



Building Better Homes and Communities

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Affordability and Choice Today

ACT Solutions

Backyard Infill Housing Fronting on Alleys

Société Habitat sur mesure, Montreal, Quebec

The issue

Building new houses in built-up areas — urban intensification — can revitalize a city, make better use of existing infrastructure and slow down the exodus to the suburbs. In the late 1990s, a Montreal group, Société Habitat sur mesure, began exploring an interesting approach to urban infill: building a second housing unit in backyards that give onto alleys.

In Montreal, as elsewhere, restrictive municipal bylaws and neighbourhood resistance pose significant obstacles to this creative solution to a limited supply of suitable and affordable lots for infill housing.

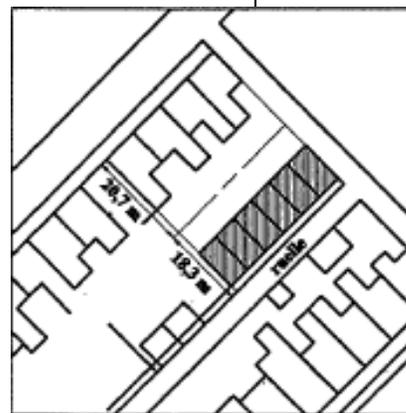
For example, Montreal's bylaws do not allow a home's principal access to be from an alley, nor do they permit a rear setback of less than three metres or the construction of two structures on one lot. Furthermore, regulations regarding minimum lot dimensions prohibit the subdivision of one lot

into two. Also, restrictive parking regulations that limit the width and location of driveways make it difficult to provide adequate parking for backyard houses.

The plan

Société Habitat sur mesure received an ACT grant in 1998 to examine issues related to infill housing, specifically to undertake a pilot study on backyard housing. The project had the following objectives:

- ❑ identify i) any regulatory obstacles to backyard housing, ii) municipal service and infrastructure requirements, and iii) neighbours' concerns;
- ❑ propose amendments to municipal bylaws to permit this type of construction; and
- ❑ develop design options and guidelines for backyard houses which can serve as models for other municipal governments, builders, architects and homeowners.



Design option located on two alleys

Source: Société Habitat sur mesure

The project team

Société Habitat sur mesure
City of Montreal's Planning, Housing, and Permits and Inspections Departments
Scalia, a building company specializing in infill development

The project team also consulted residents in three downtown neighbourhoods.

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The results

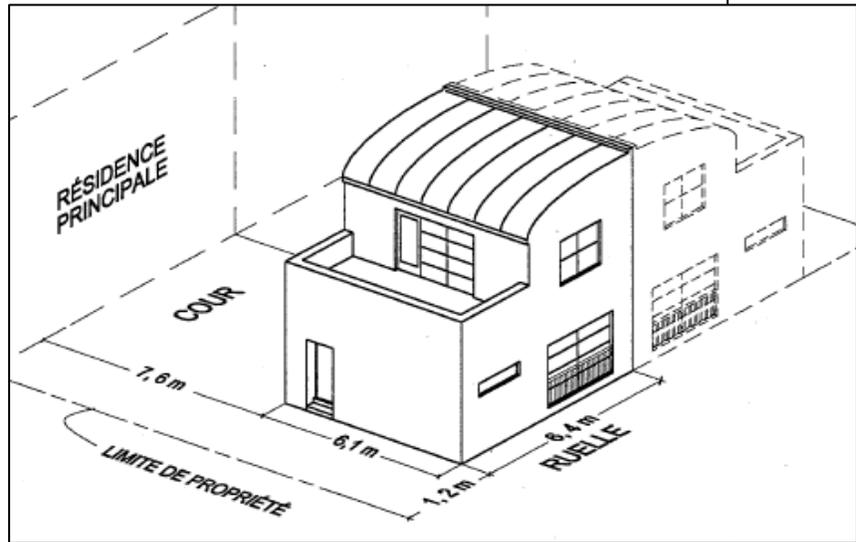
The ACT project team documented existing examples of backyard houses and developed a list of criteria for selecting suitable sites for this type of housing. They developed five design variations and a set of design guidelines on the following elements: adequate size (i.e. 85m² units with two bedrooms); provision of a private exterior space; privacy from neighbours; building height in relationship to alley width; and a separate, identifiable entrance.

The ACT project team also proposed a number of regulatory changes to encourage the construction of new homes on alleys. For example, they recommended revising the planning bylaw to permit an independent unit with its main entrance on an alley under certain conditions including:

- ❑ the unit should be located no more than 20 metres from the main street,
- ❑ it should be adjacent to two alleys, and
- ❑ it must have its own water supply.

As of spring 2004, the City had yet to adopt the suggested regulatory changes. However, Habitat has built a successful 7-unit townhouse project fronting a downtown alley. The project has been profitable for the builder and affordable for the consumer at \$149,000 per unit. Each dwelling has 146.8 m² (1,580 ft²) of living space on three floors, a garage and a private yard.

Backyard infill housing is suitable for a wide range of uses, from home offices and artist studios to accessory suites.



Design option: two studio units

Source: Société Habitat sur mesure

Related reports

Espaces habitables sur ruelle
(Société Habitat sur mesure, 2002)

This report is available from the ACT website. See "ACT projects & solutions".

Reports may be obtained on loan from CMHC's Canadian Housing Information Centre (CHIC) at chic@cmhc-schl.gc.ca or by calling 1-800-668-2642 and asking for CHIC.

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Program Administration

c/o The Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Tel: 613-241-5221 ext. 242
Fax: 613-244-1515
E-mail: info@actprogram.com

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