

INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION

Affordable High-Density Housing

IN THE NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN (NMMM) & BUFFALO CITY (BCM) MUNICIPALITIES

Promoted by the NMMM, BCM and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)

COMPETITION REPORT

At this time during the search for new urban housing solutions in South Africa, the 'Affordable High Density Housing' Competition should be welcomed as an important initiative. In this regard the jury values the initiative taken by the NMMM and the BCM in collaboration with SIDA and thanks the many competitors who submitted work. While the competition underscored the fact that it is in the nature of housing design that there is no one single solution, the submitted work as a whole constitutes a valuable resource from which further housing development work and design investigations can be drawn from.

Initially two-hundred-and-seventy (270) competitors registered for the competition, and eventually 59 from South Africa and 41 from Sweden submitted work. Forty-one entries were submitted for the Duncan Village Site and fifty-nine entries were submitted for the Motherwell site. It was evident from the work submitted, both by professional architects and students, that participants both from South Africa and Sweden had invested considerable time and effort.

The jury visited the respective sites in Port Elizabeth and East London on the 8th and 9th of May, where they also met with representatives of the local communities. The two sites posed different challenges for competitors. The site in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, is a vacant level piece of land with limited contextual clues and is located some 20 kilometers from the city center. In contrast, the site in Duncan Village, East London, is a hilltop site located four kilometers from the city center and is currently occupied by informal shelters and offers views of the sea and city. This site also has existing religious and social facilities associated with it.

The jury looked for innovative ideas which demonstrated an understanding of the site/context and which interpreted the brief in an imaginative manner. At the start of the proceedings a number of criteria for evaluation were agreed upon, which were derived from the competition brief. Amongst others, these included:

- A Conceptual Approach (ideas, visions, interpretation of the brief, the development of a coherent argument.);
- A Contextual Understanding (an understanding of the site, urban design considerations, etc.);
- A Social and Functional Feasibility (questions of affordability, delivery systems, etc.);
- Prerequisites for Social and Technical Sustainability (use of resources, ecological concerns, etc.).

All the entries were exhibited in the Feather Market Hall and the jury assessed the work in a reiterative and repetitive process that extended over five days. Based on the abovementioned criteria, the jury evaluated all the entries individually and in a group discussion context. By the end of the first day forty-five submissions were eliminated, in as much as these did not address all the criteria and on the whole were too abstract and diagrammatic, showing scant consideration for context, as well as being unrealistic in terms of cost. By the end of the second day a further twenty-one submissions were eliminated after much deliberation.

In the jury's opinion there was not one obvious successful scheme that convincingly addressed all the criteria in a consistent manner. Typically proposals dealt with one or two aspects in an interesting manner, while neglecting other important concerns. Some proposals concentrated on the dwelling unit types, while others were more concerned with technical details, and yet a few others were preoccupied with urban concerns. This condition made for an even more thorough scrutiny of the entries and for the work of the jury to be all the more interesting.

The jury was also mindful of the fact that Low Cost High Density Housing design is a challenging area of investigation. Previous housing competitions have shown the many difficulties that exist with regard to finding good quality urban design and liveable housing units to be enormous. It has also illustrated that good design remains constantly challenged by the financial constraints that this process necessarily involves. However, at the same time the jury was aware that the implementation of the project was important and that a winning entry had to be found.

MOTHERWELL SITE

SHARED FIRST PRIZE
Julian Cooke Architect
Julian Cooke
Cape Town
Code: HEC 1234

This scheme shows an excellent understanding of the site and it also reflects innovative thinking with regard to the restoration of the rich urban and social fabric that previously characterized inner cities. The proposed overall urban layout is well considered - the relationship between the public and semi-public domains, and private spaces are all well resolved. The internal central public place with its surrounding social spaces will be a natural focal point of the development. The strategy of grouping houses around smaller communal courts establishes the semi-public spaces linked to the main route. This idea also promotes incremental housing, thus supporting a participatory approach. The project allows for a process of participation by inhabitants and the proposed starter buildings on the communal courts could be a nucleus for further development in an active participatory process. The scheme offers a range of dwelling unit types for different living conditions, as well as mixed –use options along the street towards the station square and the clinic as well as within the block.

The three-storey “wall” of housing towards the station square and the clinic embraces the varied structure of lower buildings inside the block. This mixture of

building types contributes towards a possible inspiring and lively urban living experience. While the concept needs further study with regard to sustainable technical system, it can be easily implemented in several stages. The urban design principle of this concept could with slight modifications be repeated when applied on a larger scale. There was however concerns about the nature of the spaces between the higher and lower buildings and this should be reconsidered.

The jury recommends that this project be implemented.

SHARED FIRST PRIZE

Lindström Walldén arkitektkontor AB

Kristina Lindström, Lars Walldén

Stockholm

Code: MOTHERWELL JUMPING

The proposed housing model of this scheme is based on a system of "row houses" with double-sided access and tightly planned service cores. The cores are built within the internal party walls leaving good flexibility in the arrangement of the living spaces. Internal courts in each dwelling ensure light and ventilation within the middle of the deep sites. The service cores are lit and ventilated via tall shafts, which provide a poetic solution to a practical need. These shafts and party walls provide the complex with an identity and coherent whole. The jury enjoyed the efficiency of the units, which provide for maximum flexibility using an economy of means. The courtyards provide for private inside/outside living common to the township "yard" and opportunity for different uses including private space for cars, business etc against the park or street edges. The density is seen as appropriate with live edges presented to the public realm.

Concern was expressed about the possible repetition of the housing unit design and the limited use of references from outside the site. The imposition of the external stairs to the street was also an area of concern and alternative solutions that would permit the provision of duplex units need to be explored. This entry provides for an interesting typology of medium density low-cost housing with limited means and provides an appropriate balance between order and flexibility. The typology can be replicated on other sites and will provide lessons for the future. The practicality and efficiency of service runs under the cores needs to be tested.

The jury recommends that funding be sought to implement this scheme.

HONOURABLE MENTION

The 3 Annas

Anna Hessle, Anna Leonsson, Anna Sophia Eliasson

Malmö

Code: TGNCFGP

The judges commented on the graphic and comprehensive nature of the information provided in the attractive drawings that formed the basis of this submission. The incorporation of a number of community facilities into the site design, including a vegetable garden with a garden club house, crèche, group dwelling for aids orphans

and “quiet courtyards” all enhance this design. Also praised was the emphasis placed on the incorporation of the special needs of woman-headed households into the design brief. The density of eighty-four units is achieved admirably, considering the number of community facilities provided on site.

Concern was however felt that, while the surrounding community and buildings are both remote and limited in texture and quality of design, the submission did not move beyond the confines of the competition site with any authority, and thus remained an ‘island’ project. An undue amount of unit housing space was given over to service provision. Further concern was felt about the number of very small plots (36 meters square, 40 meters square), which limited the size of the housing unit to considerably below community expectations. These concerns restricted this otherwise excellent submission to the award of a honourable mention.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Ngonyama Okpanum Hewitt-Coleman Architects in association with Andrew Palframan

Brian Wintermeyer, Debbie Makan, Andrew Palframan, Paul Carew

Code: PAM3234 ('HOME TOWN')

It was felt that the presented drawings are of the highest quality. They begin by describing spatial systems in general and then worked through site design, housing unit options and into technological details, including the consideration of the running costs of the housing for the recipient families. Great care was taken to incorporate the proposed housing development into adjacent sites, which are, regrettably not yet developed. This was taken by the authors as an opportunity to incorporate public facilities into the design, while placing these facilities off site. The result is both thoughtful and highly creative and attracted much praise during the adjudication process.

Concern was however expressed about the proposed creation of a considerable network of possibly unnecessary road works, an over reliance of unnecessary investment in the public realm and the incorporation of a very large number of shops (27) when in fact the site is adjacent to a very large and successful formal shopping complex. The housing units were felt to be innovative and, with all units enjoying their own sites, this affords security for vehicles and for drying washing and family life. The judges enjoyed this submission but felt the concerns mentioned above restricted its award-winning potential to a honourable mention.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Jesús Azpeita, Anna Montagut, Björn Ahrenby, César Lapausa

Stockholm

Code: THREE 11

The merit of this proposal is its systematic approach illustrating the principle of combining a basic unit into eight back-to-back building rows. Within the overall pattern there are a lot of options to provide “cut out” spaces for sport and recreation, for market activities, as well as for semi-public spaces accommodating

laundry and playground functions. However the scheme offers a limited number of basic unit types and when the units are combined into a unity it may result in a uniformity and repetitiveness. The units have 1 courtyards but their size is limited and prevents any future extensions on the ground. While the jury enjoyed this submission the above-mentioned concerns limited its award-winning potential to a honourable mention.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Savage & Dodd Architects in association with Sixten Larsson

Colin Savage, Heather Dodds, Sixten Larsson

Johannesburg

Code: DSL 2004

The merit of this proposal is its charming and inspired buildings along the main route, including opportunities for small workshops and business units. The scheme offers a range of realistic unit type designs which are flexible and which can be successfully extended. The u-shaped vehicular circulation patterns give direct access to the entrances of most of the housing within the development. This vehicular orientated characteristic of the scheme however also denies it being a pedestrian priority environment and its potential urban quality.

Within this 'suburban' layout there is a decided lack of options for public space making. . The division of the block structure due to the u-shaped circulation pattern makes it difficult to develop links between different parts of the block. While the jury enjoyed this submission the above-mentioned concerns limited its award-winning potential to a honourable mention.

DUNCAN VILLAGE SITE

FIRST PRIZE

Per Wikström

Stockholm

Code: Civic 04

The concept of this scheme is about finding a subtle balance between flexibility and urban order. The proposal provides an urban structure framework that can accommodate change over time in an 'organic' manner. The design employs a number of urban design principles, which promotes the integration of both social functions and an overarching spatial order. It is based on a convincing series of housing units, which are carefully arranged into a small-scale and varied urban texture. The jury was impressed by the apparent human and urban quality of these spaces. Furthermore the concept of mixed-use is tested convincingly. The workshop units, as directly connected to the housing units offers interesting ways of integrating living/work solutions.

The discussion and illustration of the context in the submission is equally convincing and makes for a realistic urban analysis that is consistently carried through to the

final layout. The scheme subdivides the site and creates well defined and linked public spaces of different hierarchies.

However with the introduction of a north-south axis, namely the “promenade”, the site has been divided into three linear parts, resulting in a third north-south street. The making of this additional street has an economic impact, costs money and limits space available for housing and other uses. It is recommended that this unnecessary feature be reconsidered. The suggested extent of permeability and the lack defensible space around dwelling units in certain areas of the scheme demands further study.

The jury recommends that this project be implemented.

SECOND PRIZE:

Comrie & Wilkonson
HP Comrie, D Du Toit
Pretoria
Code: EDT 6248

This scheme has a straightforward footprint of shared courtyard blocks arranged in similar fashion along predominantly pedestrian routes and streets that link into the existing surrounding road network. Variation is achieved through the detailed articulation of the buildings in a confident and architecturally superior manner. The urban design response is well considered and the complex fits comfortably into its context. The overall design also takes cognizance of the unique site, the views, orientation and linkages. The attempt at achieving a high density is commendable.

The scheme was, however found to be overly concerned with formal solutions and aesthetics at the expense of domestic livability. The lack of variation was of concern and the hierarchies between private and public spaces was deemed not to be successful. Most units are similar in plan despite orientation and location, and internal courtyards are very tight. As with other similar projects, the issue of car ownership and parking close to dwelling units was insufficiently addressed. The blocks were seen to be too permeable, raising issues of security and defensible space. The incremental strategy, which consolidates different sections of the site, leaving others unoccupied should be tested against the practical realities of local housing developments.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Kate Otten Architects
Kate Otten, Lone Paulsen
Johannesburg
Code: 7k3zil5

There are a number of interesting aspects to this submission. The site plan was considered to be very thoughtful including the creation of what would be a well defined community square on the adjacent church site, which is sensitively incorporated into the full site plan. The use of height on the Ndende Street elevation

makes available the excellent view over Duncan Village and beyond. The incorporation of communal courtyards makes semi-private space for recreation, sport, the hanging of washing, etc. feasible.

Concern was however felt about the incorporation of too many differing usages on the site. 114 living units, 20 commercial units and a number of communal, shared and care facility are all accommodated resulting in a somewhat over intensive living environment. This, in the view of the judges, restricts what is otherwise an outstanding entry to the award of a honourable mention.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Merom Kirchmeier arkitekter AB

Moritz Kirchmeier & Ori Merom assisted by Katja Hillström & Helena Ljungberg

Stockholm

Code: 6591315 (10 by 10)

This submission is well presented and is commended for a well-studied L-shaped dwelling unit, which illustrates the possibility of improved living qualities for the residents of Duncan Village. The unit can be self-built and adapted in several ways, admitting change in needs over time. The proposed neighbourhood unit composed of both L-shaped units and single units in three stories demonstrates an attractive scale and hierarchy, moving from private to semi-private. However the overall layout of the grouping of units on the site is disappointing. There is very little connection made with the surrounding fabric and existing community facilities. The density of the total dwelling units provided is too low.

HONOURABLE MENTION

Kristina Olsson, Birgitha Persson

Gothenburg/Stockholm

Code: TAB 0001

The merit of this proposal is its visionary approach on the development of a network of common spaces intertwined with dwellings. Within the pattern of linear plots with narrow frontages, it gives a range of opportunities for flexible dwelling spaces, workshops, courtyards and gardens. It is also easily adaptable to low-cost technical and ecological systems.

While the submission considered a number of important design principles in terms of promoting and introducing an urban argument, the jury felt that these remained at an abstracted level and were not consistently developed. The scheme at both the urban design level and at the housing typology level, is too diagrammatic. The jury was also concerned about the design proposal extending unreasonably beyond the limits of the available site. These concerns limited the award winning potential of this scheme to a honourable mention.

Signed 14 May 2004

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Lucien le Grange
(Chairman)

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Mphethi Morojele

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Anna-Karin Edblom

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Ulf Ranhagen

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CLlr Nancy Sihlwayi

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CLlr Andile Ntoni

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Rory Riordan