



Thoughts written by Bob Herman and Susie Coliver on the occasion of being honored by Episcopal Community Services (ECS) at its 2nd Annual Awards Luncheon on February 1, 2012 at the Julia Morgan Ballroom, 465 California Street, SF, CA

People often ask us how very low-income housing differs from other, more market-rate housing. We've used this occasion to try to form an answer to the question. Our thoughts may provide you with some insight into the task that ECS has taken on in their pioneering effort to meld permanent housing for formerly homeless individuals with the support to exit homelessness permanently.

In other types of housing, every square foot counts.
In housing the homeless, every square inch counts.

In other types of housing almost every room has a singular purpose.
In homeless housing, most rooms serve multiple purposes.

In homeless housing, value relates to the attention paid to intangible issues, like human scale.

In homeless housing, quality relies on well-proportioned spaces enhanced by natural light, which bears no additional cost.

In market rate housing, comfort relies on generous spaces.
Comfort in homeless housing relies on the illusion of spaciousness.

Homeless housing balances the desire for community with the dignity of choosing when and if to **socialize**.

Housing for the formerly homeless concentrates amenities where the greatest number of people can enjoy them.

Well designed market rate housing raises property values.
Well designed affordable housing also raises property values.

Affordable housing is designed with the particular needs of those being served by the non-profit developer in mind, based on years of intense community engagement.

Affordable housing is designed and built to last for generations; market trends are not part of the equation.

Market rate housing has to be marketed, and thereby appeal to a large common denominator.

Affordable housing has guaranteed full occupancy, allowing for some experimentation.

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Homeless housing requires provision for few or even no cars, supporting a more sustainable community.

In homeless housing, profits are plowed back into the community for the sake of the common good.

In homeless housing, special amenities do not affect the price to the resident.

In market rate housing, renters or buyers search for the most for the least cost. In homeless housing, formerly homeless residents are deeply appreciative of simple, comfortable, basic accommodation.

Face time spent with ECS shelter and housing residents, seniors, and chef's program participants feeds the architects' imagination throughout the design process.

Market rate housing provides carefully designed spaces for those who feel entitled to them. New residents oftentimes shed tears of joy upon walking into an ECS apartment for the first time. There is a moment of grace.