Re-Forming Domesticity
Current attempts to address the housing crisis too often rely on conservative, nostalgic models of ownership—in turn largely failing to impact the interrelated problems of scarcity, homogeneity, unaffordability, unsustainability, and isolation. Rather, the very nature and meaning of home itself needs a more fundamental re-mixing: from homes in isolation to shared spaces held in common.

A diverse ecology of living sprouts forth, growing from the interstices of the formal city. It harnesses underused zones of space—laneways, front yards, infrastructural and latent ecological corridors—activating them with a shared network of collective activities. Instead of nostalgically recreating older modes of living and working based in static ownership of a singular space, this sharing network both decentralizes domesticity and weaves collective space into the domicile. The city’s components shake loose from their traditional roles and distribute into the urban fabric, allowing them to be held collectively.

Lots, in Common
This evolving network of shared spaces hosts a multiplicity of activities impossible in isolation. Shared space proliferates throughout North Vancouver as a field of experimentation, in which collective social life is continually re-formed through everyday rituals. Urban space is reframed via acts of sharing and solidarity: the denizens of the city find they have Lots In Common.
**TENETS OF MIXING**

**Tenet 1: Be a Sponge, Not an Island**

Integrate building into larger networks.

The failure of current housing policy is, first and foremost, a failure to understand how individual projects relate to larger networks of economy and ecology. Instead, *Lots In Common* is networked at its core. It builds from a commoning platform of collective ownership, using the processes of collective self-governance to negotiate larger economic and ecological networks. True local democracy starts in the home: with collective control and equity.

**Tenet 2: From ‘Community’ to ‘Communities’**

Distribute across a common ground.

In lieu of the monoculture of single-family homes and laneway houses with near-identical massing, the ground plane is freed up to serve a broader, more-than-human array of communities via courtyards, landscaped strips, and public spaces. This is achieved via two-lot land assembly (via a land bank or by individual groups of commoners), which maintains neighborhood continuity while allowing for a significantly more flexible and nuanced approach to how to integrate communities (human and non-human alike) into the projects.

**Tenet 3: (Inter)Facing Things Together**

Mediate between different habitats.

Architectural surfaces are, ironically, often overlooked when addressing larger questions of ecology and sociality—or at best, treated generically in codes. Instead, *Lots In Common* embraces architecture’s role in mediating and accommodating difference: using spatial devices to transform potential conflicts into spaces of togetherness and delight. An interface-based code turns density into conviviality.

Lots in Common is a series of spatial protocols rather than a rigid, standardized building prototype. Its deployable design moves can adapt to varied scenarios, using them to weave together the many systems and inhabitants of the sites. These design moves harness the diversity of the site’s inhabitants, livelihoods and needs—encouraging convivial and synergetic relationships.
Urban Design Gestures
In response to (and incorporating) the five key principles of Missing Middle 2018, Lots in Common proposes five additional urban design and planning principles underlying this sharing network:
1. **Commons Incentives** relax zoning codes for groups of citizen-owners creating commons-oriented buildings that are generous to the community.
2. **Yards to Boulevards** recasts the space of the street edge, front yard, and municipal easement as a multifunctional zone for living, making, and growing.
3. **The Laneway Network** renews the space of the lane as it densifies, using it as the new centre of informal, shared neighborhood activities.
4. **Greenway/Blueway Networks** use ecology to drive urban form, creating pedestrian and habitat corridors linking parks or along daylighted streams.
5. **Commons Clusters and Corridors** incentives encourage new commons-oriented development to cluster along these corridors — encouraging individual commons projects to aggregate into a larger network of commoning.

Towards a Network of Commoning
Via bridging institutions such as a prospective ‘Commoners Corps’, individual groups of commoners are able to harness resources and receive expert guidance through the process of development. As these projects combine into a larger system of common space, a diverse ecology of living sprouts forth at the block and neighborhood scale. Paired with membership access or a digital overlay, neighbors could partake in the latest happenings in the network. The whole becomes more than the sum of its parts.
Drawing Together
Commons-focused projects entangle themselves into existence, growing by weaving together the networks into which they are tied (social, biophysical, ecological, economic). This illustrative example began when Amélie heard about baugruppen, a German cohousing model, and thought it sounded like something she and her friends should explore. Through their social circles (friends, neighbors, coworkers, extended families), they assembled an interested group to take advantage of the city’s new Commons Incentives. After a few months of planning with help from the community land bank and Commoners Corps, they formed a cooperative, found a site and hired an consultant team to work through the design. The Commoners Corps sold them the lots pre-assembled at slightly below market value, with the co-op in return selecting amenities that filled gaps in the Common Space Exchange Network and offering future, reciprocal access once completed.

The Business of Exchange
As the design developed, they began to better understand their new neighbors and work them into the design — neighbors (broadly construed) that include raccoons and rain, mass timber and migratory birds, bike commuters and bumblebees, among myriad others. The co-op they formed acted as an institution of commoning, becoming a go-between that mediates the many ecological and economic exchanges of the project’s communities. Pottery was sold, habitat restored, rents and equity reallocated, amenities negotiated, newcomers feted, sidewalks chalked, vegetables brought to market.
Harnessing Found Potential

After locating their North Vancouver site and consolidating two parcels under the commons-incentive plan, the first order of business was to embrace the slope of the site. The buildings step downward in height following the slope, creating a varied roofline and a series of terraced gardens. Site specificities fuel architectural expression.

Yards to Boulevards

The front edge of the site reclaims underused space from former yards and municipal easements, thickening it into a boulevard. Multiple uses combine in this strip: cafe seating, parking, rainwater gardens, street trees, parklets and more.

Business In The Front, Party In The Back

The three courtyards of the project similarly tie into the larger boulevard, laneway, greenway, and blue-way networks. Their design and programming embraces the wide range of communities that traverse these networks:

- The street-facing courtyard plaza gives space for Simon to get tea with Anupreet when she’s biking by on her way back from work.
- The lane-facing neighborhood courtyard hosts Theresa’s parties or Natalie’s yoga classes, while neighborhood passersby (human and animal alike) drop in from the park for a visit.
- The inner common courtyard lets Dakota run wild with their preschool pals, while their parents work from home upstairs.

All three courtyards are scaled, oriented, planted, and programmed to buffer adjacent buildings when needed, while also opening out to embrace fortuitous connections with context.

1. street courtyard (1600 ft²)
2. common courtyard (2000 ft²)
3. lane courtyard (1600 ft²)
4. shared porch (4 @ 160 ft² each)
5. common spaces at courtyards (2 @ 2400 ft² total)
6. common spaces at upper levels (2 @ 930 ft² total)
7. roof terrace + garden + solar PV + meadow (2200 ft²)
8. colonnade screen interface
9. vegetated screen interface
10. connections to park
11. 1 bedroom unit (6 @ 600 ft² each)
12. 2 bedroom unit (6 @ 900 ft² each)
13. 3 bedroom unit + courtyard access (1 @ 1200 ft²)
14. small-format work / commercial space (4 @ 2860 ft² total)
15. common services, laundry, elevator, storage (900 ft²)
16. bike lockers (250 ft²)
17. mechanical (1500 ft²)
18. boulevard w/ rain gardens, parking, seating
All Up In Your [Inter]Face

The mix of conditions is mediated by a system of architectural interfaces: screens, balconies, colonnades, hedges, planters, bleacher-stairs, and more. The challenges of proximity are transformed into sites for interaction, juxtaposition, and delight.

Thickening the Surfaces

Rather than merely passive objects, building and site elements are treated as productive surfaces within systems. Migratory birds refuel in the roof meadow; bees and mushrooms inhabit hedges; stored carbon inhabits mass timber elements; thick envelope walls wrap it all in a cozy insulating blanket.

Scales of Commoning

As the residents worked through the design with their architect, they sought out a richly-varied network of common spaces:

- Ground-floor shared spaces allow residents with mobility limitations to join in with ease.
- Shared porches give a space for neighbors to sit, chat, play board games, and entertain visitors outside.
- Open, canopied terrace balconies and exterior corridors overlook the courtyards—often hung with props when the daycare stages a play.
- The indoor common space on the top floor floods with indirect natural light from clerestory windows during morning art class and glows with golden sunset light during parties.
- The harvest table on the rooftop terrace hosts communal meals for the entire building, complete with very local veggies (travel distance: three feet).