ABOVE: Danielson Grove was developed with two connected clusters of single-family homes and cottages. There is a mix of three-bedroom homes (1,500SF) and one & two-bedroom cottages (700-900SF). Each home is on a private lot facing a garden courtyard. Residents share a Commons Building for potlucks, family gatherings and meetings. Garages and parking are clustered off to the side, so that residents enjoy more 'chance' interactions as they walk through the courtyard to their front door. This project was built to meet the 4-Star Rating of the Master Builders Association BUILT GREEN program.

The Return of the Compact Home and Neighborhood

By Jim Soules

Remember the old street-car neighborhoods before the car came along? Streets lined by houses under 1000SF, built within walking distance of street cars that linked neighborhoods to work and shopping?

Such neighborhoods still exist—like Queen Anne with 3000SF lots and 1300SF homes. Though in a dense city neighborhood, these are some of the most sought-after homes in the region. Now, factors such as traffic congestion, land use regulations, gas prices, and climate change are encouraging the re-introduction of small homes, more densely placed, into neighborhoods like Kirkland.

Why smaller houses?

While most sustainability advocates favor high density (40+ dwelling units/acre), the Urban Land Institute reported that greenhouse gases could be cut significantly by creating compact communities within walking/biking/busing distance of work and services. Such developments cut vehicle miles traveled (in King County's "walkable" communities, as much as 26%) by curbing the tail-pipe, which is the Pacific Northwest's largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions.

And these smaller-home neighborhoods may be a better fit for America's new demographic: 60% of all households are one or two persons. Yet most single-family zoning is still based on large lots for a household of four or more.

In Kirkland: a new paradigm for density

Under the state's Growth Management Act, the City of Kirkland found itself obligated to provide for infill housing and greater density. Rather than adopt a code change outright, the city created an "Innovative Housing Demonstration Project" ordinance in 2002. This pilot program offered a 100% increase in density to developments using homes under 1,000SF, or a 50% increase if homes are larger (but still under 1500SF). Five proposals were received and two selected: Kirkland Bungalows, developed by Cam-West

with Mithun as architect, and the Danielson Grove by The Cottage Company in a joint venture with Ross Chapin Architects.

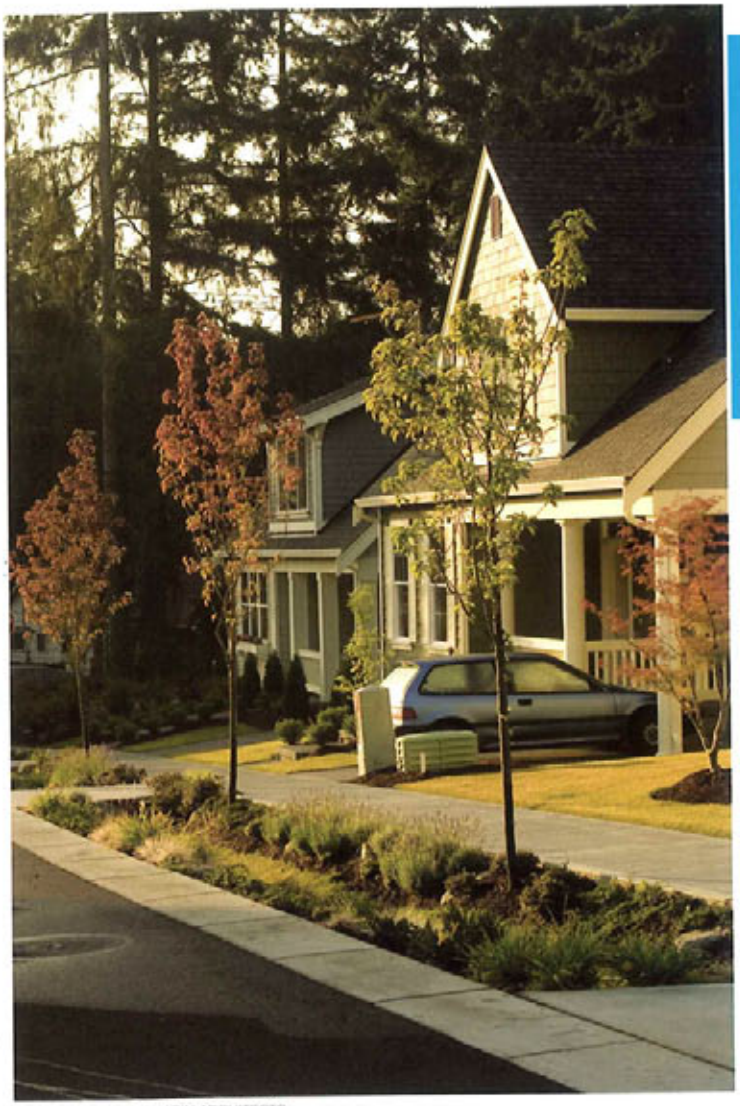
In October 2006, Kirkland evaluated the projects with focus groups of residents, neighbors, and builders. Early on, residents expressed frustration with out-of-scale new homes and limited choice (either condos or jumbo homes). After touring the pilot projects, residents and neighbors were overwhelmingly positive, noting that with smaller homes and good site plans, these compact neighborhoods still felt spacious. Only two of 28 participants rejected the model.

In late 2007, Kirkland adopted the "Cottage, Carriage and Two/Three-Unit Homes" (CCTT) zoning code. Like the pilot program, this new ordinance changed the density equation from dwelling units/acre to floor area/acre, allowing a 35% floor area ratio on any parcel in single-family zones. Assume a 30,000SF site: instead of putting 3000+SF homes on four lots, one can build any combination of homes (none exceeding 1500SF) up to 10,500SF of living space. This option allows multiple combinations: ten 1000SF homes in a courtyard arrangement or seven 1500SF homes on separate lots.

The City's evaluation summarizes: ...there appears to be a solid current and potential base of community support for innovative housing programs. Allowing alternatives to large single family homes will provide choices that will be appreciated by current Kirkland residents as well as newcomers."

Redmond and Federal Way have, and Newcastle and Kent are considering, similar cluster-housing programs. ■

Jim Soules, Principal of Soules Company, founded and until 2007 was a principal with The Cottage Company. Ross Chapin Architects received an AIA 2007 Housing Award for Danielson Grove.



PHOTOS BY ROSS CHAPIN ARCHITECTS