

Gabriola Housing Society Affordable Housing Forum

May 12, 2018

Report



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Acknowledgements

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We would also like to thank Village Food Market and Anna Bauer for contributing the refreshments at the forum.

We would like to thank Jerry Ellins for preparing the model drawings, Chloe Straw and Sibyl Frei for planning and facilitating the forum, and Julie Sperber for taking notes during the reporting at the forum.

Most importantly, we would like to express our appreciation to the many Gabriolans who came out to the affordable housing forum on the first warm sunny Saturday in 2018.

Sincerely,

Gabriola Housing Society Board (members, 2017-2018 & 2018-2019):

Nancy Hetherington Peirce, President

Tatha Cornish

Jerry Ellins

Sibyl Frei

Jenni Gehlbach

Martin Humphries

Bill McCaugherty

Cindy McCaugherty

Jim Ramsay

Chloe Straw

Background

The Gabriola Housing Society (GHS) planned and organized an affordable housing forum on Saturday May 12, from 1:00 - 4:30pm at the Hope Centre. The purpose of the forum was to provide an opportunity for discussion of multi-dwelling housing models that address the lack of affordable housing for people with low to moderate incomes, in order to assist GHS with the selection of the model(s) that are likely be supported by the Gabriola community.

To encourage wide community participation in the forum, we inserted prominent advertisements in the Gabriola *Sounder*; listed the forum in the events column of the newspaper and in the Chamber of Commerce's events calendar; and promoted it in the three most-widely used Facebook community bulletin boards. We sent personal invitations to all Gabriola Housing Society members, both Island Trust trustees, our RDN representative, and key people at the Gabriola Ambulance Society; Gabriola Arts Council; Gabriola Auxiliary for Island Health Care; Gabriola Branch, Vancouver Island Regional Library; Gabriola Chamber of Commerce's Economic Development Group; Gabriola Chapter, Rural & Remote Division of BC Family Practice; Gabriola Commons Foundation; Gabriola Community Bus Foundation; Gabriola Ecumenical Society; Gabriola Elementary School Parent Advisory Council; Gabriola Emergency Social Services, RDN; Gabriola Health Care Foundation; Gabriola Housing Society; Gabriola Island Chamber of Commerce; Gabriola Island Community Hall Association; Gabriola Land & Trails Trust; Gabriola Lions Club; Gabriola Recreation Society; Gabriola Senior Citizens Association; Haven Foundation; HOPE Centre; People for a Healthy Community; Sustainable Gabriola; as well as the new Community Paramedic, BC Ambulance Service, asking them all to pass the word to their members. We also personally invited some individual influential and knowledgeable members of the community such as past Island Trust and RDN representatives, as well as those active in the Village Vision process. More than 50 people attended the forum.

What we did

The forum started with brief opening presentations on the Village Vision project, housing rules in Gabriola's Official Community Plan and Land Use Bylaws, research on the benefits of eco-housing, and research on the benefits of diversity in income and age in multi-unit buildings.

After the presentations, four hypothetical options for multi-unit housing were presented (each with 18 dwellings, average 900 sq ft, on a 5 acre parcel): single dwellings, a mix of single units and duplexes, triplexes, and a 2-story apartment building. The bulk of the forum involved small group discussions on the models and other ideas (discussed at "wild card" tables), with participants invited to get creative and dream up what an affordable housing project could look like in our community, based on the four models. Reports were presented from each of the discussion groups, with many great ideas and suggestions put forward.

This report summarizes what we heard, outlines some next steps for the GHS, and includes all of the drawings created at the forum in an appendix.

What we heard

Who would live there?

- Most people would like to see a mixed community of old and young, singles and families, with varied incomes.
- Some spoke about the need for accessibility and ground floor units, although the comments were largely focused on seniors rather than people with disabilities.
- A few suggested focusing on housing for young workers and single parents, and a few others suggested giving preference to homeless people or people with low incomes.

What type of housing?

- Most people would like to see a mix of building types, sizes and heights on the one parcel, from studio apartments to 4-bedroom units, in buildings that are one- and two-storey.
- People suggested including a range of unit sizes, with the smallest being 200 – 400 sq ft to the largest being 1,500 sq ft.
- A number of people suggested developing a pod approach to housing, with common kitchen, dining and living spaces and laundry, and private bedrooms and bathrooms radiating out from that central space.
- A few suggested a tiny house cluster/village and/or pads where people could park mobile tiny houses.

Layout

- No one liked uniform, straight line layouts that are car and road centred, preferring access roads to be curved and parking spaces to be out of sight, both on the perimeter, with homes to be light-filled, of different styles and have views looking at gardens or recreational or wild spaces with trees.
- A curved layout of houses, road and walking trails was important for most people. More pathways and less road was also suggested, as well as more than one access to the property and a one-way circular driveway.
- Developing clusters for different types of families was frequently suggested, such as making one cluster for seniors and people with disabilities that is close to gardens, parking and the road (possibly including students in this cluster), and another cluster for families close to play spaces and gardens.
- Some people suggested controlling parking, either by limiting each unit to one parking space with more parking at a communal location, or only having communal parking. Plug-ins for e-vehicles and bicycle parking were also suggested.
- Some people also suggested providing private outdoor space or porches for some units, and another suggestion was to build exterior staircases on 2-storey buildings.

Communal spaces

- Everyone spoke about the desire for some communal spaces to be built into the design.
- Many people suggested a common kitchen area, guest rooms that could be rented for visitors, communal garden plots and some allotments so people can grow food, a common courtyard, and a playground for children, preferably near the gardens.
- Other suggestions for communal spaces included shared daycare, a common quad in the centre, laundry facilities, a workshop, a multi-purpose space, a tool library, a generator, a commercial kitchen, a yoga space, a golf cart, a storage area, a studio, a woodshed, deer fencing, a shed for parking bicycles and motorcycles, and a caretaker suite.
- Sharing maintenance, as well as shared tools and other equipment, was noted as a benefit in some conversations.

Environmental practices

- A number of suggestions were made about common utilities, such as shared rainwater collection, well(s), septic and greywater systems, and a solar energy system.
- Building green, healthy homes, involving the community in construction, using and training people in cob building, solar systems and other green building approaches, using grey water for gardening, using permaculture practices and forest gardening, and using drought-resistant plants were other ideas raised at the meeting.

Other issues and suggestions

- In bringing together multiple needs, the governance model will be critical. Community doesn't happen by accident, it requires intention.
- How to address pets will be another important topic of discussion.
- A participant at one of the wild card tables suggested looking at a different approach on larger agricultural lands: allow 5 families to each have 1 acre to do some kind of land-based farm/agriculture/permaculture businesses with a different but complementary focus or product, such as beekeeping, horses, greens, etc. They could have shared solar power, trucks and tools. The land could also provide temporary housing for workers, possibly a cluster of tiny houses with a communal kitchen. The Islands Trust could be asked to help obtain a variance from the province for this type of approach on ALR lands.
- It was also suggested to start by building the communal areas, and then add residences such as yurts, mobile homes, tiny homes, etc.
- Developing a common social enterprise could help fund the housing community. Local products could be made in a commercial kitchen and/or workshop, and sold to sustain the community.
- Consider putting housing on top of commercial buildings, such as Madrona's and Robert's, and as part of future commercial development.

The ownership question

- Although far from consensus, most people were in favour of a mix of owning and rental units (with secure tenancy for renters).
- Other suggestions were to develop a housing co-op, co-housing, keep the costs below market value and explore other ways to keep costs affordable such as capping sale prices and other rules, and having a non-profit organization such as the Gabriola Housing Society own the land or the whole development.

Next steps

Rather than identifying one or more specific models of housing to work toward, the forum produced helpful feedback on what a multi-unit housing project should look like, and who it should be for.

The Gabriola Housing Society has identified a number of steps to move an affordable housing project forward:

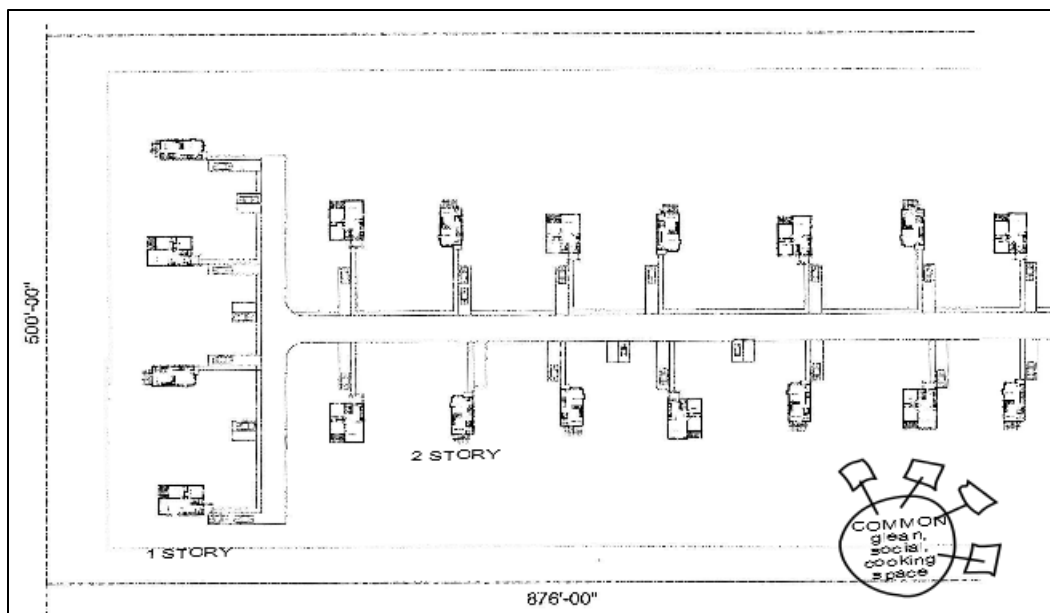
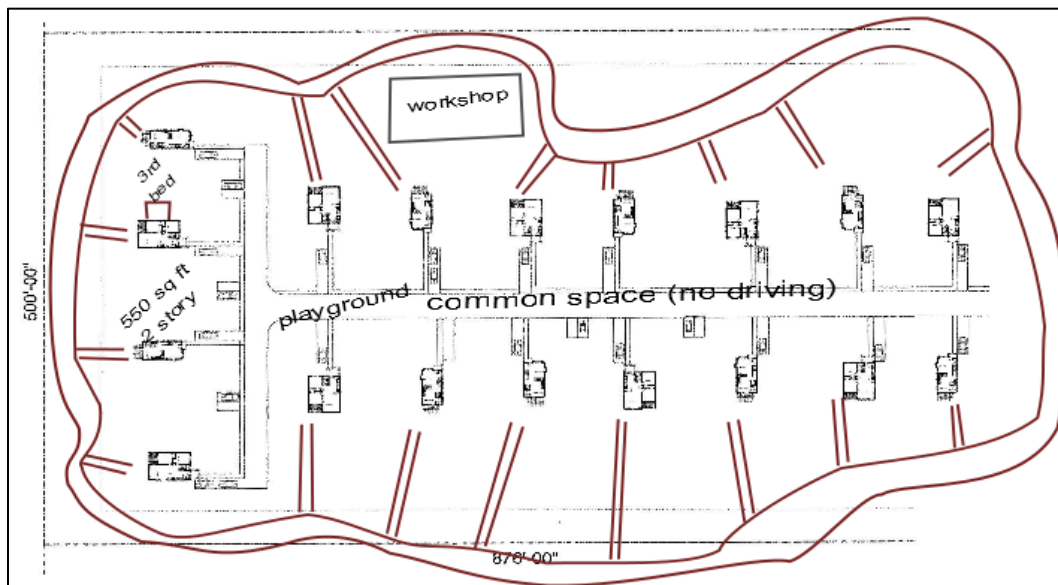
- Obtain charitable status as soon as possible, making it easier for GHS to raise money and issue tax receipts.
- Identify potential sites for a multi-unit housing project, ideally near the village core.
- Establish a set of principles to guide the process and decision-making.
- Plan further community engagement as we move forward.

Appendix A: Drawings from the forum

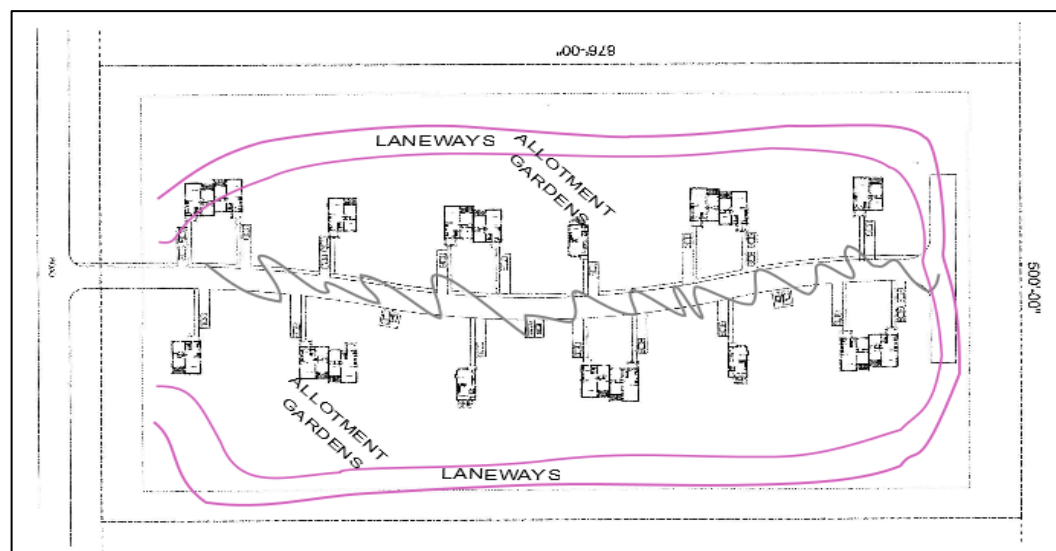
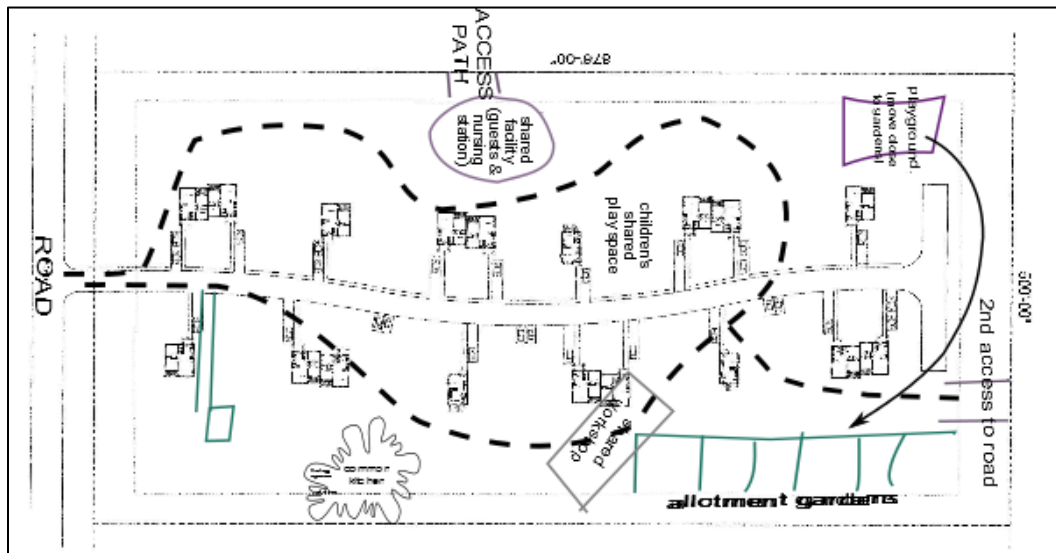
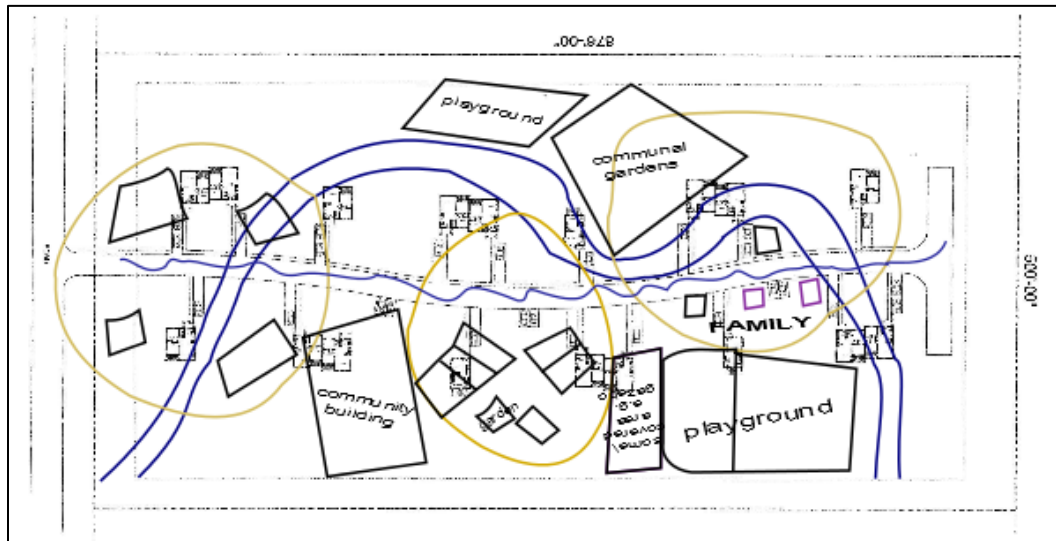
The following drawings replicate the illustrations created by participants at the affordable housing forum. They are based on the four models offered for discussion at the forum: single units, a mix of single units and duplexes, triplexes, and a 2-story apartment, as well as discussions at “wild card” tables.

It should be noted that all of the models were based on a 2 hectare/5 acre lot, dimensions 876' x 500', with a total of 18 dwelling units on the lot.

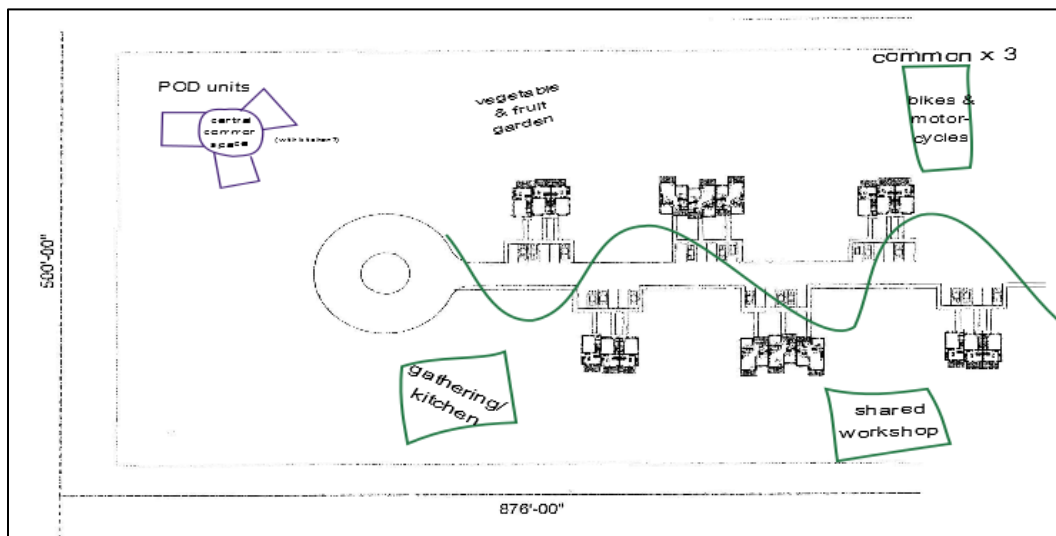
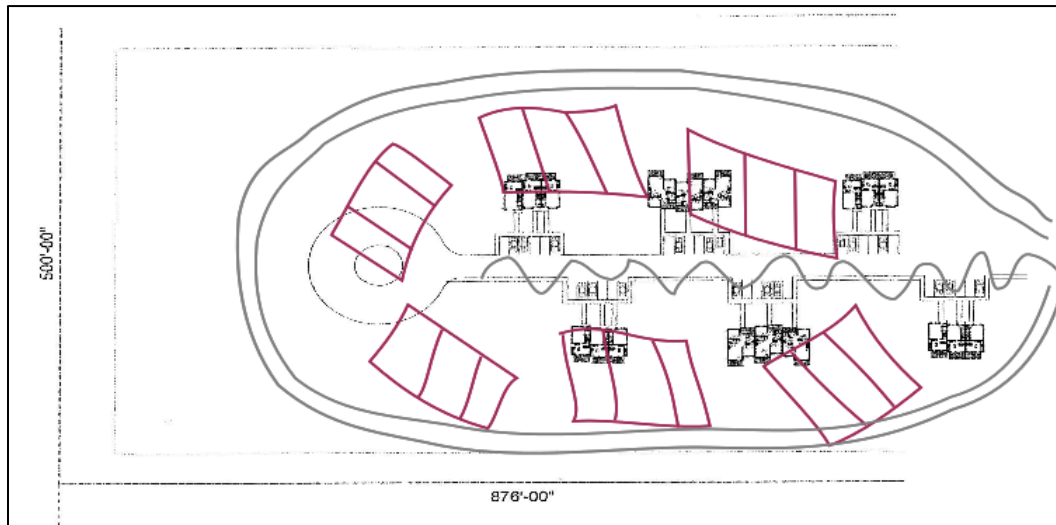
Single units



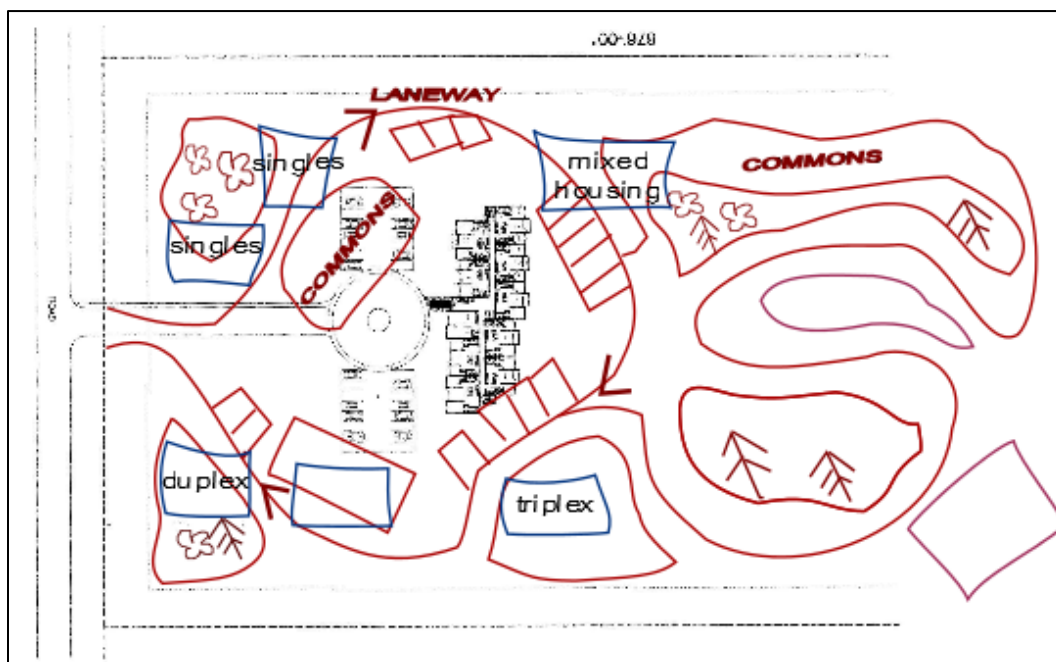
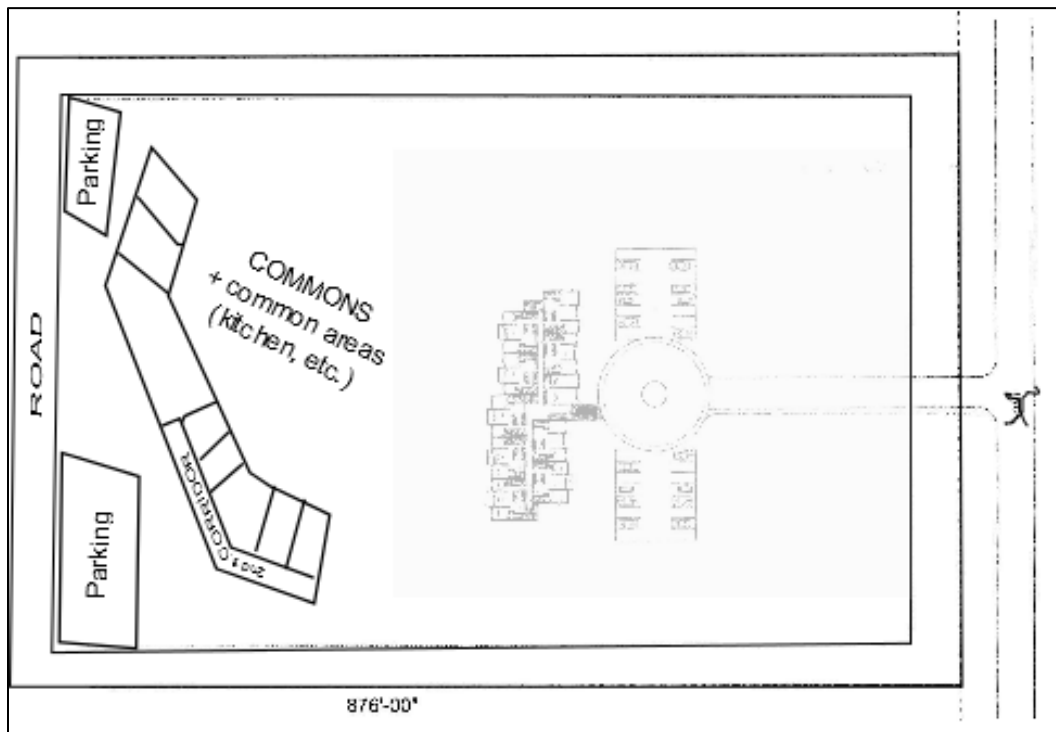
Mix of single units and duplexes



Triplexes



2-story apartment



Wild card table ideas

