

Story Ideas inspired by the book

Pocket Neighborhoods: Creating Small Scale Community in a Large Scale World

Contact: Kate Loudon at Ross Chapin Architects: kate@rosschapin.com

Taking Back the Fences

Backyard Neighbors Create a Commons



Neighbors in subdivisions are pulling back their fences to create common backyards with playspace for kids, community gardens, BBQs and even a common house with a shared kitchen & dining room.

Locations: Davis, CA; Oakland, CA

Chapter 22

A Life with Friends



Thirty-five years ago, six couples with young children decided to buy an apartment building together. Each family had their own apartment, and together they shared an apartment on the ground floor — a place to gather for meals, play ping-pong, and house out-of-town guests. The backyard was transformed from an asphalt lot to a mini park with a lawn and trees to climb. Kids had built-in playmates and adopted aunts and uncles. There is much to learn from all of their stories and enduring relationships.

Location: Cambridge, MA

Chapter 22

Stranded in Suburbia

Or: Creating Small Scale Community in a Large Scale World



During the lifetime of the Baby Boomer Generation, the American Dream morphed off the scales — super-sizing the family house and overshooting the desire for privacy to the point that many families are marooned on their own isolated islands in a sea of houses. Millions of people are longing for leaner, not-so-big houses in real neighborhoods with a sense of community. Pocket Neighborhoods offer a welcome solution.

Lead in with a comparison from Michelle Obama's obesity program?

Introduction, Multiple Chapters

Tie in with other Retrofitting Suburbia titles

What if We Didn't Sleep with Our Cars?



A 2-3-car attached garage has become necessity for home sales in the minds of realtors, lenders and many buyers. Some developers are offering an alternative at the other end of the spectrum: homes where residents walk through a shared commons on their way from the garage door to their front door.

Locations: Redmond, WA, Kirkland, WA, Shoreline, WA

Chapters 7, 8, 20

Pockets of Community



A modification of Sarah Susanka's Forward from the Pocket Neighborhoods book, where she puts the concept in a larger context.

Forward, Multiple Chapters

Creating Community in the Garden



Across the country, neighbors are transforming vacant lots into vibrant, productive gardens. In addition to reaping abundant harvests of food, neighbors are getting to know one another and cultivating long-term friendships.

Locations: Port Townsend, WA, Berkeley, CA, Denver, CO, Birmingham, AL

Chapter 21

Small House, Big Community



Todd and Jeanette Staheli and their two daughters, ages 4 & 6, live in a 995 SF house in Shoreline, Washington, a suburb of Seattle. Rather than feeling cramped, their world is expansive — beyond their front gate is a luxuriant garden shared with seven nearby neighbors.

Location: Shoreline, WA

Chapter 20

Keeping Up With Mr. Nelson Or, Solar Catches On in Seattle



Mike Nelson, a spirited solar energy advocate, installed photovoltaic arrays on his roof, reducing his net energy use to near zero. That inspired many of his neighbors to do the same.

Location: Shoreline, WA

Chapter 20

Free Range Children Or, Expanding Horizons A Child's World Grows with Age



In a world where security is an increasingly critical issue, children can feel trapped and painfully isolated. The street out front is “off limits”, and parents must chauffeur them to friend’s houses and organized activities. Pocket Neighborhoods provide a wider safe horizon for young children as they venture out on their own, offering traffic-free space for unplanned play, and daily contact with adults other than their parents.

Locations: Davis, CA, Shoreline, WA

Chapters 15, 20

Tie in with [Free Range Kids](#) by Lenore Skenazy

Taking Back the Alley Reclaiming Public Space in Central Philadelphia



Kate Herrod set out to make one alley in Philadelphia safe for its residents, and had to change a state law to make it happen. Now all alley residents in the state have this option, and Herrod’s goal is to revitalize alleys across the United States.

Locations: Philadelphia, PA, Los Angeles, CA

Chapter 23

We Hold This in Common Neighbors Care for a Common Garden



The magic of a Pocket Neighborhood is the shared outdoor space held in common by surrounding residents. This is where nearby neighbors see one another during the comings and goings of daily life, and take part in its care and oversight. Casual conversations have a chance of growing into caring friendships and a meaningful sense of community.

Locations: multiple.

Chapters: multiple. See also [Q&A](#)

Wiki Planning

City Planners Invite Developers to Write their Own Rules



Taking a lesson from the creators of Wikipedia, city planners in Kirkland, Washington, turned to the building community for innovative ideas on updating their zoning code, inviting developers and architects to write their own rules. The city was under no obligation to approve a proposal, but if it did, the finished project would be thoroughly evaluated and considered as the basis for a new code applied generally. This is how Ross Chapin Architects and The Cottage Company created Danielson Grove, a new Pocket Neighborhood.

Location: Kirkland, WA

Chapter 7

Gathering Together

Cohousing Residents Create a Community



Cohousing is gaining a foothold in mainstream culture as a viable lifestyle option, with communities are sprouting in urban, suburban and rural settings across the country. These pocket neighborhoods are planned, owned and managed by the residents themselves. Each home is owned privately, but residents collectively own extensive facilities such as a kitchen and dining hall and community garden, and share common meals several times a week. Just don't call them communes. Residents insist that their model is different from hippie communes of the 1960s—there is no shared income, no shared religious or political beliefs, and homes are privately owned. Yet many values are similar: a desire for a more social lifestyle, environmental sustainability, and cooperative approaches to decision making and shared responsibilities.

Locations: multiple

Chapters 16, 17, 18, 19

Saging Communities

Growing Old Together in a New Kind of Commune



The first of 79 million Baby Boomers have begun entering retirement. At each stage of their lives, this generation has questioned the status quo, and it's not likely to be different now. They are replacing the term "aging" for "saging" as a way of emphasizing the value offered by their years. Many are looking ahead and actively grappling with how to preserve independence without isolation. They are shunning the packaged leisure life of gated senior "communities"—which in actuality are for-profit business schemes—in a search for a real community that meets their needs. Cohousing fits the bill for many of them.

Locations: Boulder, CO, Abington, VA

Chapter 19

Designing for Community

Patterns of Pocket Neighborhoods



Pocket neighborhoods will have different qualities and characteristics given their location: an urban apartment building, an infill housing cluster off of a busy street, a co-housing community planned by its residents, or a group of neighbors pulling back their fences to create a commons in their backyards. There are underlying design patterns, however, shared by all pocket neighborhoods.

Locations: Multiple

Chapters: Multiple

Refer to [Design Patterns for Pocket Neighborhoods](#)

A Neighborhood Made by Neighbors

Sweat Equity Affordable Housing



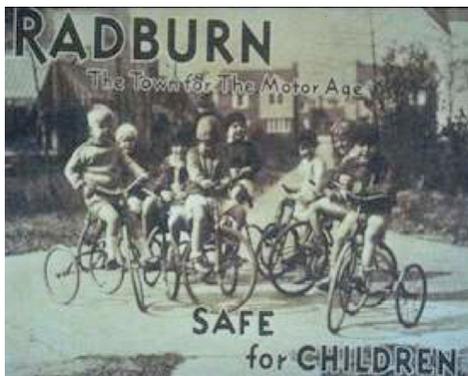
When Mary Sweet's name was picked in the affordable housing lottery, her prize was as precious as cash. She won an opportunity to own a home in upscale Boulder, Colorado, where housing prices had catapulted skyrocketed beyond her reach. The deal was that she had to work with her future neighbors to build the house from the ground up—literally sawing studs, swinging a hammer, and raising walls. Mary and her neighbors built their own homes in 1996; their pocket neighborhood has since become a part of the woven fabric of the surrounding neighborhood.

Location: Boulder, CO

Chapter 9

Ahead of Their Time

Radburn, Village Homes and the Search for Community



Radburn was a visionary “Garden City” begun in 1929 on the outskirts of metropolitan New York City. Its plan included “super blocks” which separated traffic from a network of connected parks. Homes were clustered around shared greenspaces and cul-de-sacs, and linked by walkways to playgrounds, schools, shops and a commuter rail stop. Fifty years later, in the late 1970s, Village Homes was built in Davis, California, around a similar model. In addition, its plan integrated solar homes, water conservation, natural stormwater management, and local food production. In more recent years, town plans developed in the model of The New Urbanism both reject and promote key patterns of these two communities. It's a fascinating story with many lessons to learn.

Location: Radburn, NJ, Davis, CA

Chapters 3, 15

Cul-de-sacs: Suburban Dream or Dead End?



In recent years, cul-de-sacs have received a bad rap from urban planners and anti-sprawl activists, who see a disconnected, formless pattern of “loops and lollipops” that leaves visitors (and sometimes residents) lost in a suburban maze. Homebuyers, however, seem to love cul-de-sacs. They consider them to be quiet and safe, a place where children can play with minimal fears of fast moving through-traffic. Do they have a place in town planning? Can cul-de-sacs become centers for community vitality?

Locations: Radburn, NJ, Davis, CA, Denver, CO

Chapters 3, 15, 24

Greening the Neighborhood

Two Communities Demonstrate How to Live with a Lighter Footprint



Half a world away in Australia and New Zealand, two groups have taken the global environmental crisis to heart and have built small-scale communities as templates for ecologically based cities. It is no surprise that their planning and design principles closely align with the key ideas of pocket neighborhoods, and that they are developed and organized using cohousing processes and social structures.

Locations: Auckland, New Zealand, Adelaide, Australia

Chapter: 18

Front House, Back House, Lane and/or: Backyard Cottages Offer Options



Three couples, three lifestyles. And between them runs a lane. The couples live on adjacent lots, each with a main house in front, a small cottage in back and a garage; connecting it all is a shared driveway. This arrangement offers lifestyle flexibility and increased opportunities for neighborhood togetherness.

Backyard cottages a great variety of potential uses: starter housing for young adult family members; alternative for an elderly homeowner to avoid the emotional and financial costs of having to move into a nursing home or assisted living facility; close-by living quarters for a caregiver; or a home office, art studio, or a rental for supplementary income.

Location: Whidbey Island, WA

Chapter 12

A House with a Name



A house with a name is not just cute, but is also endearing and personal. In our time, most houses are like any other, little more than a commodity that provides shelter; an investment with value in its resale. A house with a name is more likely to be a real home. The idea for PN homeowners to name their cottages came from where Ross Chapin grew up in Minnesota—a n’hood from the 1890s.

Location: Whidbey Island, WA, White Bear Lake, MN

Chapter 6

Keeping in Character / Or, Slipping In
Pocket Neighborhoods Offer a Solution for
Infill Housing in Existing Communities



One way to retrofit suburbs is to slip in pocket neighborhoods in the back of oversized lots or on vacant parcels. Their layout offers more flexibility than conventional subdivision, making it easier to work with challenging sites. The new buildings can add to the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Location: Kirkland, WA, Redmond, WA, others

Chapters 7, 8, 21

Tie into stories about Retrofitting Suburbia

Taking Back the Street
Milwaukee Avenue Becomes a Commons



An old neighborhood with historic houses in Minneapolis was able to save itself from the urban renewal bulldozers in the early 1970s. In recent years, the residents on Milwaukee Avenue convinced the city to replace the street with a pedestrian commons, complete with shade trees, lawn, and a children's playground. The homes are accessed by car from ear alleyways.

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Chapter 24

Garden Party
Pocket Neighborhoods Offer a Cause to
Celebrate



A central shared outdoor space is a key element of a pocket neighborhood. Surrounding residents take part in its care and oversight, enhancing a felt and actual sense of security and identity. It is where neighbors chat, gather for impromptu orders of pizza, and where young kids have shirttail aunts and uncles.

Location: Shoreline, WA, Kirkland, WA

Chapters 7, 20

Layers of Personal Space
Balancing Community and Privacy in a
Pocket Neighborhood



Personal space is a felt sense of comfort and safety that varies from one person to another. If the boundary of personal space is left undefined, such as a porch without a railing next to a street, a person may feel invaded. If is too enclosed, a person may feel isolated. Finding the right balance is key to cultivating community. In pocket neighborhoods that Ross Chapin designs, he typically includes six layers of personal space between the sidewalk and the front door.

Location: Kirkland, WA, Redmond, WA

Chapters 6, 7
