

Intergenerational Ingenuity

AGE SEGREGATION is a silent and growing problem in the United States of the 21st century. At the same time that age discrimination has been proscribed in the workplace, age segregation is formally permitted in the form of age 55-plus communities.

The large baby boom generation, born between the end of World War II and 1964, is aging into the portion of the housing market that is most segregated by age. Daycare, elder care, seniors' housing, congregate care, assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing, and continuing care are not only terms codified into land use planning, legislation, finance, and regulation; they also represent new institutions that have been developed, segregated, and isolated from other types of housing. Each day for the next 16 years, more than 10,000 American baby boomers will turn 65. Stricken by the Great Recession, many of them cannot afford to pay market rents for independent housing or institutional care, and some prefer to live in age-diverse communities.

In Portland, Oregon, a nonprofit organization has built an urban solution that addresses the problem of age segregation while brightening the prospects of families who adopt children out of the foster care system. These families face many of the same obstacles in finding appropriate housing as do members of the baby boom generation.

The Needs of Adoptive Families

Today, more than 400,000 children are in foster care in the United States; in Oregon alone there are over 9,000, with more than one-quarter awaiting adoption. Adoptions of children in foster care have increased to almost 60,000 per year in the United States since passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

But families with multiple adopted children also face age-segregated housing markets. Few homes in urban areas contain four bedrooms; often such units are only found on large lots located in neighborhoods surrounded by similarly large homes and devoid of older residents, who do not need such a large residence. Moreover, such homes are frequently unaffordable to large adoptive families.

Now, Portland nonprofit Bridge Meadows has built one urban solution that addresses the needs of both groups.

On the two-acre (0.8 ha) site of the former John Ball Elementary School in the Portsmouth neighborhood of north Portland, Bridge

Right: Seniors' units in triplexes are located along busy Willis Avenue, while adoptive family units are placed on the quieter side streets, along with other triplexes for seniors. Below: Duplexes for adoptive families and triplexes for seniors are integrated around a courtyard for common intergenerational activities.

Meadows has built a housing complex bearing its name that includes nine four-bedroom houses for families who adopt at least three foster children. The houses are integrated with 27 one- and two-bedroom apartment units for people age 55 or older who meet the income requirements for housing financed

Seniors in affordable apartments act as surrogate grandparents for children in rent-assisted units designed for families with multiple adopted children.



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with low-income housing tax credits (LIHTCs). And, through a novel requirement, seniors at Bridge Meadows act as surrogate grandparents and mentors to the children and families who live there.

Bridge Meadows was inspired by a program called Hope Meadows, located in rural Rantoul, Illinois, 130 miles (209 km) south of Chicago, which was founded in 1994 as Generations of Hope by Brenda Eheart, a sociology professor at the nearby University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. It occupies 84 units of former military housing on 20 acres (8 ha) of the former Chanute Air Force Base, which was abandoned in 1993 through the federal Base Realignment and Closure process.

Bridge Meadows also was inspired by the Treehouse Foundation in Easthampton, Massachusetts. Treehouse married the skills of property developer/manager Beacon Communities and a licensed social service agency, Berkshire Children and Families. The Treehouse Circle project, which opened in 2006, provides 48 affordable cottages for people 55 and older, plus 12 rental homes with three to five bedrooms for families that provide permanency for children through adoption, foster care, guardianship, or kinship care. Unlike Bridge Meadows and Hope Meadows, Beacon Communities is developing market-rate housing—an additional 33 two-, three-, and four-bedroom homes ranging from 1,500 to 2,365 square feet (139–220 sq m) on nine sites on a five-acre (2 ha) site.

In Portland, the effort to form a public/private partnership, raise funds, and assemble support from the business community and civic leaders began in 2004. By 2007, the necessary 501(c)(3) corporation had been established, an executive director had been hired, and Bridge Meadows had leveraged enough private donations to begin forming a team consisting of development/property management

The intergenerational center and offices of Bridge Meadows.

company Guardian Real Estate Services (GRES), local architecture team Carleton Hart Architecture, and local contractor Walsh Construction.

Bridge Meadows is in an urban setting and advances a kinship model of foster care, with relatives raising other relatives to the greatest extent feasible. Bridge Meadows partners with local social service agencies to offer a full array of health and well-being services for all generations.

At Bridge Meadows, the four-bedroom houses are available only to those people who adopt at least three children from the foster care system within five years, a requirement intended to help keep siblings together. Bridge Meadows requires seniors living in the community to volunteer at least seven hours per week doing such things as teaching arts and crafts, giving music lessons, leading story hours, and taking the kids to the park. Both the three-children-in-five-years adoption requirement and the seven-hour-per-week volunteer time condition are written into lease addendums to the two classes of housing. Because all applicants for each class of tenancy are subject to the same restrictions, the requirements do not violate the nondiscriminatory fair housing statutes, according to Bridge Meadows Executive Director Derenda Schubert.

Adoptive parents referred to Bridge Meadows by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) usually have already started the process of adoption or legal guardianship. For them, income is not restricted. However, their rent is below market rate, based on a percentage (currently 26.5 percent) of their gross income. Whereas market rent for comparable housing is about \$1,400 per month,



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according to Schubert, the rent for a family home at Bridge Meadows averages \$850 per month.

This rent assistance helps offset the current ODHS policy that unintentionally creates an economic disincentive to adopt foster children. Foster parents now receive a base allowance ranging from \$575 to \$741 per child per month, based on the child's age, as reimbursement for basic expenses related to providing food, shelter, and clothing. Additional assistance is provided if there are special needs. But if a foster parent adopts the

child, the parent loses most of the reimbursement. Limited adoption assistance is available for limited periods, but at a significantly reduced rate. This policy is based on the notion that the state should not pay parents, adoptive or otherwise, to raise their children.

The four-bedroom adoptive family houses at Bridge Meadows have more than 1,700 square feet (160 sq m) of space and a one-car attached garage. Other parking is accommodated in 13 off-street spaces and about 60 on-street spaces on the site's perimeter. The

Right: Exposed glulam beams, exposed spiral ducts, and polished concrete floors lend a Northwest design sensibility to the intergenerational center, the most important place in which the whole community can gather, which it does frequently. The wood on the lower portion of the walls is recycled from wooden pallets retrieved from international shipping.

Bottom right: Common spaces to support the Bridge Meadows program as well as the concept of group living are distributed throughout the intergenerational center and the triplexes. The traditional residential scale of the site plan in multiple smaller duplexes and triplexes was done to give foster children, who have experienced living in multiple places, a greater sense of permanency. Carleton Hart designed the courtyard with a variety of landscaped and paved areas to accommodate different activities as well as stormwater treatment facilities.

Below: A variegated facade for duplexes and triplexes gives a front door on the street to each unit to integrate with the residential streetscape of the area.



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lower-than-usual parking demand from affordable and seniors' units appears to be accommodated with the 0.6-per-unit parking ratio. When the off-street parking supply is added, there are 2.3 spaces per unit. This reliance on street parking in lieu of on-site parking is consistent with the established transportation/parking pattern of the inner-city area and was ultimately supported by the neighborhood.

The 23 one-bedroom, one-bathroom units for senior residents are either 618 or 624 square feet (57 or 58 sq m) and rent for \$495 to \$514

per month, with eligibility restricted to residents at or below 50 percent of the median family income for Multnomah County. Eight of the units are handicapped accessible, with a wheel-in shower, extensive grab bars, and a wheelchair-accessible kitchen. An internal ramp in public spaces offers an alternative route to stairs for residents using wheelchairs. An elevator in the two-story intergenerational community building provides access to eight seniors' units above, as well as to the community's library and computer room. The four two-bedroom,

one-bathroom units are about 820 square feet (76 sq m) and rent for \$591 to \$610 per month.

All the units—built at a density of 18.2 units per acre (45 units per ha)—border a large courtyard designed for intergenerational interaction. The 36-unit community consists of three triplex one- and two-story group mentor/seniors' houses, four two-story duplex family houses, and one two-story single-family house. The traditional residential scale of the site was used to give foster children—who have experienced living in multiple places,

many of them institutional—a greater sense of permanency, providing smaller houses that have both a front porch and a backyard feeling, says Brian Carleton of Carleton Hart Architecture.

Carleton designed the courtyard with a variety of landscaped and paved areas to accommodate different activities, as well as stormwater treatment facilities. A prime feature of the landscape is a boardwalk bridging a stormwater garden and swale. Covered and open sitting areas are built into the courtyard. Exposed wooden glulam beams

and wooden window trim, mixed with finished exposed concrete, lend a Northwest design sensibility to the project.

Structuring the Financing

The low rents at Bridge Meadows are a function of the way the project was financed. The Bridge Meadows leadership and board of directors of the 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization retained GRES to develop and manage the project, which cost \$11.4 million, or \$316,255 per unit, including all the public spaces and offices of Bridge Meadows, says Ross Cornelius, GRES vice president for development.

GRES, the largest manager of tax-credit housing in Portland, rec-

ognized that the operating income from the 36 units at below-market rents would not cover debt service on a mortgage, so it put together a package that would cover costs through all-equity deal structures for both the family and seniors' housing components. It arranged with the Portland office of the National Equity Fund (NEF), an affiliate of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), to purchase the equity of the seniors' portion of the project for \$5.3 million. NEF is the largest national syndicator of equity investments in LIHTC projects. Investors in such equity are allocated the tax credits attributable to the project.

Other funding was a mix of public and private funds. The

family and seniors' elements were structured independently, both with separate Portland Development Commission and Portland Housing Bureau resources. "The \$931,581 family units loan has been converted to an equity gap vehicle, which is essentially a grant," says Cornelius. "The \$710,725 senior units loan is a cash flow-dependent loan, which is serviced but not treated as hard debt. The \$1,020,612 development fee was split between GRES and the Bridge Meadows nonprofit," notes Cornelius. "It was a true codevelopment effort, and both depended on each other to complete the project successfully."

Additional funding of \$100,000 came from the State Housing Trust Fund, \$30,000 from the Low Income Weatherization Program, and \$671,304 from the city of Portland land lease. The 86,000 square feet (8,000 sq m) of land and the school were purchased by the city of Portland from the Portland Public Schools and have been leased to Portland Bridge Meadows for 99 years at \$1 per year. The city also waived \$216,000 of \$338,626 of systems development charges. Business energy tax credits and Energy Trust of Oregon grants totaling \$66,220 were provided to the project, which allowed solar hot-water panels to be installed on many unit rooftops.

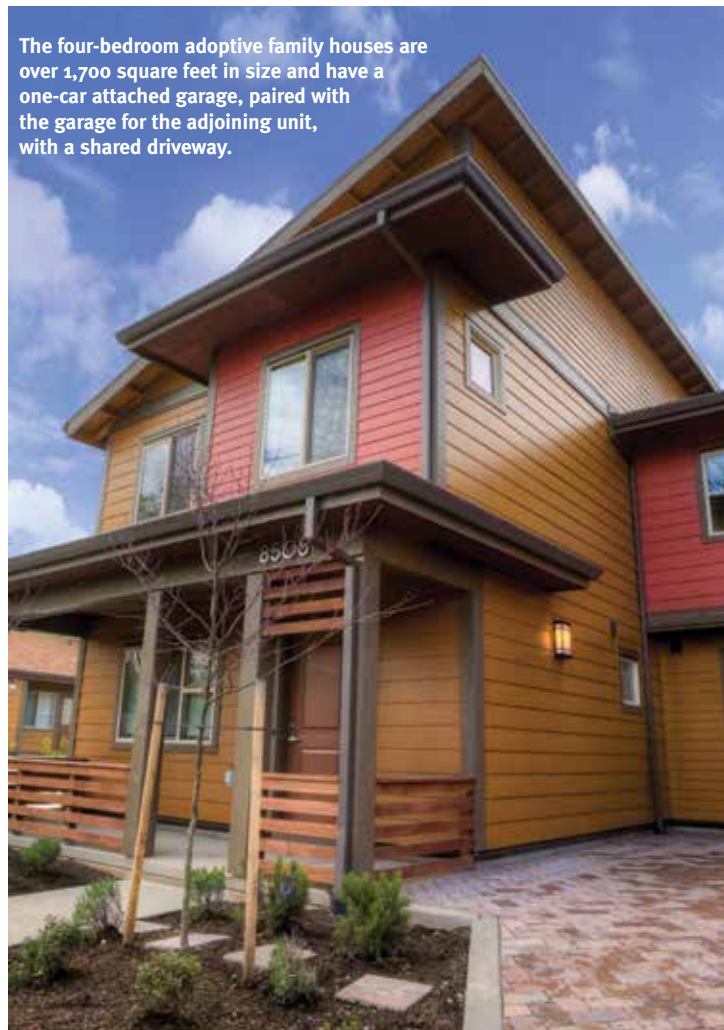
Bridge Meadows raised equity for the adoptive family homes from more than two dozen foundations in the Portland metro area and from more than two dozen banks, corporations, law firms, and real estate developers and brokers. One successful fundraising effort was to organize an adopt-a-house strategy to help raise private equity to build the family houses. The Windermere Foundation, funded by the Windermere Real Estate brokerage firm, donated \$250,000 for one of the houses, which is named after the foundation.

According to Schubert, the project covers all of its operating expenses, including a concessionary 1 percent property management fee, and has positive cash flow. Based on this success, the Bridge Meadows leadership and board of directors are planning to replicate the community in the Portland area.

Inspired by Bridge Meadows, the Native American Youth and Family Services organization is creating a multigenerational community with a specific cultural focus at the former Foster Elementary School in the Lents District of outer southeast Portland. GRES has negotiated a ground lease with Portland Public Schools through the city of Portland for a 2.16-acre (0.9 ha) portion of the Foster school site, which will allow Native American Youth Association and Family Services to sublease the area to develop about 40 units of intergenerational housing for senior citizens and Native American families who adopt foster children.

The mixture of ages has proved beneficial to all three generations living in such communities. Senior residents report benefits from living in a community with a common purpose, sharing their talents and life experiences with a new generation, and building new relationships though the bonds formed by living in an intergenerational community. Foster and adoptive children enjoy the stability of having surrogate grandparents. And parents benefit from the assistance raising children in an environment that supports them economically and socially. **UL**

WILLIAM P. MACHT is a professor of urban planning and development at the Center for Real Estate at Portland State University in Oregon and a development consultant. (Comments about projects profiled in this column, as well as proposals for future profiles, should be directed to the author at machtw@pdx.edu.)



The four-bedroom adoptive family houses are over 1,700 square feet in size and have a one-car attached garage, paired with the garage for the adjoining unit, with a shared driveway.

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