, boulevards between sidewalks and travel lanes, and street trees.**
- **In accordance with the Design Criteria Manual, use Traffic Impact Assessments as part of the application process to determine any necessary transportation improvements (e.g., speed humps, traffic signals, traffic circles, raised crosswalks), which may lead to the creation of benefiting areas.**
- **Support transportation options such as public transit and active transportation to reduce the reliance on personal vehicles and alleviate parking pressure.**
- **Look to accommodate and improve active transportation connectivity and access to transit as part of application site design.**
- **Coordinate traffic lights along major streets to optimize traffic flow and reduce congestion, considering the specific needs of intersections.**
- **Encourage townhome and plex-home access lanes to be designed to include additional visitor parking spaces (above the required 0.20 spaces per unit) and convenient loading and delivery drop-off areas and turnarounds.**

3.4 GREEN SPACE & LANDSCAPING

Green space and landscaping are important features of new townhomes and plex-homes. They can enhance neighbourhood character, beauty, livability, and environmental sustainability. Certain landscaping elements can enhance privacy, property boundaries, support relaxation and connecting with nature and neighbours, while also contributing to biodiversity, air quality and a cooler, more comfortable living environment.

“ I hope that we can keep existing trees where possible. I hope we can keep forested green spaces where they exist in backyards. The transit and support of wildlife, birds, insects, migration of these species all need old growth where possible. ”

Best practice guidelines for green space and landscaping include:

- **Emphasize larger private yards for both townhomes and plex-homes, where possible.**
- **Ensure privacy barriers such as shrubs, trees, and durable, opaque composite or aluminum high fences are placed along the property line adjacent to single detached home areas to enhance the privacy of residents.**
- **Preserve existing on-site trees, where possible and practical (i.e. outside of reasonable access lanes and building footprints and according to OCP policies).**
- **Incorporate native and water smart plants that provide shade and support local ecology and habitat.**
- **Develop pathways and designated routes away from busy roads to encourage safe outdoor mobility and active lifestyles for families, seniors and youth.**
- **Prioritize areas for vegetable gardens and flower beds as part of outdoor amenity spaces to foster a sense of community and promote food security.**
- **Plant additional trees on private property wherever possible and practical, aiming for a target of at least one new tree per unit.**



3.5

BUILDING HEIGHTS

When located directly adjacent to single detached homes, new townhomes and plex-homes will ‘step down’ to be ‘good neighbours’ to existing single detached homes, which have a height limit of 9 metres. The ‘good neighbour’ design encompass reduced massing, shadowing and privacy impacts on adjacent single detached homes. This means townhomes and plex-homes will be the same height as the existing homes beside them (2 storeys) or only one storey taller if the neighbouring home is a 1-storey bungalow.

“ This is important to integrate plexes and townhomes with existing designs for continuity. ”

“ It allows for higher density without drastically changing the feel of a neighbourhood. ”

Townhomes

Townhomes should be built using the following building heights:

- **Townhomes are limited to 9 metres (which is typically 2 storeys) when directly adjacent to single detached homes (i.e. Suburban and Urban Residential land use designations) , unless the lot hosting the townhome is also adjacent to an arterial road or park.**
- **The nominal height for townhomes is 11 metres (typically 3 storeys), based on the lot being separated from an OCP single detached land use by a street, lane, park (i.e. more than 8 metres) and when fronting an arterial street (i.e. 200, 203, 208 Streets).**

Plex-Homes

Plex-homes should be built using the following building heights:

- **Plex-homes are limited to 9 metres (which is typically 2 storeys) when directly adjacent to single detached homes (i.e. Suburban and Urban Residential land use designations) , unless the lot hosting the plex-homes is also adjacent to an arterial road or park.**
- **The nominal height for plex-homes is 11 metres (typically 3 storeys), based on the lot being separated from an OCP single detached land use by a street, cul-de-sac, lane, park (i.e. more than 8 metres) and when fronting an arterial street (i.e. 200, 203, 208 Streets).**

3.6 BACKYARD SETBACKS

Providing larger setbacks for townhomes and plex-homes with respect to single detached homes is important to increase privacy and to give townhome and plex-home residents a larger backyard to enjoy and be 'good neighbours' to the existing single detached homes. The 'good neighbour' design encompass reduced massing, shadowing, and privacy impacts on adjacent single detached homes.



It's a far healthier situation for people to have access to as much outdoor space as possible. We learned this during Covid.



Townhomes

Backyard setbacks for townhomes should be built using the following guidelines:

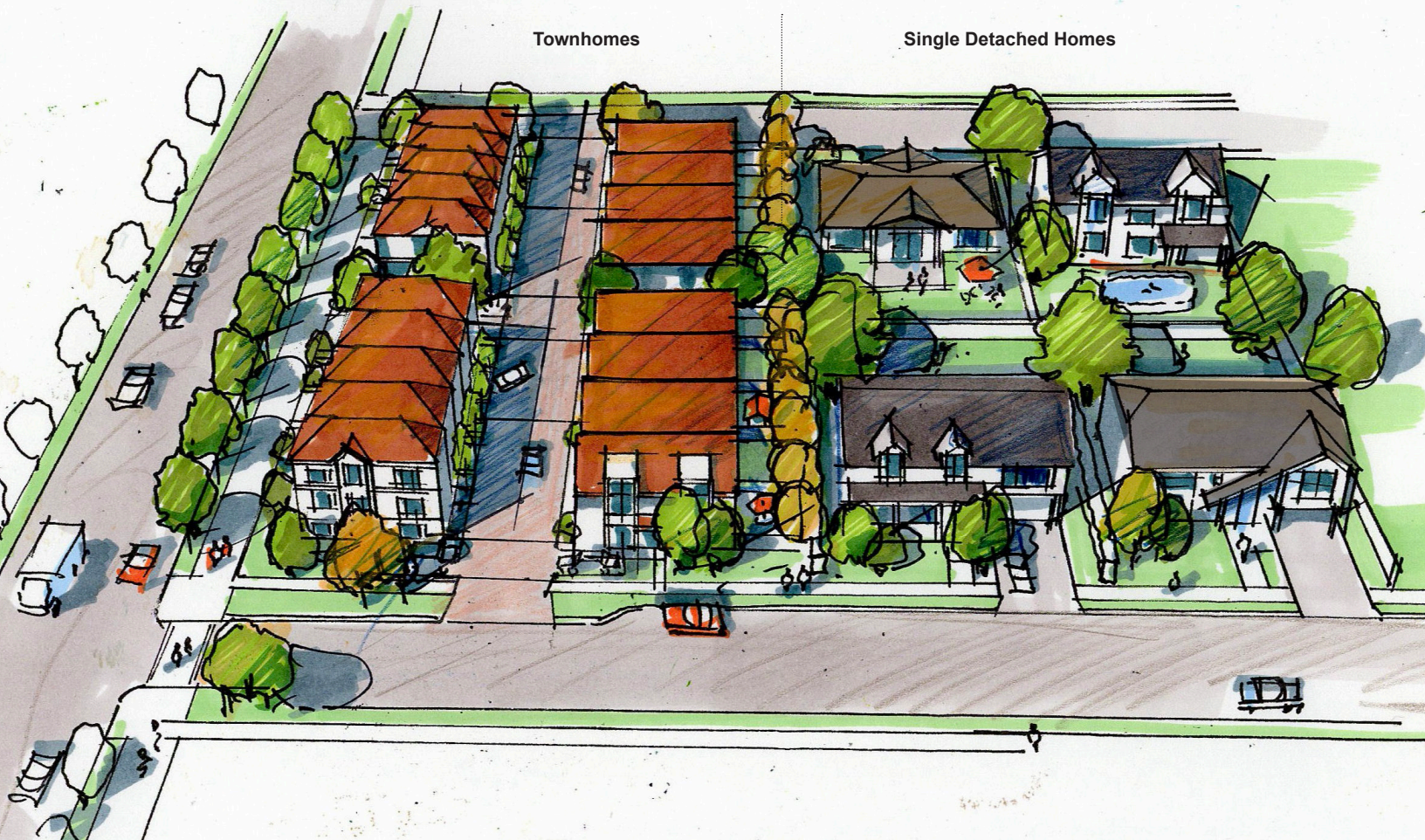
- **Maximize backyard setbacks to a minimum of 6 metres adjacent to Suburban/Urban Residential properties to create greater separation between new developments and single detached homes.**
- **Provide larger backyards and shared outdoor amenity spaces elsewhere while maintaining OCP densities vision.**

Plex-Homes

Backyard setbacks for plex-homes should be built using the following guidelines:

- **Maximize backyard setbacks to a minimum of 6 metres adjacent to Suburban/Urban Residential properties to create a larger yard buffer and separation between plex-homes and single detached homes for increased privacy and more green space.**
- **Prioritize larger backyards to enhance personal recreation, support family activities, and promote mental health and well-being by facilitating outdoor exploration, connection with nature, and gardening opportunities.**

Scenario 1 - Double Row of Townhomes



Townhomes

Single Detached Homes

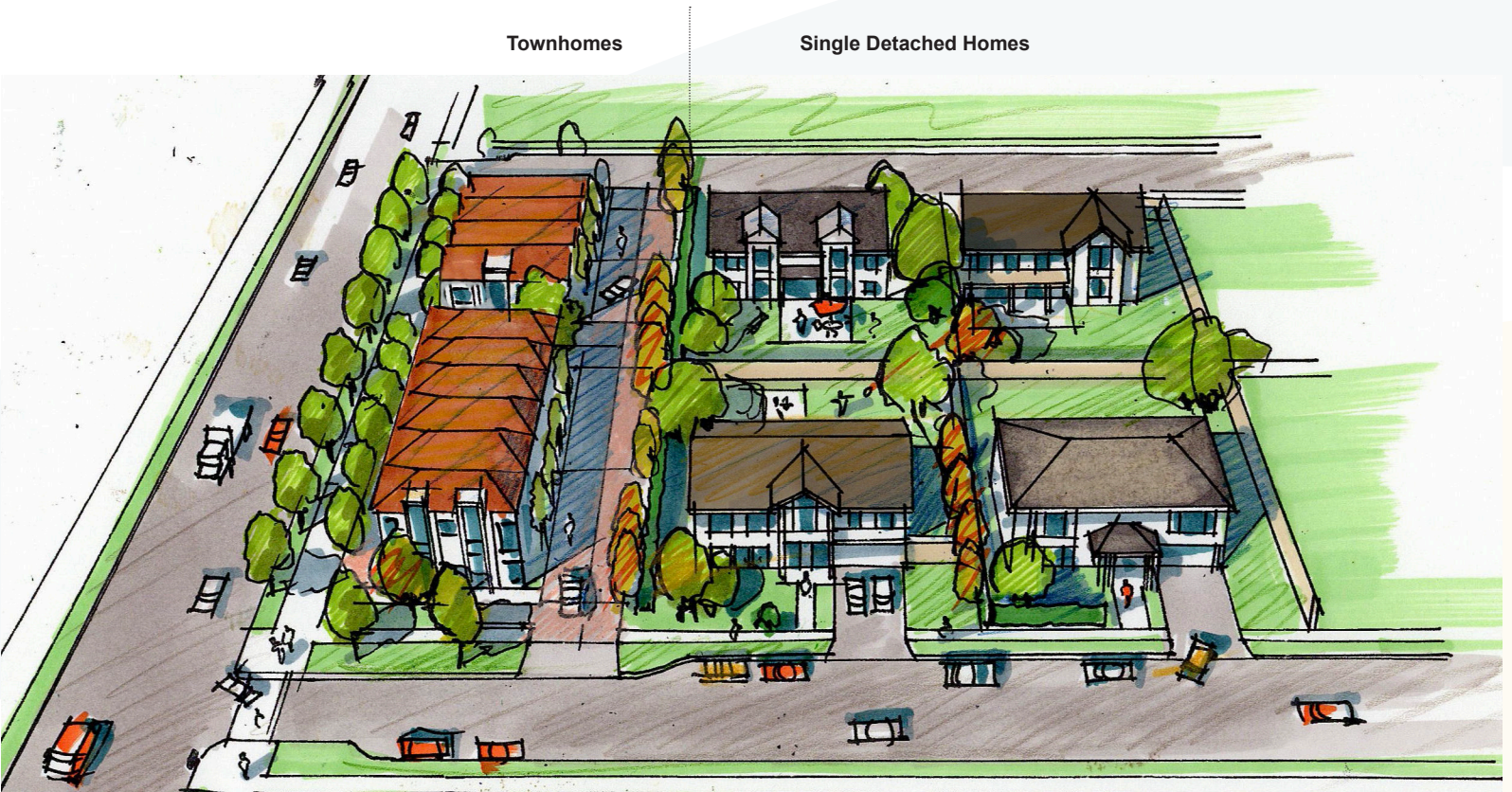
incorporate landscaping features/fencing within backyard setback to protect privacy



9m height



Scenario 2 - Single Row of Townhomes



incorporate landscaping features/fencing along lane and property line to protect privacy



← arterial street 11m townhomes (typically 3 storeys) ≥ 8m lane max 9m single detached homes (typically 1 or 2 storeys) →

Scenario 3 - Plex-Homes



incorporate landscaping features/
fencing within backyard setback
to protect privacy





3.7

GARAGE STYLES AND PARKING

The Official Community Plan (OCP) emphasizes diverse housing options for households with various incomes and family sizes. Townhomes and plex-homes must provide two parking spaces per unit*. Garages come in two configurations:

- ‘Tandem garage’: A narrow garage where two cars can park, one in front of the other. (cost-effective and space-saving but less convenient).
- ‘Side-by-side’ or ‘double garage’: A wide garage where two cars can be parked beside each other. (convenient but requires more land and is more expensive).

** each unit also requires separate visitor parking, at a rate of 0.2 spaces per unit*

“ I personally greatly favour side by side but there needs to be options available in order to provide diverse options, that account for people’s preferences and financial situations. ”

Townhomes

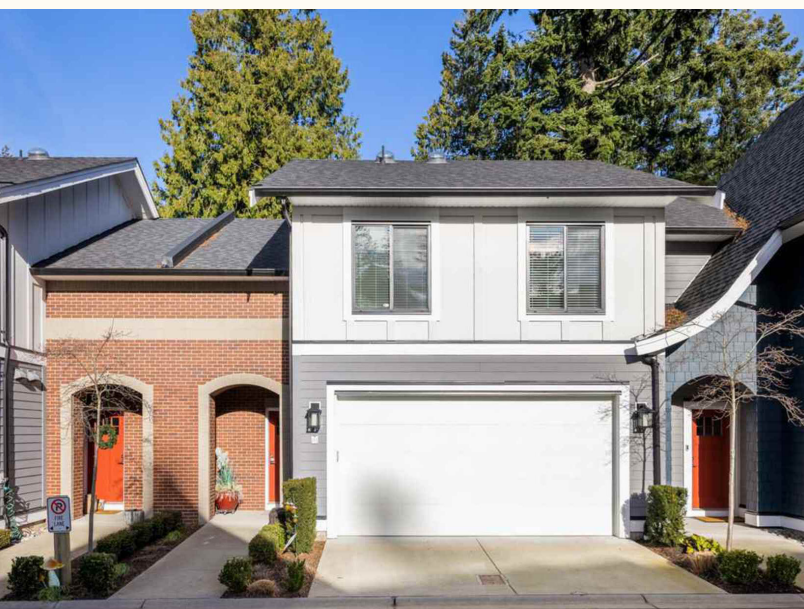
Townhomes should be built using the following considerations for garage styles:

- **Encourage a mix of both side-by-side and tandem garages, and limit tandem garages to less than 50% in new townhome complexes.**
- **Promote the use of garages over street parking by ensuring they are well-designed, easily accessible, and provide adequately sized parking spaces for residents’ vehicles at or above minimum Zoning Bylaw requirements.**
- **Seek out opportunities for additional visitor parking spaces and drop-off/loading bays off and on site off of access lanes (over the minimum 0.20 visitor parking spaces per unit).**
- **Where reasonable, encourage driveways between access lanes/streets and garages, to provide additional parking opportunities. Require driveway pad length to meet the Zoning Bylaw’s minimum parking space dimensions.**

Plex-Homes

Plex-homes should be built using the following considerations for garage styles:

- **Encourage non-tandem garages, and limit tandem garages to less than 50% in new plex-homes.**
- **Consider the design and layout of driveways to ensure safe and efficient vehicle maneuvering.**
- **Promote the use of garages over street parking by ensuring they are well-designed, easily accessible, and provide adequately sized parking spaces for residents’ vehicles at or above minimum Zoning Bylaw requirements.**
- **Where reasonable, encourage driveways between access lanes/streets and garages, to provide additional parking opportunities. Require driveway pad length to meet the Zoning Bylaw’s minimum parking space dimensions.**



3.8 AMENITY SPACES

Townhomes

In townhome complexes, there is a trade-off between private and shared open space. As the number of units increases, there's a need to balance outdoor amenity space with available land for housing. This requires careful planning to provide private outdoor areas while fostering a sense of community and providing adequate open space for common amenity areas.

“ **Langley provides access to beautiful parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities - having a yard for privacy would be better than no yard space.** ”

Amenity spaces in townhome complexes should consider the following:

- **Encourage a centralized common outdoor amenity area in townhome complexes that have 20 units or more.**
- **When distributing available amenity space between backyards and common areas, prioritize creating larger backyards.**
- **When development and/or lot configurations make common amenity spaces too small or impractical, consider contributions for improvements to nearby parks and green spaces that are accessible to all residents.**
- **Design open spaces to promote community building and social interaction, with an emphasis on providing family-friendly spaces, including playgrounds. Other features that can be provided include shared green space, community gardens, small dog parks, etc.**



