

Attachment 3  
*Social Connectedness Guidelines*  
*Summary*

## **SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS GUIDELINES SUMMARY**

### **The Building Social Connections Project: Housing Design Policies to Support Wellbeing for All**

Hey Neighbour Collective and Happy Cities are co-leading this three-phase project, in partnership with Simon Fraser University. Happy Cities and Hey Neighbour Collective have collected substantial evidence over the last several years on design and programming strategies to inform inclusive, 'sociable' housing policy at the municipal level. From July 2023 to June 2024 the collective will be working with six jurisdictions in Metro Vancouver to co-create new design policies to support wellbeing for residents in multi-unit housing. This is called the *Building Social Connections* project.

This work comes at an ideal time for the region, building on Metro 2050 and ensuring that new, denser housing contributes to happier, healthier communities for all.

#### *What is social wellbeing?*

Social wellbeing includes elements such as a sense of belonging and inclusion, and how satisfied a person feels in their social relationships and connections, with family, friends, neighbours, and the wider community. It contributes to a person's overall wellbeing, and is closely linked to health and happiness.

Global research has highlighted the importance of addressing our current loneliness and isolation epidemic. In Canada, a 2021 survey found that 1 in 10 adults experience loneliness frequently. The US Surgeon General recently released a report on the health impacts of isolation, equivalent to smoking a dozen cigarettes a day. Other countries, such as the UK are starting to address social isolation as a policy issue.

Currently, there is little guidance on how to design multi-unit buildings from a social wellbeing lens. Social wellbeing in housing is impacted by the design of common spaces, circulation spaces, and surrounding neighbourhood amenities, among others. Typically, local governments suggest minimum common area space and some construction elements that need to be included in a multi-unit residential project. These recommendations are generally not enough to realize the full social potential of shared spaces. By developing evidence-based policy and programming, cities can encourage the design of housing with shared spaces that facilitate positive neighbourly social connections, inclusion, and resilience.

### **Project Phases**

This project includes three phases, the second of which has directly involved the City of New Westminster.

#### *Phase 1: Measuring the impact of the City of North Vancouver's Active Design Guidelines*

In this phase, the project team will engage residents, architects, planners, developers, and building managers to understand what elements are most important to consider when designing shared spaces in multi-unit housing. This phase includes engagement

with residents through focus groups and a public survey, building audits of recently completed projects in North Vancouver, and interviews with industry partners.

*Phase 2: Co-creating housing design policies to support wellbeing in multi-unit housing*  
Happy Cities and Hey Neighbour Collective will provide a multidisciplinary learning opportunity to help the six jurisdictions create individual policies that encourage inclusive approaches to designing for wellbeing and social connectedness in multi-unit housing. At the end of the process, jurisdictions will create regulatory or incentive-based policies to encourage social design and programming for all types and tenures of multi-unit housing.

*Phase 3: Developing the Building Social Connections policy and design toolkit*  
Following Phases 1 and 2, the findings from this process will be summarized in a policy and design toolkit, which will be publicly available. Policy toolkit scheduled to be released in the summer of 2024.