

Making Shared Housing Work

Acknowledgments

RESEARCH BY

Sarah Watson, *Deputy Director*, Citizens Housing & Planning Council

Viktoria Barbaniuk, *Ginsberg Research Fellow*, Citizens Housing & Planning Council

Sheena Kang, *Policy Analyst*, Citizens Housing & Planning Council

WRITTEN BY

Sarah Watson, *Deputy Director*, Citizens Housing & Planning Council

EDITED BY

Jessica Katz, *Executive Director*, Citizens Housing & Planning Council

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY:

SHARED HOUSING OPERATORS

Clinton Housing Development Company

CoAbode

CO-LIV

Common

Common Space

Ditto

International House

Ollie

Outpost Club

Nooklyn

PadSplit

Panoramic Interests

The Collective

Smith & Others

Starcity

Tono Inc., Tokyo

Tribe Coliving

Webster Apartments

WeLive/WeWork

Weissman Equities

WSFSSH

ARCHITECT & DESIGN ADVISORS

Amie Gross Architects

Curtis + Ginsberg Architects

Dattner Architects

FXCollaborative Architects

Gans Studio

Glass & Glass Architects

Goshow Architects

Magnusson Architecture and Planning

Institute for Public Architecture

Peterson Rich Office

Resource Furniture

Urban Architectural Initiatives

THANK YOU to our funder,
the Charles H. Revson Foundation,
who has supported CHPC's work
on alternative housing typologies
for a decade through our Making
Room initiative.

About CHPC

Citizens Housing & Planning Council

(CHPC) is a non-profit research and education organization focused on housing and planning policy in New York City.

Since 1937, CHPC's mission has been to develop and advance practical public policies to support the housing stock of the city by better understanding New York's most pressing housing and neighborhood needs.

For more than 80 years, CHPC's research and education work has helped to shape public policy to improve the City's housing stock and quality of life in NYC's neighborhoods. A team of expert research staff are led by a diverse board of 90 practitioners in the fields of urban planning, architecture, zoning and land use law, housing finance and development, and community development.

Our work brings clarity to NYC's housing issues by presenting research in relatable and engaging mediums. Our agenda is practical and always begins with questions, not answers. It is the data, our analysis, and its relevance to the real world that drives our conclusions.

Making Shared Housing Work

Design and management strategies to maximize the quality of shared housing.

These best practices make shared housing work for both the resident and the owner/operator.

15	Resident Compatibility
19	Bathroom Sharing
23	Kitchen Sharing
27	Private Bedroom Quality
29	Sense Of Home
33	Privacy
37	Conflict Resolution
41	Safety & Security
43	Lease Arrangements
45	Cleanliness
46	EPILOGUE: Community & Convenience
48	Best Practice Checklist

In recent years, shared housing has flourished in cities across the US. The reemergence of this housing typology has been fueled by rising land prices and housing demand, growing numbers of single adults, new digital technologies, and a culture that facilitates the sharing economy.

Many cities are grappling with the best ways to regulate this typology to make sure that they do not become associated with the marginal housing conditions that have tarnished shared housing in the past.

CHPC wanted to support this regulatory exploration by interviewing an array of entrepreneurs, operators, and developers who have insight into best practices in designing and operating shared housing.

Private developers and new shared housing entrepreneurs were interviewed, alongside veteran operators of supportive housing and dormitories in New York City. An advisory group of architects and design professionals was also consulted.

*This simple guide, **Making Shared Housing Work**, pulls out the core themes that expert shared housing practitioners say should be considered by operators and regulators.*

Living in and operating shared housing can be very different than a typical residential building. However, if the design and the management of this typology is regulated well, shared housing can be a crucial tool for cities; offering attainable and suitable housing options for single adults.

Definition of Shared Housing

For the purpose of this study, we use the term “shared housing” with this definition:

“Shared Housing refers to housing units consisting of two or more independently occupied rooms that share a kitchen and/or bathroom. This housing type can encompass a wide range of configurations and usually includes additional building-wide common spaces.” - *ShareNYC*¹

Throughout this report, we use the term “shared housing” because related terminology can have other connotations. Other terminology can include:

Single Room Occupancy (SROs)

Technically, “single room occupancy” describes the form of occupancy where individuals reside independently of other occupants² rather than a housing unit typology. However, over the decades, the term SRO has come to represent shared housing with the specific design of rooms off a long corridor, with a shared bathroom nearby, and poor quality and management.

Rooming Units

Similarly, the term “rooming units” - rooms without private kitchens and/or baths³ - has historical implications as representing inferior design, quality, and management, and typically found in smaller buildings.

Co-housing

The term “co-housing” is mostly used to connote individuals and families gaining a symbiotic relationship by virtue of sharing communal space with others in shared housing. Shared spaces are designed and programmed to bring the residents together, and/or programming and services are provided to focus on the community aspect of shared housing.

The New Exploration of Shared Housing

Before the 1950s, New York City was replete with legal housing typologies specifically suited to single adults: basic private bedrooms to rent and shared amenities, offered in exchange for affordability.

However, a new housing policy direction was enacted from the late 1950s to try to improve the conditions of these living arrangements and keep families from fleeing to the suburbs. Minimum unit sizes, minimum room sizes, occupancy rules, and density controls were employed, to prioritize larger apartments laid out for nuclear families. The development of new private rooming-units was prohibited, except to serve special needs populations. Converted rooming units were mandated to return to their original use, and tax incentives were expanded to convert rooming units into regular residential buildings⁴. According to one study by the State Assembly, between 1976 and 1981 the City's tax program caused the elimination of nearly two-thirds of all remaining rooming-units⁵.

However, the disfavor of specific housing options for single adults did not reduce the size of the single adult population. Today, 32 percent of New York City households are a single person living alone⁶. Many other single adults are living in shared arrangements, despite the regulations. **Out of all New York adults (21+), 23 percent are single (unmarried), low income (\$58,481 or less), and live with roommates or other adult relatives⁷.**

The affordability of shared housing was recently tested in a 2018 NYU Furman Center study. The study found that a private bedroom (165 sq ft) with shared bathroom and kitchen can be newly constructed for 43 percent of the cost of a small studio apartment,⁸ and thus able to support lower rent.

In recent years, the market demand for and cost efficiency of shared housing has led to a boom of new entrepreneurs designing and developing this typology in cities like NYC, San Francisco, London, and Tokyo. High demand, rising land values and rents, and ever-increasing

numbers of single adults have allowed private companies to offer this typology as an aspirational, market-based housing option.

Digital technology has offered a new management experience that suits the density of shared housing buildings and the sharing of living spaces. Companies have marketed the typology as a way to offer community for singles; housing that can act as a buffer against potential social isolation.

In New York City, the emerging shared housing companies have had less freedom to design the typology because they are operating within the City's rigid regulations. New York City's shared housing is designed more like conventional apartments configured into "shared suites" for roommates, and avoids single room occupancy signifiers such as separate room leases and locks on doors. These units are often found in retrofitted, older buildings.

In other cities, companies have been able to design, develop, and operate their own purpose-built shared housing buildings to maximize the quality and utility of the typology.

The clear need for more housing options for single adults and the recent success of these private shared housing operators has illustrated the potential for this typology to be used as a tool in achieving NYC's affordable housing goals. This recognition has recently been reflected in the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development's *ShareNYC* initiative to gather experience, knowledge, and insight into the development, operation, benefits, and challenges of shared housing, and to explore how new shared housing development may be used to offer a broader range of housing options⁹.

Making Shared Housing Work

For this study, CHPC interviewed a wide range of shared housing operators and visited many shared housing projects.

Modern-day shared housing ranges from high-price, market models, to dormitories, supportive housing, and income-restricted, regulated housing. Some shared housing operators have the regulatory freedom to design, develop, and operate new, purpose-built shared housing buildings (San Francisco, London, and Tokyo). Many are operating shared housing in existing conventional residential buildings (mostly NYC).

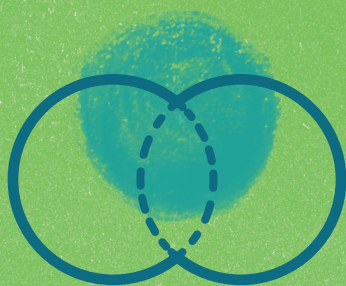
The purpose of this study was to interview experts from across this spectrum and to digest and collate their different voices into a simple guide. This guide pulls out the core themes that expert practitioners say should be considered - by regulators and operators - in order to give shared housing a chance to be a successful, attainable, and suitable housing option for single New Yorkers.

CHPC conducted interviews with a number of entrepreneurs, operators, and developers who have been involved in the recent boom in shared housing seen in many cities around the world. We also consulted with veteran providers of supportive housing and dormitories in NYC, to add their seasoned insight into design and management practices for shared housing. Finally, an advisory group of architects and design professionals was assembled to offer their expert judgment on design considerations.

The study concludes by turning each theme into a checklist that could potentially be used as a framework for a new regulatory approach to shared housing; to allow it to flourish, in the right way.

**Please note that CHPC did not explore the financial aspect of living in or operating shared housing in this study or interview shared housing residents themselves. These aspects of shared housing could be part of a further study.*

Making Shared Housing Work



Resident Compatibility

A prominent theme among shared housing operators was finding ways to establish compatibility among residents who will be sharing a kitchen, bathroom, and other living spaces. Shared housing necessitates a proximity to other residents that can be difficult to navigate, especially if the other residents have different daily routines, approaches to cleanliness, or tolerance for noise.

As with all of the major shared housing themes, there is a range of management practices employed to offset this potential challenge for the typology.

Matching Residents With Common Traits

One of the basic practices employed by shared housing operators is to put residents who share common traits together. The vast majority of operators employ questionnaires and interviews to find out about resident lifestyles, routines, and preferences in the pursuit of matching people to share communal spaces.

Many operators described the matching process as labor intensive and usually done by live-in property managers or those with direct, frequent contact with residents. Operators who have larger buildings, or more than one building, seemed to find the matching process easier to manage. One large private shared housing operator described having “quieter, more studious” buildings and the “party” buildings – and allocating new residents accordingly. One supportive housing operator summarized their basic compatibility themes as: smoking or non-smoking; pets or no pets; morning or night person; messy or clean on a scale; having friends/visitors often, or not. These were deemed sufficient for determining compatibility. One operator expressed interest in marketing shared housing units to big employers in the city, since people from the same company would likely have similar routines and lifestyles.

Single-gender shared housing is more common in institutional environments like dormitories or non-profit rooming units.

Age-specific shared housing is more commonly seen by the new private operators as a way to establish compatibility.

The vast majority of operators do not allow children to live in shared housing. This is often because of regulatory restrictions on children in shared environments, but it can also be an actively stated policy to avoid the complexity of that compatibility factor. Shared housing operators that do focus on parents with children have the most rigorous process of establishing compatibility seen across all of the shared housing practitioners. For example, one organization that facilitates shared housing for single parents conducts interviews with potential residents to ascertain their parenting philosophies, as well as the details of their daily routine. Those whose parenting approaches are aligned are matched together.

Self-Selection of Shared Residents

Many private shared housing operators allow the existing residents of a unit to select new or potential residents by assigning them to vet questionnaires or allowing them to be present in new resident interviews.

Many providers have also developed roommate matching platforms, or use third-party matching systems, so that potential residents can create their own shared housing groupings. In these scenarios, when potential residents apply for shared housing, they fill in questionnaires on the application platform or post their social media accounts. Residents then group themselves accordingly. One provider even allows residents to post their Spotify accounts so that their musical tastes can be considered when residents are grouping themselves together.



Bathroom Sharing

Another challenging feature of shared housing for residents is bathroom access, cleanliness, and privacy.

Finding solutions to assuage this challenge is key to making sure shared housing can be a successful long-term housing option.

All of the operators interviewed acknowledged this challenge and discussed using design and management practices to offset it. As with many of the design practices, some operators are unable to employ their ideal bathroom designs because they are not operating shared housing in a new, purpose-built development, and have to work with pre-existing bathrooms. In those cases, housing operators were asked about their ideal design solutions for bathrooms.

Location and Ratio of Bathrooms

As discussed in the Definition of Shared Housing (p. 5), there is a pervasive stigma about the design of the old SRO and rooming unit buildings in NYC. This was a comment heard repeatedly by shared housing providers, both private entrepreneurs

and supportive housing providers: “We do not want to replicate the old SRO design”.

One important element of this comment is its implications for an overall layout for shared housing that has bedrooms off a corridor with a bathroom at the end. This design can be problematic for both privacy and bathroom access for residents. As one supportive housing operator commented, “If you are sick at night, the last thing you want to do is run to the bathroom past people you don’t know, in your night clothes, and then the bathroom is in use”.

All of the operators said that the ratio of bathrooms to private bedrooms was crucial to counteract this potential challenge. The majority limit sharing of bathrooms to between one and three residents, but ultimately it depends on the design of the bathrooms in the building. Most new shared housing providers design a layout that has a bathroom within a “suite” of bedrooms.

Separating Bathroom Components

Many private operators, as well as institutional providers, make every effort to separate showers and toilets in shared housing. Many of the operators able to design their own purpose-built developments insist on offering private bathrooms as a crucial marketing component (“No one likes sharing a bathroom”). Operators focused more on affordability said that although it was too expensive to offer private bathrooms, they would like to at least provide a private toilet and/or sink with storage space in each private bedroom.

Single Gender Showers

Many providers either separate showers by gender, or would like to do this if the building layout would allow for it.

Design of Shower Stalls

Many of the operators said that if the design of a building would allow for it, they would love to be able to design large, individual shower stalls that include a sink, mirror, and dressing area. This would allow for bathrooms to be shared between a greater number of residents and avoid the need for gender segregation, while still providing for privacy.

Locked Space for Bathroom Belongings

Locked individual storage in bathrooms is strongly preferred by operators.

Durability and Quality of Facilities

All providers said that durable, high-quality appliances in the bathroom are crucial for ease of management and to ensure that residents are motivated to clean up after themselves. Shared housing needs to have the same level of infrastructure as a hotel, with high water pressure and reliable hot water. Many providers have had difficulty with this component when operating shared housing in conventional residential buildings.

Cleaning

A frequently cleaned bathroom is essential for efficient operation of a shared housing building and also makes residents far more likely to clean up after themselves (see Cleanliness, p. 45).

Key Fobs for Bathroom Access

Some of the new purpose-built shared housing developments use a key fob or card entry system for bathrooms to be able to track the specific residents causing cleanliness issues – and warn them about their behavior quickly.

Shower Reservation Systems

Many of the new private operators that prioritize the use of digital technology in their buildings have developed online reservation systems for shared spaces, including for reserving a shower stall at a certain time of day.

Provision of Basic Supplies

The vast majority of shared housing providers supply toilet paper, shampoo, and body wash/soap in the bathrooms.



Kitchen Sharing

A potential challenge for a resident in shared housing is making sure they have easy access to a kitchen when desired. Shared kitchens must be hygienic and also promote a sense of home.

Kitchen Design

There has been a lot of innovation around best practices for designing communal kitchens among private operators and in institutions like dormitories. Many operators incorporate locked cabinets and locked segments of fridges to allow for privacy and security within a shared kitchen. However, some did express the need to maintain a balance between everything being locked up and still generating a “sense of home” (see *A Sense of Home*, p. 27). A variety of table sizes including large communal tables is a common design feature. Many of the new private shared housing providers find that supplying industrial appliances like ovens, refrigerators, and even dishwashers that only take six minutes can be very helpful for managing shared kitchens. Many also said that offering a wide range of kitchen gadgets (blender, juicer, etc.) was very useful for residents living in a shared environment.

Kitchen Facilities in Bedrooms

The architects consulted for this study expressed the importance to provide some kitchen elements in individual rooms - for example, a small fridge, a microwave and a sink, or storage for pots. One prominent new shared housing provider provides a kitchenette (a sink, two-burner stove, microwave, and cupboards) in every private room, or for sharing between only two private rooms. This is then supplemented by larger communal kitchens in different parts of the building. One provider supplies a “pantry on wheels” that can be rolled easily between a private bedroom and the communal kitchen.

Provision of Basic Supplies

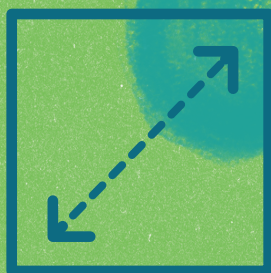
The vast majority of shared housing operators provide dish and dishwasher detergent, sponges, salt, pepper, and olive oil. One provider has a hotel-style pantry with items for purchase which are automatically added to the rent. This level of convenience did raise concern among the providers that residents would then view their housing as a hotel and not treat the shared space responsibly (see *A Word About Convenience*, p. 47).

Scale of Sharing

There is a wide range of shared kitchen sizes seen in shared housing projects. There was a general consensus among providers that the size of the kitchen, appliances, amount of storage spaces, etc. must be set according to the number of adults who will share the kitchen. Many providers offer a variety of different scales of kitchen within the building. Some believe that it is best practice to offer small kitchens limited to sharing between three unrelated adults; and to supplement these with larger communal kitchens for shared use between entire floors and hosting of parties and community events.

Cleaning

(see Cleanliness, p. 45)



Private Bedroom Quality

Maximizing the quality of the private bedrooms in shared housing was considered an important issue by all the shared housing operators interviewed.

Bedroom Design Quality

Natural light, ventilation, high ceilings, and built-in storage were significant elements of shared housing operators' feedback on how to maximize the quality of private bedrooms in shared housing.

Many operators also believe that it is important to bring in some elements of a living room, bathroom, or kitchen into a private bedroom. This practice provides residents in shared housing some options to undertake the basics of their daily lives in private if they choose to (such as a small refrigerator, sink, microwave, couch, or desk).

Custom & Multi-functional Furniture

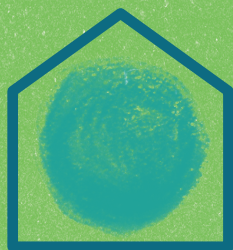
The vast majority of operators provide furniture in the private bedrooms to make sure it is tailored to the specific dimensions of the rooms. It is becoming more common to provide multi-functional furniture, as a way of bringing elements of a living room or study into a small bedroom. Many providers include wall-beds with built-

in couches; one provider stored beds on the ceiling that would drop down for use, to use as much of the room's cubic footage as possible. See *A Sense of Home* (p. 27) for discussion about operators' approaches to residents bringing their own furniture and belongings into the private bedrooms.

Some shared housing operators (especially the larger ones) allow residents to choose between a furnished and non-furnished bedroom.

Supplementing Private Space with a Range of Shared Living Spaces

Architects and shared housing operators all agreed that well-designed and well-programmed communal spaces are crucial to offset the potential limitations of private bedrooms. All agreed that a range of different sizes and formats of communal spaces is needed. One operator said that 10-20 percent of their buildings is devoted to communal spaces. Other operators did not give a specific ratio, but said it depended on the number and size of private bedrooms and the overall layout of the bedrooms in relation to the shared spaces.



A Sense of Home

One potential challenge for a resident in shared housing is not feeling a “sense of home”. Many of the shared housing providers consider this challenge, and there is a wide range of different practices in place to respond to it.

Layout of bedrooms and communal space

As discussed in the Definition of Shared Housing section (p. 5) and Bathroom Access (p. 17), there is concern among new shared housing operators to not replicate the designs of the old SRO or rooming unit buildings in NYC.

One component of this concern is about the importance of creating a “sense of home” rather than developing a sterile, institutional environment. Most shared housing providers preferred an overall layout that connected between two and six bedrooms to shared bathrooms and a kitchen in a suite arrangement, with supplementary, larger communal space elsewhere in the building.

The architects consulted for this study offered many suggestions for how to generate a sense of home through design. They believed that having diverse shapes of private bedroom units with nooks and crannies in them (for example, recesses) allows tenants to use the space differently and thus creates a feeling of home.

Design elements

The architect group put forward that design elements, such as adding an extra 8-12 inches of ceiling height and using high-quality natural materials, also adds warmth to a private space. Other important elements include thresholds that create a sense of smooth transition from public to semi-public space to private rooms, as well as natural light in public spaces and corridors.

Guest Policies

Making sure that residents can still welcome guests into their rooms, or into the building, is considered a prominent component of feeling at “home” by the private, market-based operators of shared housing. Many providers place some time limit on overnight guests, but it is not well

enforced, especially for guests sharing a bedroom with the resident. If the staff receive complaints from other residents about someone negatively encroaching on the communal space, they talk to the resident and try to find a path forward.

Some providers offer guest rooms in their buildings, while others expressed interest in providing guest rooms if they could make it work with specific projects.

In general, providers of dormitory-style shared housing have stricter guest policies in place than their private market-based counterparts. These are predominantly concerned with safety and security. For example, one non-profit rooming unit building in NYC does not allow any male guests above the first floor. Dormitories are more likely to have 24-hour staff at the door and specific public safety staff in their management teams to track and oversee guests.

Social Programming

Many of the new private shared housing providers felt that programming to help residents to meet and socialize with one another built a sense of home - such as resident happy hours, trips, or events in the communal spaces.

Decorating and Furnishing by Residents

Shared housing providers struggle to find a balance between allowing residents to personalize bedrooms with their own furniture and decorating, practical concerns around the operations of the building, and maximizing the quality of private spaces. The most common concerns about residents bringing in their own furniture were egress, bedbugs, and compromising the quality of the small private space.

There is a large range of policies employed by providers to manage this tension. Some providers allow residents to put posters on their walls, but not to paint. Some allow painting of private rooms if residents return the walls to their original color upon departure, because they believe that personalization of bedrooms is important for generating a sense of home.

Most of the newer private providers offer custom furnishings (see Private Bedroom Quality, p. 25), with many focusing on quality, well-designed furniture to generate a sense of home. One provider said they focus on finding unique, good-quality, refurbished furniture that new residents can pick out to suit their tastes. Some offer furnishing

packages to residents or sell items like removable wallpapers. These accessories come with additional fees, but allow for more personalized bedroom spaces.

Many providers do not allow any personalization of communal spaces, but said that if all residents agreed on the décor or items of furniture, they would not enforce the rules.

Sense of Ownership and Responsibility

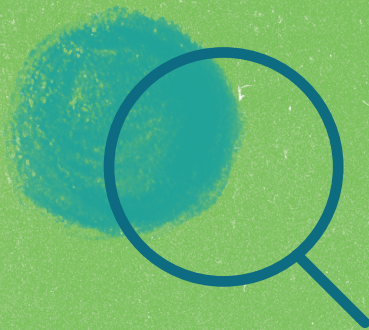
The operators all stressed the importance of bestowing a sense of ownership over shared housing to make residents feel at home.

That includes responsibility over their private bedrooms, with clear, individual leases setting out rights and responsibilities, and proactive staffing to enforce rules.

One architect/developer of shared housing takes this concept further. Kitchens and living rooms are designed so they are closely connected to the bedroom of one of the residents. That resident is given an elevated position in the shared housing arrangement. They take on a house leader role, which bestows a greater sense of home, care, and responsibility than if they were in a generic shared space.

Getting Feedback from Residents

Some of the new private providers put emphasis on getting feedback from residents about life in their buildings in order to promote a sense of home. One provider makes it compulsory for all new staff to spend some time staying in one of their shared housing units to better understand the experience. They also have many formalized feedback loops, such as surveys and regular meetings for residents to comment on the design and programming of the shared spaces. One provider created additional storage space for the tenants' wine collection. Another provider actively seeks feedback from residents about what small kitchen appliances should be included in a "library of appliances" that can be borrowed for certain periods of time, like juicers or food mixers.



Privacy

Shared housing is often associated with a lack of privacy. For this typology to serve as a long-term housing option, best practices that can reinforce a sense of privacy for residents are crucial.

Multi-Functional Design

Many providers incorporate some elements of a living room/study, kitchen, or bathroom into the private bedrooms, so that residents have the option to undertake the basics of their daily lives in private if they choose. This approach includes the use of multi-functional furniture to transform a space from bedroom to living room or study; or provision of a sink, fridge, microwave, and/or small toilet/washroom.

Locked Bedroom Doors

Every private shared housing provider interviewed wanted to put individual locks on bedroom doors, but most were not allowed to due to regulatory restrictions. Many expressed they would prefer to be able to put locks on doors in exchange for more rigorous fire prevention systems, such as a sprinkler in every room (see Safety and Security, p. 39). To overcome

the regulatory restrictions, many providers employ digital technology that sends an alert to your phone when your bedroom door is opened.

Management Access to Private Rooms

Some operators offer cleaning of private spaces, but are careful to ensure that no staff has access to private rooms without direct communication with the resident.

Circulation of Bedrooms to Communal Space

The overall layout of private rooms relative to communal spaces was considered an important element of enhancing privacy for shared housing residents (see also *A Sense of Home*, p. 27).

The architect advisory group believed that, whenever possible, having private rooms with two exits - one with direct lobby access and one to communal spaces - is important for allowing residents to stay private if they choose to. Many providers agreed that is critical for the sake of privacy to consider this juxtaposition of private

and communal spaces. However, they also acknowledged that shared spaces are activated when people pass through them, so a balance must be maintained.

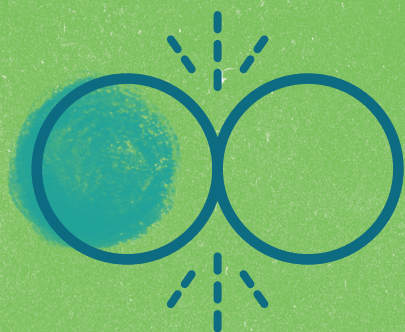
There was general consensus that a range of different sizes and formats of communal spaces helps to support privacy. Some new shared housing developments incorporate, in addition to the larger communal spaces, a range of small co-working spaces and semi-private living areas/TV rooms designed to fit two or three people. One operator/developer offers four layers of privacy: 1) a private room for sleeping, showering, changing, and personal time; 2) smaller shared spaces for working/studying, eating, and watching TV; 3) shared spaces for larger numbers of people to share – bike storage, laundry, lounges, kitchen; and 4) fully public spaces also open to the wider community, like an art gallery and a coffee shop. One building offers a diverse array of communal spaces with specific functions - library, piano room, movie room, dining hall, garden, rooftop space.

Sound Attenuation

The importance of sound attenuation and separation between communal uses were often discussed. One operator uses materials such as solid cork/steel doors to ensure sound attenuation.

Ratio of Sharing Communal Spaces

There was a mix of opinion about how the scale of shared spaces impacts privacy. One company argued that having larger numbers of people sharing communal spaces like kitchens actually promotes privacy, because residents can be more anonymous in the building if they choose.



Conflict Resolution

Sharing spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms can cause conflict among shared housing residents to arise more frequently than in a typical residential building. The most frequent conflicts cited by operators were around cleanliness and noise.

The majority of operators recognized the need to have staff and processes in place to mitigate conflicts - both proactively and reactively - to maintain resident satisfaction and for ease of overall building management.

New Resident Interviews and Orientation Meetings

Many providers use interviews, orientation meetings, and resident manuals to clearly set out the responsibilities of living in shared housing. Providers also commonly have dedicated staff for helping new residents to move in and feel welcome, and to establish resident rights and responsibilities up front. This is a prominent component of management practices in Tokyo's shared housing, where individuals tend to have less experience living with roommates.

Good Design of Kitchens, Bathroom, Living Spaces

All of the design best practices discussed so far were also cited as ways to pre-empt potential conflict. For example, a well-designed kitchen with large, durable appliances and locked spaces can help to avoid conflicts around the use of a shared kitchen.

Conflict Management Services

There is a range of different practices employed and services provided by shared housing providers for active conflict management. Many have specific staff who help to mediate between residents to resolve a conflict. This can range from email mediation to the intervention of live-in support staff. Some providers do not offer a formal process or dedicated staff, especially if they also utilize the practice of allowing residents to find/ select other residents to share with, rather than organizing the matching process centrally.

House Rules

Establishment and enforcement of the house rules was seen as an important management practice to be able to actively prevent and resolve conflicts. All providers make residents sign a lease or residency agreement designed specifically for shared housing arrangements, which outlines clear rights and responsibilities. Many of the private operators have a conflict and disciplinary process that escalates if a problem cannot be resolved, in which the resident is fined, moved to another building, or evicted (or his or her lease is not renewed). This process is made more complicated if all the shared residents are on one master lease (see Lease Arrangements, p. 43).

Resident “Reviews”

One housing provider uses a digital platform for their building to offer a rating system for residents, similar to Airbnb. Residents with higher ratings could get more affordable rent. One provider said that the rating system helped them to write landlord recommendation letters for residents who were moving out and into their own apartments.



Safety & Security

Security and safety for residents is a more pressing concern in shared housing than in a regular residential building. In general, providers of supportive housing, rooming-units, and dormitories were more concerned with safety and security than private operators, who mostly expressed that they had not experienced any problems with safety and security.

Security Staff

Broadly, providers of institutional shared housing types like dormitories are more likely to have 24-hour staff at the door and specific public safety staff on their management teams to oversee security in the buildings. Some private, design and development operators do provide a 24/7 front desk which, helps to create a safe environment.

Single Gender Sharing

Some operators of older rooming-unit buildings and dormitories believed that single-gender shared spaces are crucial to providing safety and security. Some private operators offer the option for new residents to share with the same gender where it is possible, but for the most part the issue is managed more informally, rather than reserving certain rooms for certain genders.

Key Fobs or Card Access for Communal Spaces

Many providers use key fobs or card access for communal spaces, specific residential floors, or elevator access. However, those who did so did note a dissonance between this practice and supporting a sense of home (see A Sense of Home, p. 27).

Fire Safety

Shared housing providers in general did not feel that their typology caused more fire safety vulnerability than a regular residential building. One purported that there is less risk because they furnish the rooms (and make sure that nothing is blocking egress paths), and because there are no children in their buildings. The vast majority of shared housing providers with new developments supplied egress, sprinklers, smoke detectors, and fire doors for each private bedroom.

Guests

(See A Sense of Home, p. 27)

Locks on Doors

(See Privacy, p. 31)



Lease Arrangements

All shared housing operators interviewed said that they would choose to operate shared housing with individual leases by the room. Many are currently unable to do this due to regulatory restrictions on new single room occupancy buildings.

For the resident, an individual lease makes it easier to move in and out of shared housing without being reliant on the other residents they are sharing with.

For the operator, using individual leases makes it easier to manage resident rights and responsibilities and to enforce against problem residents. It also relieves them of having to manage the difficult process of individual turnover, which is necessary when all the roommates are on the same master lease.



Cleanliness

The vast majority of operators provide regular cleaning services to offset the potential challenges of high-density sharing in spaces like kitchens and bathrooms.

Frequency of Cleaning

Most shared housing operators provide services for the intensive cleaning of shared space. The most frequent practice is twice a week cleaning, although some offer kitchen and bathroom cleaning every day. Some have full-time cleaning staff in-house, while others offer housekeeping services for the private bedrooms for an extra fee.

Many operators said they have to make sure to strike the right balance between providing management services like cleaning and making sure that residents still feel responsibility for keeping communal spaces clean. One operator said that the more “hotel-like” services they provide, the less residents clean up after themselves (see *A Sense of Home*, p. 27 & *A Word About Convenience*, p. 47).

EPILOGUE

A Word About COMMUNITY

This study focuses on the challenges of living in shared housing and how to overcome them. However, shared housing operators cited some elements of shared housing as being **more** beneficial for residents than living in a regular residential building. The most prominent of these was that living in shared housing can offer a sense of **community**.

Some academic research backs up this assertion. Multiple studies find support networks to be “stronger and more developed in cohousing communities,”¹⁰ which can engender psychological benefits and can even bear socioeconomic benefits such as higher educational attainment, better health, and lower levels of crime¹¹. It is difficult to establish whether this is due to the design typology itself, the degree of shared responsibilities, or the social programming or supportive services provided. Certainly, the design typology does necessitate increased social interaction in comparison to a regular residential building. However, forced social interaction, if there is not compatibility between residents, can be even more socially isolating than in a regular building.

Shared housing operators interviewed — from London to Tokyo to New York — cited “community-building” as a distinct advantage of the housing typology and use the concept prominently in their marketing.

EPILOGUE

A Word About CONVENIENCE

Another element of shared housing frequently cited by providers as potentially more beneficial for a resident than a regular residential building is the element of **convenience**. Broadly speaking, the typology allows a resident to move in quickly, without belongings. Basic bathroom and kitchen products are provided. Built-in furnishings are provided. Cleaning is provided.

However, some providers expressed concern about offering too many convenience services in their buildings because they had experience with residents treating the shared spaces more like a hotel than a home. This can lead to a higher turnover of residents, and less resident-led responsibility for conflict resolution and cleanliness. As discussed in a “A Sense of Home” (p. 27), the shared housing operators all talked about the importance of bestowing a sense of responsibility/ownership over shared housing to make residents feel at “home,” and some felt that making life too convenient countered this goal. One provider with a 24-hour front desk said that residents immediately complained to the desk when any conflict or complaint arose, without first trying to remedy it themselves. One provider said that daily cleaning led to residents leaving dishes in sinks and on counters. Many of these convenience services are also expensive and can push up rent levels.

Shared Housing: Best Practices Checklist

When planning a shared housing project, or reevaluating regulations for shared housing, it is critical to consider the key themes on the checklist on the facing page.

For developers seeking to build shared housing, these design and operational themes will ensure resident satisfaction and operational efficiency. For government and policy-makers, a regulatory framework that considers these core themes can help to create shared housing that can be a high-quality housing option for single adults.

To compile these best practices themes, CHPC drew from the experience of shared housing operators worldwide who were interviewed for our *Making Shared Housing Work* study.

Design

- ❑ Location and Ratio of Bathrooms
- ❑ Separating Bathroom Components
- ❑ Design of Shower Stalls
- ❑ Locked Space in Bathrooms
- ❑ Durability and Quality of Bathroom Facilities
- ❑ Kitchens Designed for Sharing
- ❑ Some Kitchen Facilities in Bedrooms
- ❑ Ratio of Communal Space to Bedrooms
- ❑ Layout of Bedrooms and Communal Spaces
- ❑ Sound Attenuation
- ❑ Multi-Functional Bedrooms
- ❑ Bedroom Design Quality

Operations

- ❑ Matching Residents with Common Traits
- ❑ Social Programming
- ❑ Decorating/Furnishing Policies
- ❑ Locks on Bedroom Doors
- ❑ Management Access to Bedrooms
- ❑ Single Gender Showers
- ❑ Shower Reservation Systems
- ❑ Cleaning Services
- ❑ Provision of Basic Bathroom and Kitchen Supplies
- ❑ New Resident Interviews and Orientation
- ❑ Conflict Management Services
- ❑ Clear House Rules
- ❑ Security Staff
- ❑ Key Fobs/Cards
- ❑ Lease Arrangements
- ❑ Guest Policies

Endnotes

- 1 ShareNYC press release, November 1 2018
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/press-releases/2018/11/city-kicks-off-shared-housing-pilot-program.page>
- 2 "The occupancy by one or two persons of a single room, or of two or more rooms which are joined together, separated from all other rooms within an apartment in a multiple dwelling, so that the occupant or occupants thereof reside separately and independently of the other occupant or occupants of the same apartment."
New York Multiple Dwelling Law § 4(16)
- 3 "one or more living rooms arranged to be occupied as a unit separate from all other living rooms, and which does not have both lawful sanitary facilities and lawful cooking facilities for the exclusive use of the family residing in such unit." Housing Maintenance Code § 27-2004(a)(15)
- 4 Mark Malone, (1982) Homelessness in a Modern Urban Setting, 10 Fordham Urb. L.J. 749 cited by Sullivan, B. J., & Burke, J. (2013) Single-Room Occupancy Housing in New York City: The Origins and Dimensions of a Crisis. CUNY Law Review, 17(01), 113
- 5 Blackburn, Anthony J. (1996) Single Room Living in New York City, Department of Housing Preservation & Development, p 7-11

- 6 2017 American Community Survey
- 7 2017 American Community Survey using the CHPC Making Room Household Methodology
- 8 Stern, Eric & Yager, Jessica (2018) 21st Century SROs: Can Small Units Help Meet the Need for Affordable Housing in New York City? NYU Furman Center Working Paper Available at: http://furmancenter.org/files/NYUFurmanCenter_SmallUnitsInNYC_WorkingPaper_Update_20FEB2018.pdf
- 9 ShareNYC press release, November 1 2018 <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/press-releases/2018/11/city-kicks-off-shared-housing-pilot-program.page>
- 10 Dovey, K. & Marcus, C. (1991). Cohousing — an option for the 1990s. *Progressive Architecture*, 6. pp. 112–113. cited by Williams, J. (2005). Sun, surf and sustainability — comparison of the cohousing experience in California and the UK, *International Planning Studies Journal*, 10(2)
- 11 Williams, J. (2005). Sun, surf and sustainability — comparison of the cohousing experience in California and the UK, *International Planning Studies Journal*, 10(2).

