



Thomas Dolan Architecture : LWI : Codes

10 Truths of Live/Work Planning Policy

What are the planning and zoning implications of live/work? They are legion, and they are not what they first appear to be.

1. First, live/work is not a monolithic phenomenon. Clearly, some of what bears that name is predominantly residential in character. The rise of the internet, telecommuting, and even teleconferencing have created unprecedented opportunities for home office and small, at-home business. On the other hand, there is a demand for a more work-driven type of space in which employees and walk-in trade are permitted and more intense and/or more hazardous kinds of work are performed. This we are calling work/live.
2. There is a demonstrated tendency for live/work or work/live space to revert to purely residential use, regardless of how it was permitted or represented. This tendency is most pronounced in new construction condominiums or "lifestyle lofts." In some areas this is tolerable, in others it can cause great harm.
3. Each of these three types, home occupation, live/work and work/live, (and subsets thereof, e.g. home office, artists' live/work) is more appropriate in some areas than others. Zoning should be applied to locate live/work types suitably.
4. Residential reversion, described in #2 above, should be discouraged strenuously in those areas where pure residential use is undesirable due to incompatibilities with other uses, lack of residential amenities, etc. Residential reversion can be slowed down, if not entirely stopped, through the use of a combination of regulations, sanctions, financial incentives, tax policy incentives and, perhaps most importantly, the design of units for the appropriate level of proximity



between living and working spaces. Residential reversion is a central issue of concern to The Live/Work Institute, and was an important part of a study conducted in 1997 by Live/Work Institute President Thomas Dolan and others, entitled *Work/Live in Vancouver*.

5. While it can be a valuable tool for revitalizing "under-developed" neighborhoods (that term used to refer to countries!), the development of live/work, lofts, -- or whatever one calls them -- must be balanced with the valid need for the kinds of small and medium-sized businesses that are needed to make a city work, and for the larger commercial and industrial companies that employ her citizens. Laissez-faire loft development -- which usually leads to wholesale residential reversion -- can spell disaster for these businesses in the form of prohibitive property values and "imported NIMBY's."
6. There is, however, a place for lifestyle lofts, especially as part of a lively mixed-use district, often transitioning (spatially) between residential and commercial/industrial areas, between downtown commercial and industrial neighborhoods, or generally on residential neighborhood edges. Lofts are often an appropriate re-use of historic structures which might otherwise remain vacant, and in fact, relaxation of building code requirements for all kinds of live/work is permitted under state law in California. The permitting process for lofts, particularly in the case of new construction live/work, should be closer in character to residential regulations, which means instituting design review, open space and setback requirements, inclusionary zoning, and (in California) full imposition of school impact fees.
7. Artists began the live/work phenomenon, and they require a kind of affordable space that can (almost) only be found in older industrial



buildings. In areas with hot real estate markets (or where lifestyle lofts are already out of control, which includes many cities), the only way many artists can retain control of their spaces is through ownership, long-term rent subsidies, or the creation -- and enforcement -- of "Artists' Protection Zones" providing long-term affordable live/work. It is, in fact, more of a financial problem than a zoning problem, although certain zoning measures can help (such as designating certain live/work areas as rental only in existing buildings only). Artists contribute significantly to cities' economies (in San Francisco, 1 in 11 jobs are in the arts sector). They are the keepers of our culture, and they deserve our support and protection.

8. Live/work plays an important part in what The Live/Work Institute calls The Incubator Cycle. Ideas for small businesses often progress through different work spaces, from a spare room at home, to the garage (of Apple Computer and Hewlett Packard fable and fame), and often next to a live/work space. In fact, for some, the progression from home occupation to live/work to work/live space is part of the cycle. Government and corporate-sponsored incubators are a valuable newcomer on the scene: many have been very successful. A project idea being considered by the Live/Work Institute is a "Live/work Incubator," in which business assistance and facilities would be provided in a residential -- i.e. live/work -- setting.
9. Live/work and community is a topic treated elsewhere. Its implication for planning policy and zoning regulations are enormous -- they speak to the future of socialization in the 21st century, in which commuting may become more the exception than the norm. Live/work has been occupied and experimented with (mostly by trial and error, in a relative regulatory vacuum) for most of the last half of the 20th century. Any person who works at home (most do so alone) will attest to the fact that it can be a very isolating experience



in a suburban single-family house, or even a conventional apartment or condominium. Live/work projects can be planned to alleviate this isolation in two ways:

By requiring that live/work projects be designed such that they provide opportunities for spontaneous interaction among residents as they come and go in "interactive spaces" such as courtyards, atriums, etc;

By locating live/work projects in pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, on lively mixed-use streets (sometimes above shops) where there are easy opportunities for one to step outside and encounter others in a congenial public realm.

10. The Congress for the New Urbanism was founded to "advocate the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice."

Many New Urbanist projects include live/work spaces; as mentioned above, the fit is a natural. The apartment above the mom-and-pop store, or the country lawyer whose cottage is behind his office are time-honored built forms in the traditional American town. They are both forms of live/work.

Live/work is probably the most viable form of market rate housing



(sic) development in many inner cities. It is the only building type that provides both employment and housing. Inherently mixed use, infill live/work projects or renovation of existing buildings often go a long way toward meeting many of the goals of New Urbanism, and therefore could be seen as one of its best entrees into an inner city context.