A Terminal Project

HOUSING FOR AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT: A NEW COMMUNITY FOR OLD TOWN PORTLAND

University of Oregon

School of Architecture and Allied Arts

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Interior Architecture

August 10, 1972

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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the love and understanding of my parents, and the patience and help of my husband, I am deeply thankful.

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#### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

#### Background of Housing Problem

Cities have traditionally been dynamic places of diversity and opportunity. This century, however, has seen a steady urban to suburban migration by the middle economic class. They have left the cities to the few rich and the many poor. The populations from disappearing rural America have continued to come to the big cities with hopes of a better life; too often only to find themselves existing in overcrowded ghettos under the harsh impersonal grip of poverty. The drain of middle income taxpayers has led to the drain of city government coffers. The poor, who can not pay, live in a city that cannot support them. Public services such as garbage, street care, law enforcement, even parks disintegrate as the process of decay begins. 1

The regeneration of our cities will not come with massive Urban Renewal or government aid. It will come with the return and reintegration of people into the total fabric of city life. As it is now, the central city bustles during the day with commerce and activity but is deserted at evening as the commuters return to their homes on the outskirts. Cities at night are being left to the poor and the criminal.

The urban to suburban trend is appreciably beginning to reverse of its own accord. Some suburbanites have been disillusioned by false promises of country living within easy reach

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of the city. <sup>2</sup> Instead, suburbia has provided monotony. "Isolation in the vast sprawl of suburbia had led to a spiraling dependance on transportation and communication to provide contacts and experiences missed at home."<sup>3</sup> The dependance on transportation has resulted in a mutation of human values ... the car owner values his car, and the freedom it brings, higher than the quality of his natural environment. This value scale can be clearly seen in the amount of land allotted to transportation (namely automobiles), 40% of all land in city and suburb is being allotted to transportation. In Los Angeles, famous for its freeways, air pollution and urban sprawl, the dependance on the automobile has not only led to it's infamy, but has been awarded 60% of all its land. Urban sprawl is directly related to dependance on the car. Cars are impractical and dangerous within the crowded central city ... they are also undesirable as living, working and entertainment come within walking distance, or reach of public transportation. "You don't meet people passing them at sixty miles an hour on the expressway; you have to decide you want to see someone and make the effort of driving to see him. It is the difference between a city that makes possible random social association and one in which encounters are predetermined and therefore rigid."4 The suburbanite is slave as well as master ... of the car.

Man hungers for social company and friendship, yet there is an equal need within him for privacy and a one to one relationship with nature. As the suburbs fan out to engulf wilderness areas and private interests sub-divide the rest, the state of being alone with

#### Page three

Nature becomes a scarce and privileged commodity. Yet, real nature is not the scenery one sees on post card vacations but the garden in his backyard or the tree that grows in the school playground. Growing things must be part of the "asphalt jungle", growing things and outdoor space that can be enjoyed in a personal and day-to-day manner.

However much I may speak in ideals of urban housing, I an aware that the subject of housing IS a sore and controversial one. The Western ideal of home and land is rooted in feudal and pioneer traditions. It was not until the begining of the Industrial Revolution that the problem of housing took on the cloak of housing for the masses rather than the personal problem of one man's need for shelter. This separation of body from soul, so to speak, brought about some concepts about urban housing, but these concepts were induced by political and economic rather than social concerns. One of the first, most prolific, answers to the crying housing shortage was the form new known as tenements ... these dehumanized standard components of the present urban ghetto.<sup>5</sup> The failure of the temements (and apartment super blocks) lay with their expedient negation of tenents as human beings. To provide shelter means to provide for basic survival levels; to provide a home is to provide for the real social and psychological needs of people. In commenting on recent developments in urban housing projects, Amos Rapoport stated, "The designs generally have fewer elements that can be personalized, show less opportunity for change; fewer surfaces which can be repainted, fewer forms that

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can be modified, fewer parts that can be changed." <sup>6</sup> Housing has traditionally been vernacular --- open-ended and individual. Architects since the Industrial Revolution, among them even the venerated Le Corbusier with his Radiant City concepts, have been designing building in the tradition of High Architecture, for rick developers, bureaucrats and politicians none of whom would have to live in the completed building. In the last few years it has become clearer and clearer, that unless the individual has the opportunity to change, improve, personalize his dwelling place, he will abdicate all responsibility towards it. The freedom to control his environment is the driving power behind the idea of "a home of our own".

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#### Project Intent

The purpose of this terminal project is the design and development of a theoretical housing system to be integrated into the heart of an existing urban center. The ultimate objective behind such a project is to provide a satisfying, enriching environment for a cross section of the population. This design is being offered as a positive and reasonable alternative to suburbia. Resulting benefits would be to bring the producers back into the city, to achieve a more intelligent balance between man and his transportation, and to leave much of the land surrounding cities in a natural, rural or recreational state, for the betterment of all.

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#### Scope of Design Problem

An economic problem arises to restrain runaway idealism in the realm of urban housing. Mass production of identical units is one thing, but producing individually tailored homes is quite another. This is where the architect or designer must take a cold look at just how omnipresent he must be in the design of houses ... and begin leaving large areas for client/user participation. To allow for such participation will be as much a part of my design solution as creating "ideal" environments in a formalized sense.

In setting up my design program, I have made use of the "systems approach" as outlined in C. West Churchman's book of the same mame. His approach is not one of solving existing problems (for problems are symptoms not causes of difficulties) but of outlining the elements that compose the system in an easily analyzed manner. To use my design program as an example: the housing project as a whole is divided down into three inter-related yet distinct realms. 1) the individual/family areas (private) 2) the community (group-semi-private) 3) and the interface between the project and the city.

The systems approach is of a highly general nature. In the search for solutions, I have crossed many disciplinary boundaries: Urban Planning, Architecture, and Industrial Design, as well as the traditional concerns of Interior Architecture. It was an information gathering adventure and I have consulted with as many people from the other fields as the limits of time would allow. In limiting this problem to a manageable design task, I have primarily concerned myself with the following:

1) On the individual family level; the development of a housing system, using a proto typical example.

2) On the community (or "group-private") level: the development of the block as a part of a probable whole community, through concern for shared facilities; specifically the circulation areas, playground, and commercial facilities.

3) On the city-wide (or "group-public") level: a study of the relationship and integration of the new community block into the existing area.

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#### CHAPTER TWO: THE VEHICLE

Portland does not suffer from the acute shortage of housing that plagues other metropolitan areas, but it does suffer from other "big-city" doldrums such as blight and suburban sprawl. Portland is, though, a city of considerable attractiveness with a unique history and beautiful natural setting (between the West hills and the Willamette River with views of Mt. Hood and Mt. St. Helens.)

The site of the original 19th century trading port is now the Old Town/Skidmore Fountain District. The existing buildings are carefully detailed, dignified examples of another time, and because of them the district has color and character distinct from the rest of the city.

#### Brief history of area:

Since the 1840's there has been controversy over public vs. private ownership of the waterfront area. In 1852 the city commission placed all waterfront land into private hands. Portland's growth was through it's waterfront industry - primarily shipping. As the original buildings began to decay, the business district shifted West, leaving the waterfront. Investors directed their capital to develop the surplus of newly commercially zoned lands, and were reluctant to build or even maintain existing property on the waterfront. 7

The Willamette River flooded annually, damaging the area's

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remaining buildings. The sea wall was built in 1920 to control the floods but docks were removed and the area continued to decay. Later bridge approach improvements and parking lots wiped out much of the remainder of Old Town Portland.

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#### Criteria for choosing the site

The area between Front and Third Avenues, Stark and Everett Streets, contains Portland's greatest concentration of 19th century commercial buildings. Many of them, with their original cast iron facades, stand bare sided and isolated by parking lots. 42% of these blocks are used all or partially for parking. <sup>8</sup> The area looks, as if through a struggle, it were bombed out.

The area has recently recaptured the elusive interest of city planners, landowners and businessmen. Slowly capital is being pumped back into the area; economic precedent having already been set by development in San Francisco's waterfront; Vancouver's, Gastown; as well as Victoria and Seattle. The Old Town district is beginning to acquire a reputation for distinctive dining, specialty shopping.... and a certain charming urban atmosphere peculiar to old west coast cities. This is an opportunity to "retain and recall Portland's history not as a museum piece but as an economically viable and integral part of Downtown." <sup>9</sup>

Fositive programs for redevelopment are under way: <u>The</u> <u>Waterfront Study</u> by Welff, Zimmer, Gunsul, Frasca and Ritter; and the <u>Portland Downtown Plan</u>. I am utilizing many of their guidelines for the urban planning background of this terminal project.

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#### The site: Description

The block developed in this study is bordered by Third and Second Avenues and Pine and Ash Streets. According to the Downtown Plan Study, Third will remain open to vehicular traffic, while Second, Pine and Ash will become pedestrian malls.

The existing buildings within the block are:

1) Trivet Tower - a two story structure recently renovated and inhabited by Thayer Office Equipment Company.

2) A one story building, also newly refurbished, for Portland Stamp.

3) A three story building of later date, in poor condition used by the Alcoholic Recovery Center, a cafe, a bookstore, and an antique exchange.

4) The Hazeltine Building, a four story brick and stone structure built in 1893, is an example of Richardsonian Romanesque. Originally built for a wholesale hardware business, it is now owned and operated by Dimitre Electric. The building is in good condition and has been preserved without substantial changes (only the original cornice has been removed.) <sup>10</sup>

The north half of the block is a commercial parking lot. It faces a tree-lined street of small shops. To the south is the Police Headquarters, a candidate for removal into the new city government complex uptown. To the west is an apartment block and moderate traffic; to the east is a full half block of old buildings ( the backside of this is parking also.) The eastern orientation affords. a view of Mt. Hood and the Willamette River.

The site was chosen because existing buildings and vacant lots allow for the integration of new structures into the area without further destroying the fabric of the district. The only section touched will be the vacant half block. The rest of the study site will remain as is, waiting for future development. Development, hopefully, of an electric and vernacular mature impossible to comcieve in a single-minded plan.

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# CHAPTER III: GENERAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS: URBAN, ARCHITECTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND SOCIAL

1) <u>PLAN TO DEVELOP THE PORTIAND WATERFRONT</u>: After the proposed closure of Harber Blvd. and the development of the waterfront as a "major public open space and recreation facility", the Old Town district will once again extend right to the river's edge. Tourism will be a new industry for the area.

2) <u>PEDESTRIAN ORIENTATION:</u> A look at a map of Portland districts reveals why Old Town will be a more truly appropriate place for people than it has been for cars. People living in Old Town could be within walking distance of their jobs in the Financial, Office, Government, or Downtown shopping districts. Shopping and entertainment are close at hand both within and closely outside the area. The streets within the Old Town district are narrow and hemmed in by shop fronts. Restricting or eliminating vehicular traffic within the area would not only turn large areas over to the pedestrian but also cut down on noise, smog, and gross driver irritability! Major pedestrian ways, bicycle paths, and skyways are planned to link the area to the rest of the city. "Traffic" along the waterfront would be restricted to foot, bicycle, slow vehicles such as trolleys or horse drawn carriages.

3) <u>IDENTITY</u>: The area is one of Portland's strongest assets in terms of unique, readily identifyable character. The Downtown Plan stresses retention of historical character through the use and

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scale of new construction. The area has already been zoned for design control.

Building heigth is of particular importance. High rise building is prohibited in the Old districts and all along the waterfront. This has been done to preserve visibility to the water and to protect the area's integrety.

4) <u>LANDMARKS</u>: Old Town is one of Portland's gateways, as both the Morrison and Burnside Bridge approaches cut into it. In being a gateway, it ideally should be indicative of the beauty and prosperity of the city.

Within the district, local landmarks play a strong role in defining and organizing. As such these landmarks should be retained and utilized in any possible neighborhood plan. The major landmark of the area is the Skidmore Fountain; others include:

The Oyster Bar / Chocolate Mousse / The Source The New Market Theater The Spaghetti Factory

The fire station

5) <u>SOCIAL PROBLEMS</u>: The Burnside/Skidmore strip contains the city's worst social problem area. Transients, drop-outs, handicapped, underprivileged, poor and old are its chief residents. Pawn shops, second hand stores, liquor and flop houses, salvation agencies live off this population.

From 1950-1960 more than 30% of the remaining permanent

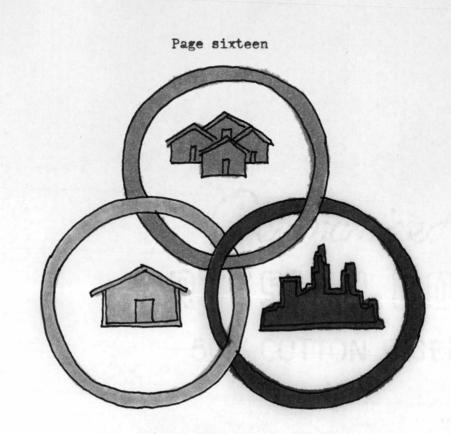
#### Page fifteen

residents left the district. In 1960, the median family income in this area was \$3000-4000 a year. <sup>11</sup> Since 1960 the population is stable but sparce. The 370 housing units in the 22 block area have all been recommended for destruction. <sup>12</sup>

6) HOUSING FEASIBILITY: Housing would bring both life and revenue back into a blighted neighborhood. Because of height and space limitations, housing can only be of moderate density ... which would tend to imply housing geared toward middle to high income families.

Strongly suggested housing forms are: housing above shops and offices in new infill structures, and apartments and offices in rehabilitated buildings.

Although this project is on a theoretical basis only, urban development money is available and a unit such as this could be readily constructed. The plan is feasible but improbable.



THE DESIGN PROGRAM

Individual-Family (private)

Community (Group-private)

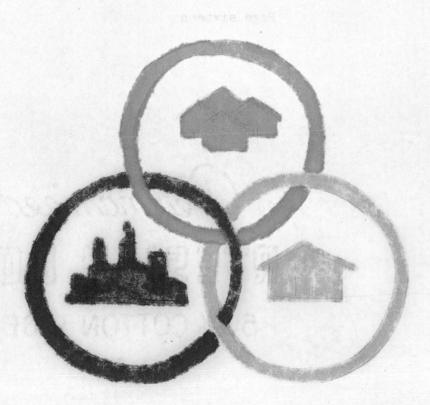
City (Group-public)

Spaces under the control of a single family and/or individual, the secure and intimate

The overlap of private and public responsibility, services, areas of entertainment, the group control (playgrounds, etc.), the close and familiar

Transportation, schools, shopping, strange and exciting

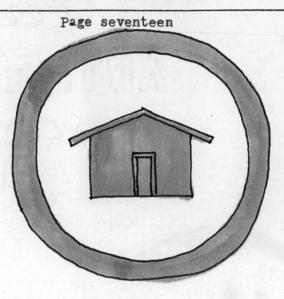
A hierarchy of relationships exist between man and his environment. 13 This portion of the design process is a research and analysis of the range of relationships between man, his dwelling, and his city. With using a systems approach, each aspect of the problem is divided into: 1) Objectives (the standards of performance), 2) Resources (physical means by which the objectives may be obtained), 3) Activities (functions the design must accomodate).



THE DESIGN PROGRAM

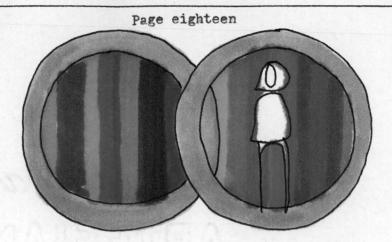
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ACTIVITIES

Eating	Formal and informal	
Food preparation	Gourmet and informal	
Storing	Possessions - long and short time	
Disposing of wastes	Food/garbage/human/disposable	
Servicing	Electricity/water/hvac	
Sleeping	For adults/children of various ages/guests	
Playing	All ages/all types - hobbies, sports, TV	
Werking	On studio (semi-public) or hobby basis	
Greening	Dressing/toiletry/bathing	
Entertaining	Up to 10 people - or more	
Gentemplating	Meditating, reading, daydreaming	
Cleaning	Maintainance of dwelling and poss-	



To provide a varied and stimulating immediate environment.

**RESOURCES**:

View - 1) Long: to the river or west hills

2) Short: to common areas within the

project area

Building modules - psychological as well as mathe-

matical variety of form.

Use of nonpermanent/non-traditional interior

finishes - easily changed.

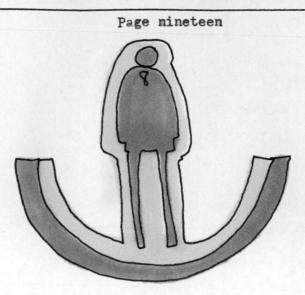
Use of multi-floor levels and orientations within

the basic frame.

#### PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Variety of: 1) types 2) locations 3) sizes
4) costs 5) degrees of luxury 6) periods of tenure.





To provide a housing unit geared to the needs of the modern urbanite.

**RESOURCES:** 

Built-in necessities (such as bathroom, major appliances) Option of background furnishings \* (general seating and sleeping facilities).

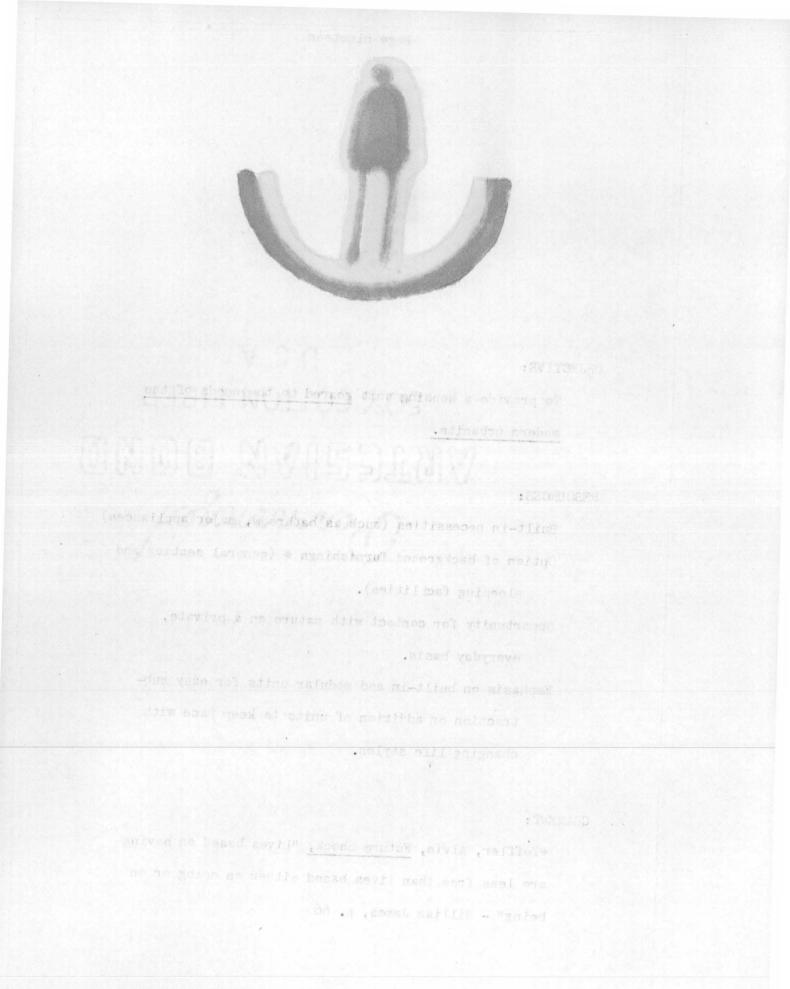
Opportunity for contact with nature on a private,

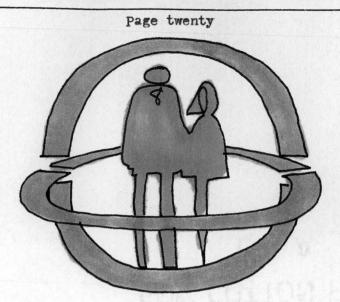
everyday basis.

Emphasis on built-in and modular units for easy subtraction or addition of units to keep pace with changing life styles.

COMMENT :

\*Toffler, Alvin, <u>Future Shock</u>, "Lives based on having are less free than lives based either on doing or on being" - William James, p. 66





To provide SECURITY.

**RESOURCES**:

Identity: single family dwelling <u>Private area</u>: (indeers and outdeers) to occupy a recognigable and defendable space,

particularly ingress and egress.

Controlled access: to dwelling area (totally man-

made as no dwellings rest directly

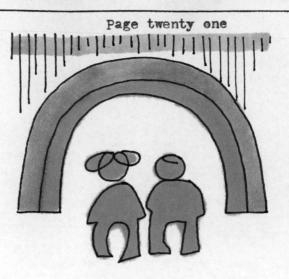
on the ground).

<u>Clearly stated hierarchy</u>: between public and private spaces.

Physical and psychological guards: against falls from the dwelling.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Security on this level is primarily psychological freedom from the unexpected intrusion of strangers. The dwelling should <u>feel</u> as well as <u>be</u> secure.



To provide SHELTER from the undesired effects of nature.

**RESOURCES**:

Removable enclosures (wall/ceilings) to allow for maximum space use in all seasons.

Separation of functions of structure (bearing) from

non-structural (partitions).

Additive (modular) building system to allow for expansion

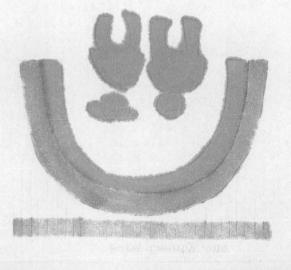
without destroying original structure (open-ended).

Site orientation - natural weather constraints.

Grouping of units to form natural barriers.

#### PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Interior renovations even radical changes possible without destroying or penetrating (destructively) basic shelter.

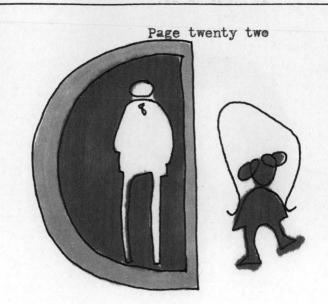


OBTROLLER \*

to provide Shall'sh from the undesired effects of nature.

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Interior removations even radical chanses pessible without destroying or penetrating (destructively basic chelter.



To provide PRIVACY, visual and auditory.

**RESOURCES**:

Soundproofing/ structural, natural - in and outside. Controlled fenestration.

Controlled ingress and egress.

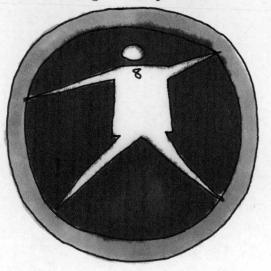
Adaptable interior spaces for specific needs (such as separation of sleeping or dressing areas of children of differing ages or parents) - for internal privacy.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Outdoor areas to be out of the line of sight of neighbors/ passers-by.

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OBJECTIVE:

To provide AMPLE SPACE for activities.

#### **RESOURCES:**

Flexible interior layout.

Continuous integration of interior and exterior space.

Open ended basic structure.

Variety (choice) in basic module combinations.

Frugal use of space (space saving) - use of psycho-

logical freedom (windows/ varying ceiling

heights, etc.)

Use of storage units instead of walls.

Modular furniture instead of discrete pieces.

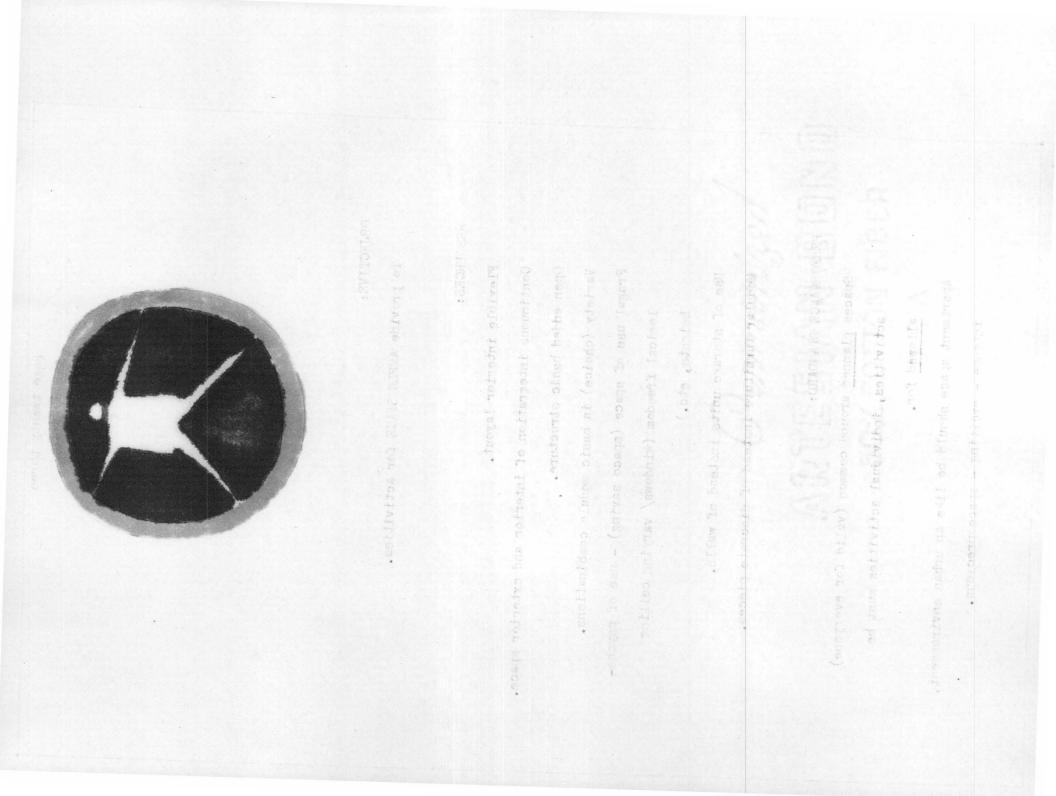
PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Spaces planned around common (valid for everyone)

activities, individual activities must be

allowed for.

Apartment space should be like an urban environment, intense - exciting - space precious.





ACTIVITIES

## Safety

Sanitation/ services

Peace/ quiet/ order

Recreation facilities

Working

Socialize (on public and private levels)

Playing (relax and enjoy)

Transportation - compatible with neighborhood activities Shopping



ACTIVITIA

Sanitation/ Mervices Peace/ miet/ arder Secreation facilities norking ( Secretize (en public and rrivate level) Eloying (relay and echon)

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SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT on Community Level:

- 1) Sandwich Shop
  - This shop is one of several commercial ventures which will profit from customers off the street and tenents of the building.
  - The orientation of the shop shows this dual purpose with entrances off the street and from the inner plaza.
  - The cuisine is specialty sandwiches, soups. It caters to the morning coffee crowd (with an upstairs coffee bar), the lunch traffic, and early evening diners.
  - The shop is not meant to compete against the late evening restaurants and bars.

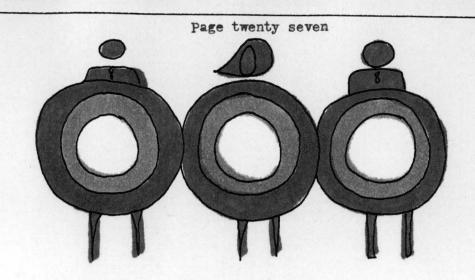
#### 2) Playground

- The playground is meant to be used by children and guests of tenents as well as children of customers of the commercial shops.
- The area has a strong sense of enclosure to ensure that the children will not stray off unwittingly.

- Equipment was chosen for variety of types of play

(passive and active) it premetes, as well as safety. The equipment provides a clearly defined challenge to physical control.

- The area offers a variety of vantage points, textures, spatial relationships, sensory experiences, paths, degress of involvement.



To provide a sense of communal identity.

### **RESOURCES:**

<u>Safety</u> provided by tenents concerned and oriented toward public paths (pedestrian streets, etc.) <u>Needs</u> of individuals to identify with community

(<u>social</u>-security) - as in village or vernacular architecture.

<u>Needs</u> also of people to recognize their house unit from outside - <u>orientation and identity.</u>

Division of "public" area into levels of restriction/

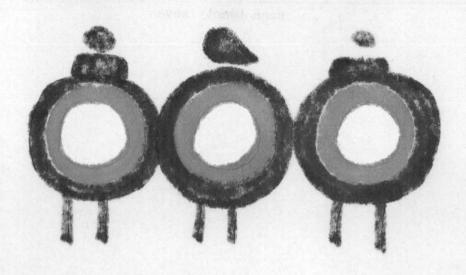
freedom from private - public.

Historical sources: street enclosure by building facade. Burnside and Hawthorne Bridges are gateways to Portland;

Old Town becomes a recognizable gateway.

#### PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

The project should be ordered in such a manner as to make it clear to people in the spaces where they are and what behavior is expected of them.



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To provice a sense of evenual (dentity.

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lafety neovided by basents concerned and releaded terrard mublic packs (permatrian streets, etc.) Keeds of individuals to identify with community (social-stourity) - as in village or verseco-

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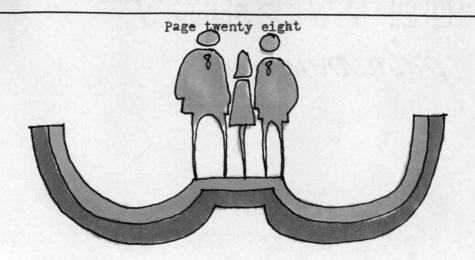
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what to become of natural detw



To provide meeting places for adult members of the community.

RESOURCES:

<u>Places</u> to meet/ talk/ sit/ generate spontaneous interaction. "<u>Public" places</u> to go socially but informally. <u>Areas</u> of meeting through choice/ chance - people you

know/ don't know.

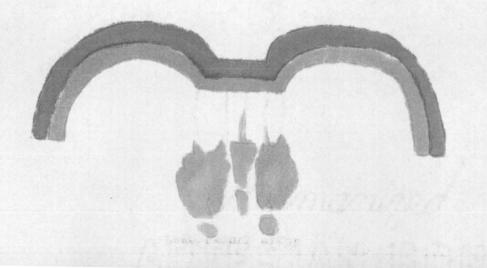
Places of entertainment and recreation.

Public characters: shop keepers, bartenders, mailmen,

janitors.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Adults should be able to meet and visit without having to entertain everyone within their private dwelling.



CONTRACT ON PARTS

To provide mooting claces for scult manders of the

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HERE SECTOR

Places to meet/ talk/ sit/ generate spontaneous intersection. "Fublic" places to ge socially but informally. Areas of metime through choice/ chance - provise rou krow/ don't knew. Places of entertainent and recreation.

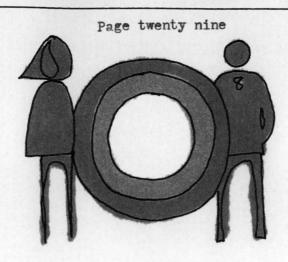
PRECENTATION STATES

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Fublic charactors: shor keepars, barbenders, tailmen,

to entertain everyone within their private dwelling.



To provide common facilities and conveniences.

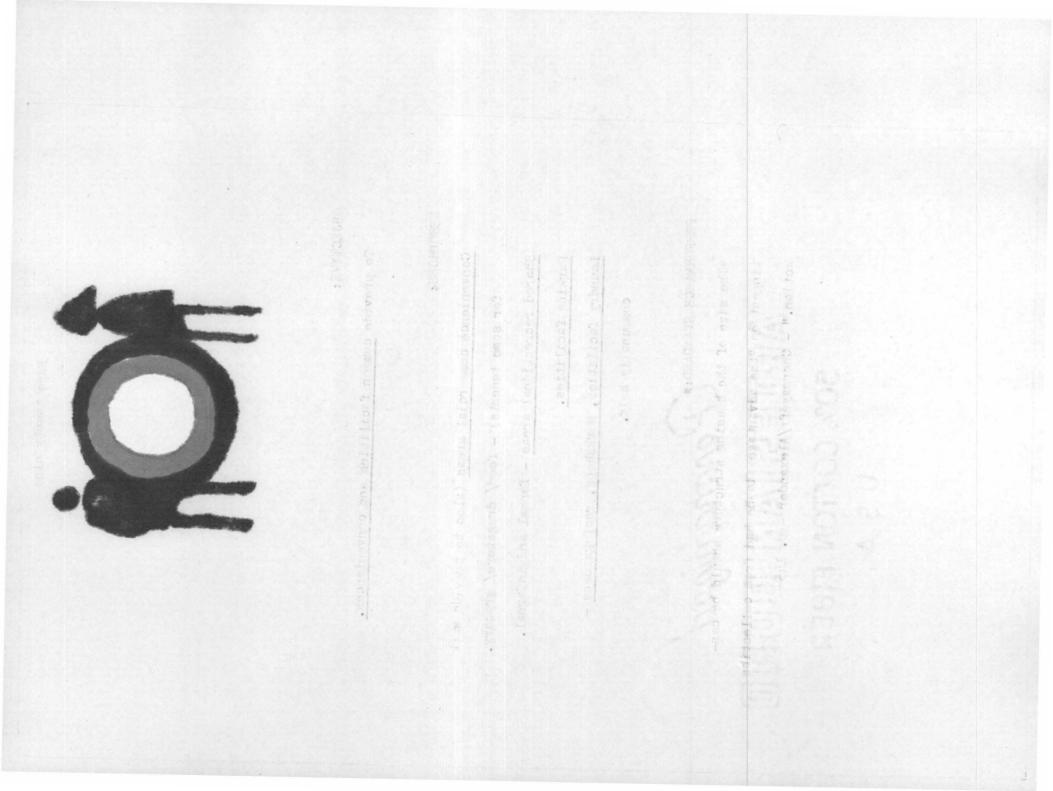
**RESOURCES:** 

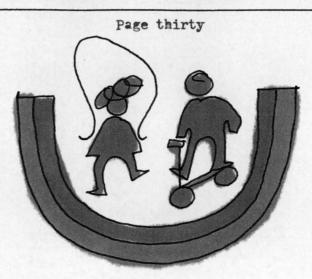
Convenience commercial areas (also to provide work for some tenents) - food/ drugstore/ grocery. Shared recreational areas - formal and informal. Parking facilities. Laundry facilities, workshops, roof gardens -

communally held.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD:\*

\*The size of the housing structure should be contingent on "the advantages to be had from collective action." - Chermayeff/Alexander - p. 145





To provide recreational areas for children of all ages.

**RESOURCES**:

<u>Playgrounds</u> safe for unsupervised 3-6 yr. elds. <u>Play areas</u> and playfields within total project boundaries. <u>Separation</u> of vehicle from pedestrian traffic. <u>Recreational facilities</u> of the teenage culture within the project (coffee shop/ soda bar/ pizza parlor, sport center, etc.) or within short distance of it. <u>Areal sidewalks provide playareas for 1-5 yr. elds</u> on "work level" of mothers.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

Young children should be able to leave their home unattended and play with children of their own age within sight of their home (mothers).

Teenagers should not have to be dependent on the car

for social life.

The playground should provide safe, varied play, to sustain the unsupervised interest of a 6-8 yr. old for at least an hour.



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e within sight of their head (nothers).

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The equipment in the playground should contribute to the kinesthetic and motor skills of the child.



To <u>design new structures</u> that will be <u>compatible with</u> <u>existing historic buildings.</u>

**RESOURCES:** 

Sense of street enclosure.
Size limitation of height and bulk.
Form: elongated rectangles, arches.
Rhythm: vertical bays, horizontal sections
Variety: roof forms, building uses.
Scale: the variety and texture of spaces, changes in enclosures and views and levels, and special orientation found in historical buildings.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD:

New buildings must meld with surrounds, to complete not disrupt the character of the area. New buildings should strive for recreating the essence of old buildings, notslavishly imitating them.



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Sense af street enclosure. Size limitation of generic and built. Porma: clongeted rectangles, arches. <u>Mortha:</u> vertical bays, accisantal sections <u>Variety:</u> roof forms, building uses. <u>Scile:</u> The variety and texture of spaces, conners us <u>enclosures and views and levels, and arecial</u> errestation found in historical buildings.

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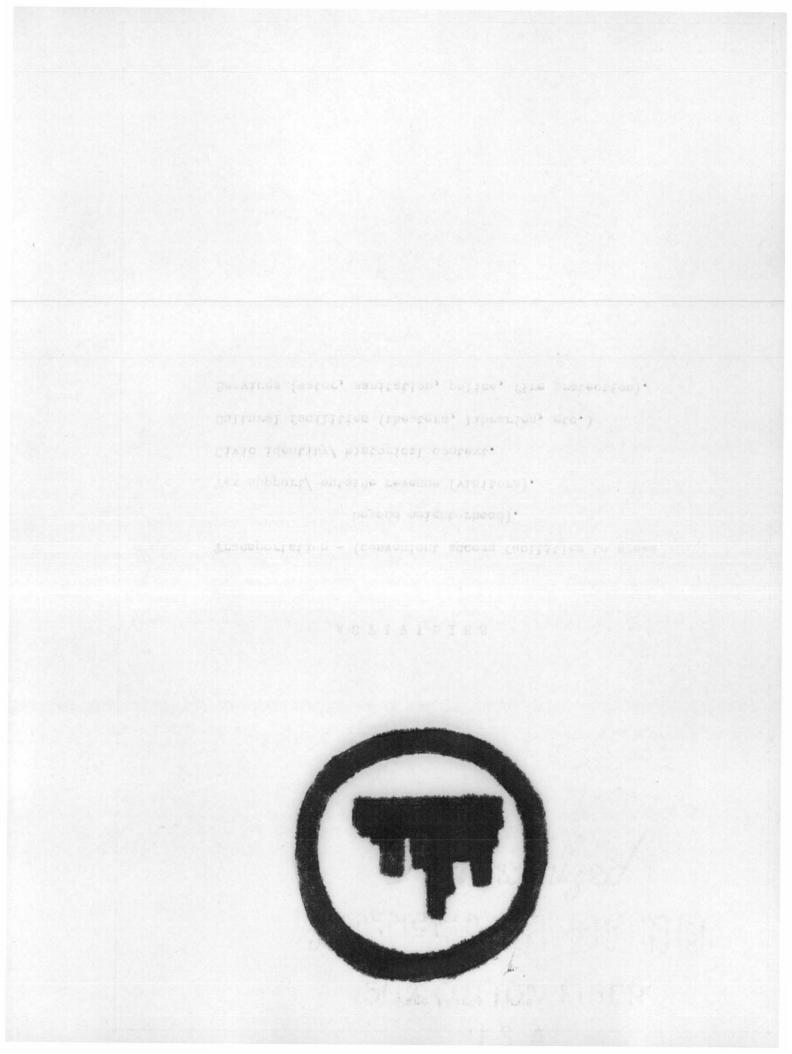
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## ACTIVITIES

Transportation - (convenient access facilities to areas

beyond neighborhood). Tax support/ outside revenue (visitors). Civic identity/ historical context. Cultural facilities (theaters, libraries, etc.) Services (water, sanitation, police, fire protection).



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