

Introducing Density to Middle Neighborhoods: A Sales Approach

NeighborWorks® Boise
Boise, ID

Home costs are rising in middle neighborhoods and permanent affordability is in demand, which usually leads to conversations about density. Introducing density may not be an easy sell and can be one of the most difficult discussions to have with residents, businesses, and



government. Density talks can spark pushback among community stakeholders and many concerns are legitimate, so addressing them early on is critical to long-term success.

NeighborWorks® Boise (NW Boise) uses a [Pocket Neighborhood™](#) approach and this case study will focus on how to create a neighborhood concept that includes building density, so community members fully understand.

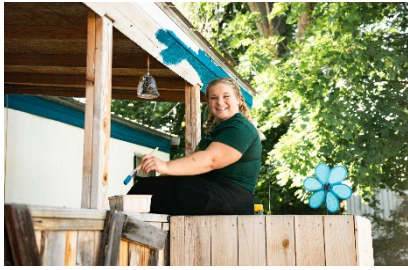
What is a Pocket Neighborhood™?

NeighborWorks Boise adopted the Pocket Neighborhoods™ style of development to provide high quality, affordable, sustainable, and community-focused housing in the greater Boise metro area. So far, the organization has built five Pocket Neighborhoods™ with a sixth underway. The average number of units is 15, and ranges from 9 to 39. These single-family homes allow buyers to achieve their “American Dream” in a compact setting within existing neighborhoods. The model includes mixed affordability with some units at market rate and others subsidized with grants and down payment assistance. Some units are in a community land trust while others are fee simple ownership. Beyond the affordability of the purchase price, monthly costs are minimized through energy-efficient construction methods.

Zoning Considerations

Construction projects often reveal necessary changes to existing zoning laws and although no policy or rule is perfect, taking steps to protect neighborhoods and support strategic growth via zoning can be beneficial. In Boise, the zoning rules have been in place since 1968, so local government is working on administrative improvements to support standards and guidelines that will help streamline processes so progress can be made. One strategy is to build agreed upon dwelling and neighborhood designs into zoning ordinances. Zoning rules that take these concepts into account create efficiencies in housing development and improve the overall resident and stakeholder understanding as development unfolds.

Supporting Neighborhoods in Other Ways



Investing in neighborhoods in other ways can help larger projects move forward. Over 40 years ago, NW Boise started a community wide “Paint the Town™” program and later began offering an event called “Rake Up Boise™” each fall. Both programs - which are for low-income senior and disabled households who are physically or financially unable to maintain their homes – quickly became popular and helped increase recognition of the organization’s work and mission. These programs supported neighborhood beautification, plus helped staff identify homes in need of repairs or improvements (i.e., gutters or other work). Offering high-profile programs can help build trusting relationships that create a strong advantage when promoting larger and potentially more sensitive projects.

Planning Home Designs



When introducing density to an existing neighborhood, it is important to consider home size. Depending on the amount of space available and the goals of the project, some units may be small. Still, units should fit with the style of homes already in the area. When building a Pocket Neighborhood™, NW Boise starts with a few larger units in lots that are more visible from the street and transitions to smaller designs as they move toward the internal workings of the neighborhood. In these Pocket Neighborhoods™, larger homes are around 1,200 square feet while smaller designs are about 600 square feet.

Home and Neighborhood Amenities

NW Boise has found the following designs and amenities to be most important to residents and community stakeholders:

Garages	Most homes have a garage, so NW Boise includes one-car garages (both attached and detached) for all builds within the Pocket Neighborhood™. This keeps development in sync with the surrounding area, helps each family with storage and parking, and increases the value of the home. Each garage costs between \$18,000 - \$21,000 to build.
Front Porches	Large front porches are another common feature in Boise homes. Porches provide opportunities to connect with neighbors and align with existing neighborhood character. Homes of all sizes include front porches in the Pocket Neighborhoods™.
Landscaping	NW Boise uses intentional landscaping to create natural barriers and beauty. Sometimes actual fences are needed or preferred, but usually natural barriers are nicer and require less maintenance in the long run. Bushes and shrubs create borders but are welcoming. Building a small grassy area creates a buffer between homes while adding space for people to work or play.
Outdoor Common Area	Adding common outdoor spaces is a great way to build community; ask residents what they prefer. Popular ideas include outdoor patios with lounge areas, tables, and a bonfire pit as well as dog parks.

What's In:

- Fire pits
- Patio lights
- Public art
- Garages with (above) storage space
- Individual garden boxes
- Dog parks
- Consolidated trash collection
- Shared tool sheds
- Diversity

What's Out:

- Community rooms
- Shared storage spaces (may result in insurance liabilities)
- Individual trash receptacles
- Playgrounds
- Swimming pools
- Community laundry
- Investment property (homes are owner occupied only)

Selling Strategies

Here are some tips for discussing topics related to density and permanent affordability with neighbors and community stakeholders:

Anticipate Questions: Know the typical questions and resident concerns which usually include water, traffic patterns and parking. Know what people are afraid of so you can be ready to talk about that and focus on protecting neighborhood character and natural spaces. NW Boise creates one parking space on the street per household, in addition to the one-car garage, which helps with parking concerns.

Host Neighborhood Tours: Offer tours and events to show off the completed Pocket Neighborhoods™. If older projects exist, tour these areas as well to show how the neighborhood endures even 10 years later. Host public walking tours, block parties, outdoor movie nights, and holiday parties and provide food and other entertainment.



Understand ‘Trigger’ Words: Words like ‘density’ and ‘affordable’ can be divisive so consider terms carefully. Cluster development or Pocket Neighborhood™ may be less threatening or intimidating, and even descriptors like ‘mixed income’ or ‘subdivision’ may be more acceptable. Focus on promoting homeownership and housing stability and make the project goals relative to the needs in the local community. Examples include housing options for aging couples who are downsizing or young families who are looking for a starter home.

Build Partnerships: Create opportunities for companies and partners to get involved. Ask the local REALTOR® association for volunteers to help build or paint garden boxes. Getting partners involved at this level will help them to understand the neighborhood concept.

Explain the HOA: Most planned developments are managed by a Home Ownership Association, which generally takes on the function of a neighborhood association, plus collects monthly fees from members to fund maintenance of common areas. This can be a positive selling point. HOA rules and standards are an asset to the surrounding community and empower households. They uphold plans for maintenance and repairs and hold members accountable to a neighborhood standard including trash and debris removal, yard maintenance, and property guidelines. In Boise, each Pocket Neighborhood™ has its own HOA comprised of homeowners living in the development. NW Boise educates them on how to run the HOA, elect committee and board members, set up a joint HOA bank account and ensure future operations and transitions are smooth and successful. While doing walking tours or community meetings, invite an existing HOA member® or manager to help explain the concept and promote the benefits.

Affordability Strategies

Various affordability strategies are built into Pocket Neighborhoods™:

Land Trusts - Some Pocket Neighborhoods™ are part of a land trust, meaning the buyer owns the home and leases the land from the land trust, which maintains the ground. This is a popular shared equity strategy.

DPA - Down payment assistance programs are a great way to increase affordability. Home ownership is out of reach for many, and providing support for households with varied incomes is key.



Smaller Homes - Small or modest-sized properties are naturally more affordable and create opportunity with less cost and fewer subsidies.

Updated Zoning – Sharing clear and precise construction guidelines with town zoning and government officials can help development processes and proposals become more fluid and can also help the public to better understand building parameters and have accurate expectations. Review variances and use common requests to inform new plans or zoning rules.

Best Practices

Involve Residents and Stakeholders	Holding regular meetings and listening sessions can be challenging and time intensive but is worth every minute. Residents have great ideas and these meetings give the organization a chance to debunk misunderstandings or misperceptions.
Maintain Connections	Stay connected with the new community and learn from residents. Ask what works and use those details to inform new projects. The HOA may have unique ideas that you have not considered.
Provide Examples	Provide an example of the plan and ask what stakeholders think, rather than providing a fully mapped out proposal. Residents want to be part of the conversation and are more supportive if they are a part of the decision-making process. Ask about priorities.
Gather Input	Use a quiz or poll to gather input on elements like architectural styles and color schemes. Hire a good architect who understands the styles that fit into the neighborhood.
Maintain Affordability	Make sure the homes are affordable after purchase. Include energy efficiencies to increase value and help buyers save money.
Make Homes Accessible	Prioritize visitability. This means at least one bedroom and a full bath on the main level and accessible doorways.
Build in Placemaking	Include parks, outdoor lounge areas, dog runs, fitness areas, etc., based on the needs and desires of the community. Pocket Neighborhoods™ not only build homes but build community.

Resources

Homeownership Alliance:

<https://www.stabilizationtrust.org/homeownership-alliance/>

NeighborWorks® Boise Pocket Neighborhoods

<https://nwboise.org/single-family-homes/pocket-neighborhoods-by-nwboise/>

Questions

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