

Case Study: Townhome Development Long-Term Maintenance

Client Type: Developer

Project Focus: Risk Assessment and Plan Adaptation

Project Overview: During the design phase of a townhome development project, concerns emerged about how homeowners would manage long-term exterior maintenance, such as painting and re-roofing. Typically, this is handled in one of two ways: the homeowners association (HOA) assumes responsibility, or neighbors must coordinate and share the cost of maintenance. Both methods come with challenges. HOAs are prone to financial mismanagement, leading to fee increases, special assessments, or even lawsuits against the developer, regardless of fault. When maintenance responsibility falls on neighbors, disputes or delays are common when some cannot or do not want to contribute. Given these risks, a more sustainable solution was necessary.

Challenges:

- **HOA Mismanagement Risks:** When an HOA is responsible for maintenance, inadequate budgeting can lead to financial shortfalls. Homeowners may face increased fees or special assessments, and legal action against the developer can follow if the situation worsens.
- **Coordination Among Neighbors:** Relying on neighbors to share the cost of maintenance often leads to disagreements, delays, or neglect when one party is unable or unwilling to pay their share.
- **Shared Design Constraints:** Traditional townhomes share walls and rooflines, making it difficult to assign clear responsibility for exterior repairs, further complicating maintenance efforts.

Solution: To address these challenges, I proposed an architectural redesign that provided a visual separation between each unit both on the walls and roofline. The Separation took the form of a change in direction of siding materials, and a shift in the roof plane between two units. This simple adjustment allowed each homeowner to maintain their unit independently, free from reliance on neighbors or the HOA. We implemented a straightforward party wall agreement, ensuring that each homeowner was responsible for their own roof, walls, and exterior maintenance. This solution eliminated the risk of shared maintenance disputes or unexpected HOA financial issues.

Execution: Once the design was finalized, we incorporated the separate rooflines and walls into the construction plan. Each unit was clearly divided, making it easy for homeowners to manage their own property without affecting their neighbors. This not only solved the maintenance challenge but also simplified the legal structure for the development, as responsibilities were clearly defined from the outset.

Results: The architectural redesign successfully resolved the maintenance concerns. By empowering homeowners to maintain their own units, the project eliminated the risks of financial

mismanagement by the HOA and the complications of coordinating shared maintenance with neighbors. Homeowners gained independence in managing their properties, leading to higher satisfaction and fewer conflicts within the community.

Key Takeaways:

- **Innovative Architectural Design:** Separating each unit at the walls and rooflines provided a lasting solution to the challenges of shared maintenance responsibilities.
- **Homeowner Independence:** The redesign allowed homeowners to manage their own maintenance, avoiding reliance on HOA funds or neighbor agreements.
- **Reduced Risk of Disputes:** Clear individual responsibilities for maintenance led to smoother operations and fewer conflicts, contributing to a more cohesive community environment.