



## THE DISRUPTION

Develop a flexible residential structure that can accommodate various lot sizes and densities, as well as entrepreneurship and aging in place. Architects must innovate for affordability, utilizing new construction materials and methods, and providing single-family homes that offer opportunities for live- work situations, growing families, accessibility, and a new focus on the “gig” economy.

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Submit a written narrative that describes your team's design and program.

“Amplify” is a new, incremental approach to housing that reduces common cost, time, and permit-related barriers for Chicago homeowners. This framework builds on existing Chicago Zoning Ordinance (CZO) concepts and local labor to provide quality design and quick approval for new, easily-adaptable urban homes.

**Amplify** activates Chicago’s wealth of talented architects to create a database of incremental housing plans designed with future expansion in-mind. These can be as simple as a one-story home with an unfinished basement. The database will include numerous expansion modules - for both the primary home, and expansion options for a live-work garage - which could be activated for future use depending on the owner’s individual needs. By simplifying the renovation permit process, homeowners will be able to avoid a costly major renovation and only build what they need, when they need it.

Popularized by Sears Roebuck & Co. in the early 20th century, the concept of high-quality “kit homes” has regained momentum throughout the country in recent years. ArchiBlox offers an award-winning series of customizable homes in Australia, while Plant Prefab is deploying modular designs in fire-damaged areas of California.

Chicago’s unique building codes currently make such products impractical in our city, but by designing a series of homes that are tailored to local code and climate considerations, the “kit home” approach could be adopted. For a city with standard lot sizes, a surplus of vacant parcels, flat terrain, and a proud tradition of local tradesmen, this is a concept with transformational civic potential.



## How does the proposed design contribute to reducing the prevailing cost of construction while still ensuring a durable, sustainable, and livable space for working families?

As building costs continue to rise, **Amplify** targets perhaps the most costly factor in the entire construction process - time. Similar to Chicago's existing "Self-Cert" program - which grants expedited building permits to "prototype" housing plans by architects with a special certification - these plans would be "pre-approved" by the Building Department and require only a cursory review upon submission. Accelerating the design and approval timeline dramatically cuts soft costs and allows construction to begin sooner, reducing uncertainty and risk for the homeowner.

**Amplify** uses time-proven building materials and methods that can be executed by Chicago's experienced tradesmen, many of whom live in the neighborhoods that could see the greatest benefit. Standardized plans lend themselves to partial prefabrication - where some building components are prepared off-site in a controlled environment - reduces jobsite assembly time, reduces waste, and allows for a more effective QA/QC process. These traditional building methods offer opportunities for economical, local labor streams while maintaining the integrity and safety of the construction. The **Amplify** database would be updated biennially as new products are introduced to the market, allowing the project team to select the latest and most cost-effective solutions given their specific requirements.

**Amplify** offers another alternative for developers looking to fulfill affordable housing requirements. Pro formas are often compromised when affordable units built into multi-family developments become too costly due to reduced return on the units. The developer now has the opportunity to build **Amplify** homes and harbor more goodwill than simply paying into Chicago's affordable housing fund.

## What practical changes to the existing Chicago zoning and building code may be needed to support your proposed design (i.e., what do you believe to be real, but readily addressed barriers to affordable owner-occupied housing)? Where in the U.S. have these changes been implemented and tested?

**Amplify** recommends three key revisions to the Chicago Zoning Ordinance. First, eliminate single-family zoning to allow a minimum of two dwelling units on any Residential lot in the City of Chicago. 40% of the city is blanketed with suburban-inspired, exclusionary zoning that limits new construction to single family homes. This includes 20% of lots within two blocks of a CTA "L" station. Allowing the time-proven Chicago two-flat would add thousands of units of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) across the city. An ordinance reversing this kind of economically restrictive zoning has recently been approved in Minneapolis, while a similar proposal is currently being explored by the state of Oregon.

Second, amend the existing TOD overlay map to include existing Residential lots, rather than only "B" and "C" parcels. This would eliminate on-site parking requirements within an established radius of major transit nodes for all single-family and multi-unit lots.



Third, expand the list of allowable uses within an accessory garage to include various home occupations and accessory dwelling units (ADU). This accessory structure would still be governed by current code limits on size and location. But that valuable space would no longer be restricted to private auto parking, as statistical trends increasingly show this to be a wasteful - and expensive - use of available urban land. Nashville has allowed these residences for decades with great success. Pittsburgh and Vancouver have recently implemented similar policies. In Vancouver, it is estimated that more than ⅓ of single family homes now have an ADU.

### **With changes in the economy increasing the desire or need of households to supplement their family income with independent or contract businesses, how could a potential design incorporate flexible space and wealth-building potential in the home or onsite (i.e., in the basement or a garage as studio/workshop)?**

Mindful of the fact that extreme changes to the residential face of a street will likely be met with fierce resistance by neighboring homeowners, **Amplify** focuses on addressing restrictions to how the rear of a lot can be utilized - specifically, expanding the list of allowable uses within an accessory garage and required rear setback. This underutilized space shouldn't be limited to private parking, as statistical trends increasingly show this to be a sunk cost and waste of valuable urban land.

The result is a net gain of 480 square feet of flexible, revenue-generating space naturally integrated into the existing fabric of a neighborhood. This reimagined garage can now be used as the homeowner sees fit - a personal home office, a maker workshop, or a fitness studio for small group classes. A home-based e-business gains a physical space to expand its craft as it slowly grows towards a traditional storefront one day. Commercial use of this space will be limited to the homeowner or their business, rather than leasing to a third-party retailer. If the owner doesn't have a need for this extra space, relaxed restrictions to Chicago's CZO allow them to supplement their income by converting this into an accessory rental dwelling unit (ADU) - providing small-scale, affordable housing within an established community.

Through modernization of these zoning restrictions, homeowners are able to freely utilize their property as the valuable asset it is - whether for personal benefit, financial improvement, or as a broader community asset.

### **How does the proposed design support full accessibility and aging in place?**

The adaptable nature of the **Amplify** model enables organic growth. It can adapt with the changing life of the homeowners and provide a comfortable, safe space regardless of age or lifestyle. By eliminating many of the common deterrents - high upfront design costs, a lengthy permit approval process, impatient lenders and unpredictable housing markets - **Amplify** allows for affordable construction of a "starter home" by a family seeking to plant long-term roots in a community. A family can build incremental additions, using pre-approved expansion modules. As residents grow older, a younger family member or live-in caretaker could reside on the



2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment while the accessible design of the 1st-floor home provides homeowners with the opportunity to continue living comfortably in the home they have nurtured over the years.

While **Amplify** homes provide livable solutions for residents of all ages, the broader approval and execution approach ensures that existing and incoming members of the community can reside in their neighborhood without being pressured away in the future. With these improvements to the CZO, new affordable housing can be spurred from the “bottom-up” on individual housing lots, protecting against factors that drive drastic fluctuations in neighborhood property values which result from a sudden influx of new housing units in a single location.

Rather than push out long-time residents who have tended to the neighborhood over the years, these homes will naturally become a part of the local fabric and contribute to the long-term success of the area.

