

Future Decker RFI Submission

ROOM TO GROW - a Housing Ownership Model that promotes taking root in the community

Submission by: Aeron Hodges & Eliza Datta

1. What are we proposing?

Buying a home for the first time is a challenging endeavor. With the high cost of housing, many first-time home buyers opt for smaller sizes to start, but face the risk of having to buy a new home when their families grow in size. This is not conducive to building sustaining communities. It is very unfortunate for anyone to move away after having taken root in a community, built trust and gained a sense of belonging.

“Room to Grow” is an alternative model to the traditional housing ownership model by providing flexibility for the owners to add individual rooms to an existing home. “Room to Grow” starts with a large volume of occupiable space at first occupancy, and the owner has the option to add more individual rooms or floors to this volume without changing the envelope of the home. Unlike adding rooms ad-hoc in a typical home, “Room to Grow ” starts with the structure and proportions that are suitable for division into livable spaces. The individual projects with this housing model will be designed to provide sufficient dimensions before and after expansion, as well as anticipating access to daylight for the expanded rooms.

This typology is suitable for many different scales and contexts: detached single family houses, row houses, triple deckers and apartment buildings. It could be hosted in either single-story or multi-story buildings. On day one, it will look a lot like a loft home, with double-height ceiling space, extra windows, and ready-to-use kitchen and bathrooms. As the family is ready to expand, the large open areas could be subdivided to create individual rooms and an upper floor with more living spaces and individual rooms. Additional plumbing hookups will be provided to allow for a second bathroom.

The concept of this typology has already been executed in many parts of the world successfully. Although most of these examples are less finished than what “Room To Grow” is proposing, they serve as good precedents and lessons learned.



BUILD WHAT YOU NEED, EXPAND WHEN RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE



DEVELOPER BUILD A FRAME WORK, OWNER PROVIDES THE REST

2. How will this typology help?

In addition to allowing families to grow in their communities, there is the added benefit of housing affordability. It is often beyond the financial means for a young couple to purchase a 3-bedroom home, a size suitable for long term growth, and be in their desired locations. The “Room To Grow” typology will lower the barrier-to-entry for these individuals to their desired housing markets, by not building all the rooms until when the families need them.

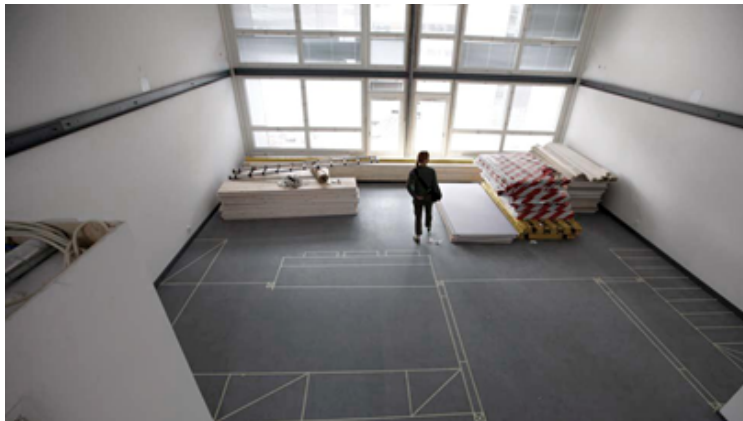
The projects following this typology will come with their own set of expansion instructions, to be followed during renovation by a small contractor, or the owners themselves if they choose to. During renovation, the scale of construction will be greatly reduced in comparison to traditional housing models. As a result, this will generate less adverse neighborhood impact as the rooms get added in increments. The smaller construction scale also provides more job opportunities for smaller contractors and individual construction tradesmen.

This unique housing typology will also allow customization from the owners to tailor-build their housing based on their particular needs and lifestyle. Instead of having to demolish any existing interior elements, the owners can built additional spaces from a blank canvas.

3. How can it be built?

A. A “Room to Grow” project is designed with the following in mind:

- a. Built as a move-in-ready unit on first occupancy, no partially finished spaces will be included.
- b. Extra ceiling height and windows to allow room placement on multiple floors
- c. Additional plumbing hookups will be provided to allow second or third bathrooms
- d. Suitable at a scale similar to triple-deckers, when two double height units are stacked on top of each other.



B. Finance

- A. Lower initial acquisition cost as compared to fully built-out units; creates more attainable housing options in high-cost markets (initial purchase price will be affordable to households earning between 100% - 150% of Area Median Income).
- B. Owners build equity over time by investing in expansion of unit

- C. Design options, information on build-out cost, and list qualified builders for future build-out provided to buyers and lenders
- D. Development team provides on-going support to condo association to assist with expansion projects

C. The construction methods of “Room To Grow” are similar to conventional housing construction.

- a. Wood frame construction for low scale projects
- b. Structural capacity to account for final build-out conditions.
- c. Expansion manuals to suggest different layout options for future renovation
- d. Directory of smaller contractors and trade professionals to help with building out additional rooms.

4. Next Steps

The project team has initiated conversations with the ISD and received positive feedback so far. We have also tested the design on a real site, with preliminary construction cost analysis. The exercise has yielded a level of financial feasibility and can serve as a proof-of-concept. Moving forward, we would like to test this prototype through the Future Decker RFI to understand market feasibility and our potential buyers.

- How much would first-time home buyers be willing to pay as a premium for the flexibility to grow their family in place?
- What's the percentage of owners who'd like to carry out their own construction?
- How many owners would invest in design assistance from a design professional?
- How much do people actually value staying put in a community?

The team would appreciate the opportunity and support from this RFI to gather feedback through focus group sessions or surveys.

5. Who we are

- Aeron Hodges, AIA, is a Senior Associate at Stantec Architecture. Based in the Boston office, she has led the design for many housing, commercial and mixed-use projects. She is also co-founder of WHAT'S IN, a design research initiative aiming to find innovative urban housing solutions that are sustainable and affordable. In 2018, WHAT'S IN advised the City of Boston on a new compact policy that allowed for smaller units to be built. Aeron's work has been published by d3 Assemble, AIA Young Architects Forum and Architecture Boston Magazine. She is the recipient of the ONEin3 Impact Award given by Mayor Walsh to outstanding civic leaders under age 35. She recently received the Plym Fellowship from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, which lead to an in-depth investigation of Social Housing in Europe.

- Eliza Datta is a housing developer with 20+ years of experience in planning, financing, and developing affordable and mixed-income housing. She leads E3 Development LLC, a woman-owned development firm focused on innovative, small-scale development that responds to the needs and priorities of local communities. Prior to founding E3, Eliza held senior positions with real estate firms in Boston and New York City and worked on a wide range of housing development projects in markets across the Northeast. She has deep experience in Boston, where she has contributed to the permitting and execution of more than 2,000 housing units.