

Impact Lufkin: Scalable Solutions to Micropolitan Housing

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Figure 1. Impact Lufkin Site Oblique. Image by author.

The project explores relationships among houses as a small settlement. The strategy challenges the suburban subdivision approach that micropolitan communities across Texas have adopted. Specifically, the project works toward a place-based response to the creation of affordable supportive housing for working-poor households in the North Lufkin neighborhood of Lufkin, Texas. Architecturally, the project takes a multi-scalar approach, from locally sourced wood resources and construction processes to the arrangement of units into clusters with shared outdoor resources. The residential buildings are modest yet generous unit typologies. Aesthetically, the project draws upon silhouettes and standard building elements common to the region, an architectural vocabulary that flickers between foreground and background.

COMMUNITY PARTNER I am working with Impact Lufkin; providing architectural services that integrate community driven engagement processes. These activities were in-person Pre-COVID-19 and have continued online since March 2020. Residents have generational ties to this neighborhood and recognize how structural and systemic racial and social exclusionary practices have impacted the neighborhood. To facilitate ways of addressing challenges, Impact Lufkin formed partnerships with nearby Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas A&M University. While economically depressed, the community is socially vibrant, connected, and committed to empowerment. As a grassroots organization,

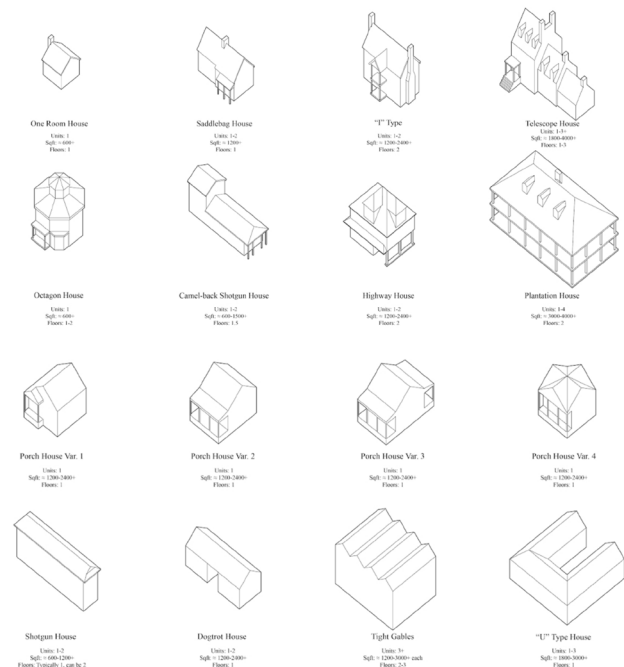


Figure 2. East Texas Housing Typologies. Image by author.

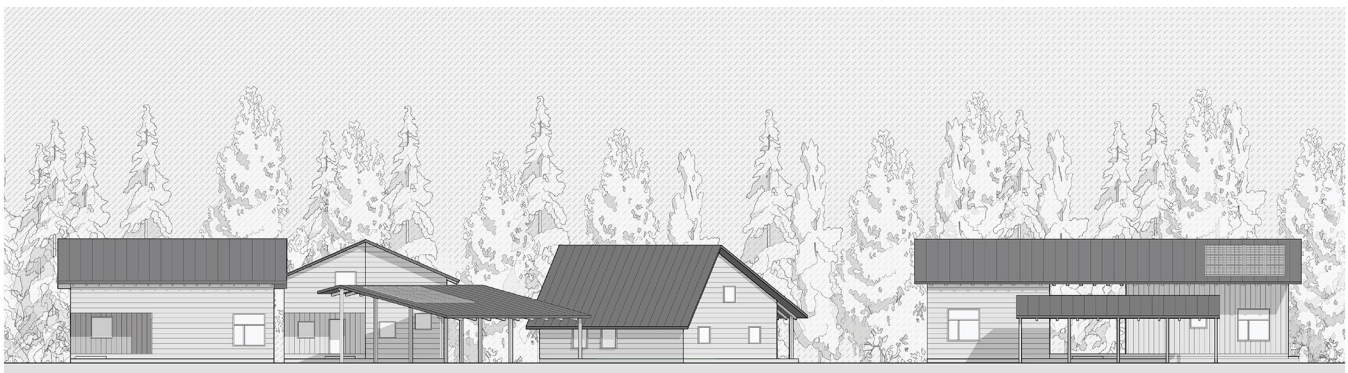
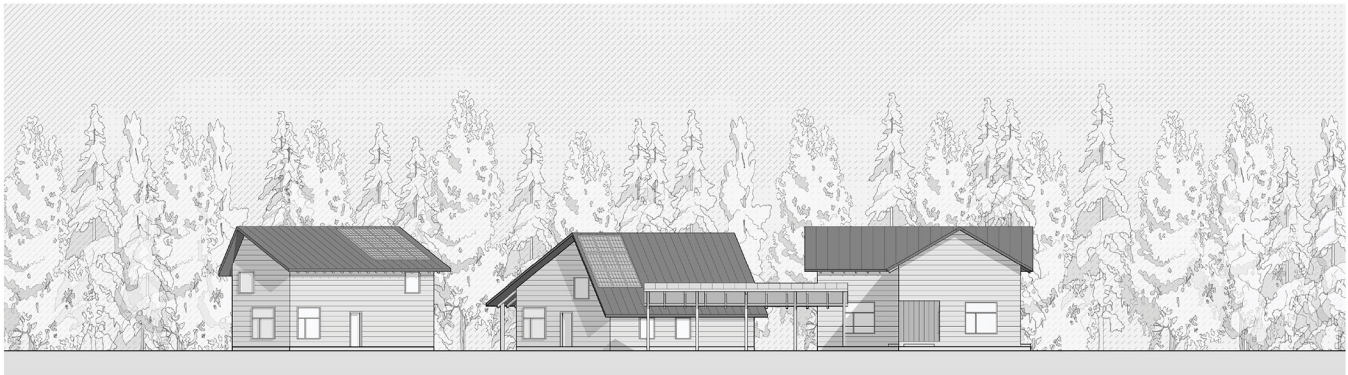


Figure 3. Impact Lufkin Site Elevations. Image by author.

Impact Lufkin lacks resources to assist in creating affordable housing. I help enable design processes and introduce paradigms of housing outside of what exists in their frame of reference. In the ten months of collaboration, I've become more educated about the challenges rural micropolitan cities face and they have been exposed to an expanded view of housing typologies that envision what a connected neighborhood can be. Together, we are addressing a significant gap between the local community's particular needs and creating a vision of a project that adds social value and is achievable.

NEIGHBORHOOD Lufkin sits within a dense Southern Yellow Pine forest. Its economy is dependent on the timber industry, and the North Lufkin neighborhood was originally settled as a Black sawmill town. Today, half of Lufkin's residents live in North Lufkin and identify as Black or Hispanic. With a median household income of \$22,465, compared to \$45,596 in Lufkin overall and \$59,570 in Texas, North Lufkin residents have seen few building improvements in half a century. Affordable rental or owner-occupied housing stock is of substandard quality. By comparison to major metropolitan areas of the Texas Triangle – Houston is 120 miles southwest – this Lufkin is an almost rural setting. Meeting the neighborhood on their own ground is critical to the success of such a project.

THE HOUSES The project thinks about houses in multiple. At the building scale, Impact Lufkin currently employs a 1,200SF

builder spec house that is copy-pasted on open lots. It can be reliably built for \$90-\$100/SF by local contractors. The non-profit's proforma, the realities of making the proposed project move from vision to an achievable reality, is dependent on being conscious of that price point. Different from the existing product, the proposed houses consider long-term costs of maintaining and operating a house. Recognizing that efficiencies in layout and lean construction are important, each house negotiates open and enclosed spaces, some are single family and others are two-family. Avoiding corridors, jack-and-jill bathrooms, and service core kitchens help with organizational design decisions. All houses have some form of porch that establishes connections between the house and the shared yards. Roof geometries are governed by pitches in an attempt to utilize it performatively and produce gestures that are rural in archetype. Scale of cladding, size of windows, depth of eaves, thickness and articulation of surfaces, are tuned among the set of houses. Ideally one can perceive each as purposeful and meaningful, authentic and honest with the aim of fostering a sense of pride and enrichment.

THE SETTLEMENT The original plan called for a subdivided suburban block. There would be no common space, only fenced lots, private driveways, and rubber-stamped houses. A significant number of mature trees from the heavily wooded site would be removed. The alternative proposal considers a micro-urbanism, creating multi-unit housing

at an intermediate density. By this I mean the creation of housing clusters that congregate to make connections with one another around shared outdoor resources. This strategy treats the entire site as a common ground. It challenges existing approaches in Lufkin to vehicles, pedestrians, and the integration of social resources within a residential district. The reconfiguration of the houses away from rectangular lots eliminated underutilized side yards in favor of a more episodic settlement pattern. The spaces framed by housing clusters aim to be informal, small to medium in size, encouraging the sharing of resources and activating neighborhood life. These are currently developing into a combination of flexible spaces that adapt over time and specific programmed spaces.

NEXT STEPS COVID-19 has slowed the project, but work continues. The scheme resonates with early rural forms of urbanism in the region but is very different from twentieth century formats that some residents see as aspirational and equate with real estate value and success. Engagement efforts address the inequities and perceived success such models have produced and reinforce. Community driven initiatives by Impact Lufkin understand progressive alternative models to housing in North Lufkin are necessary. They recently acquired a 190-acre tract immediately adjacent. The project presented here is considered a phase one prototype to be refined and scaled up to the larger site.

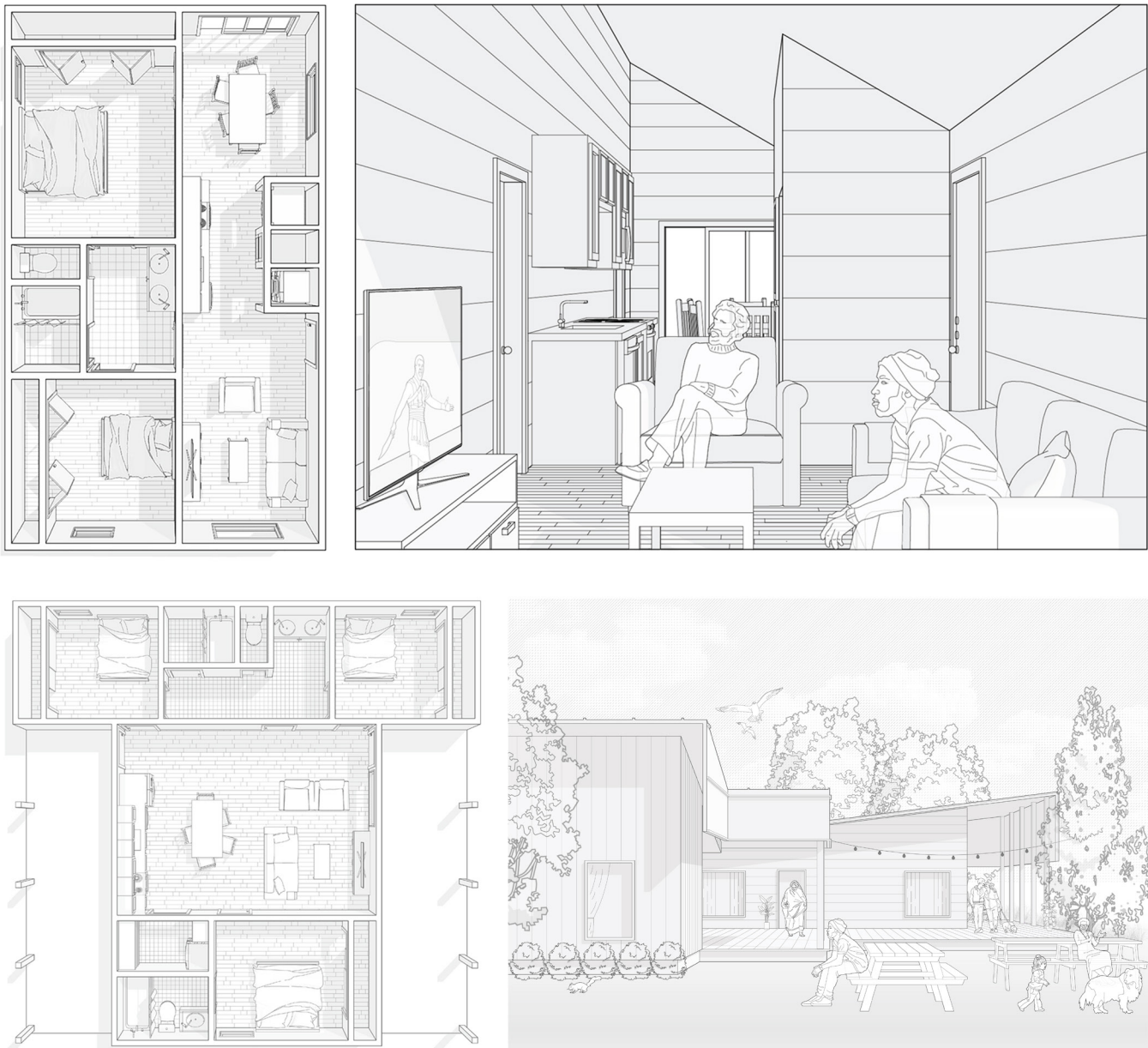
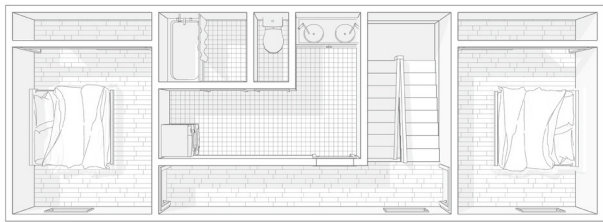
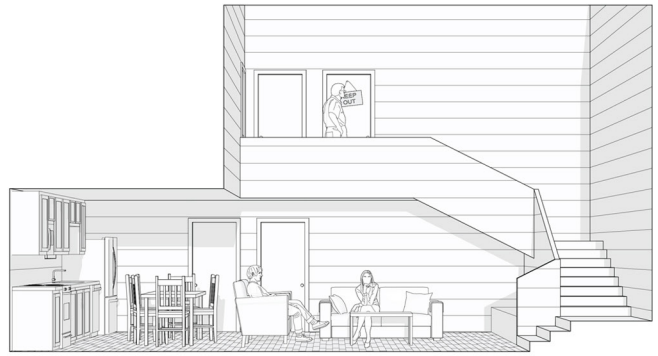
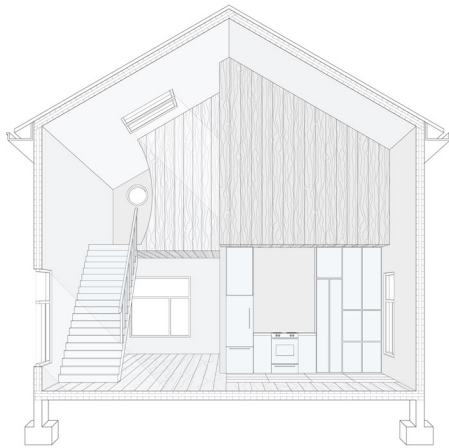


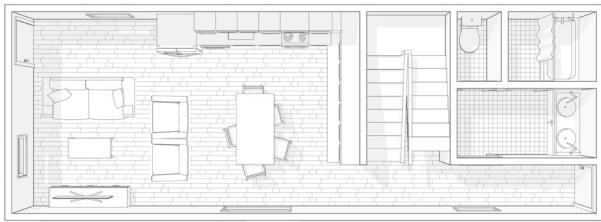
Figure 4. Single Story House Designs. Image by author.



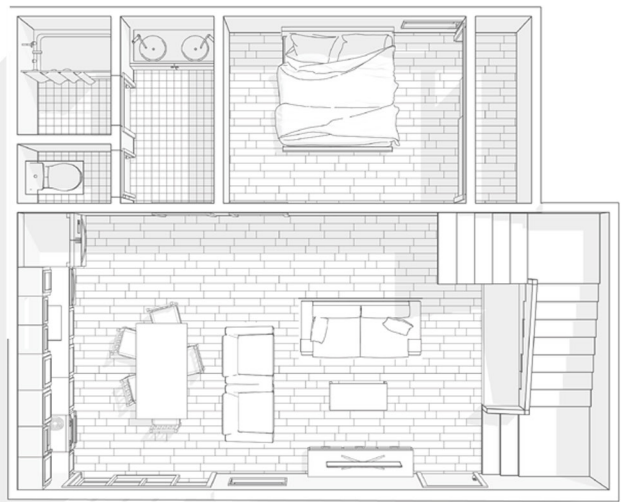
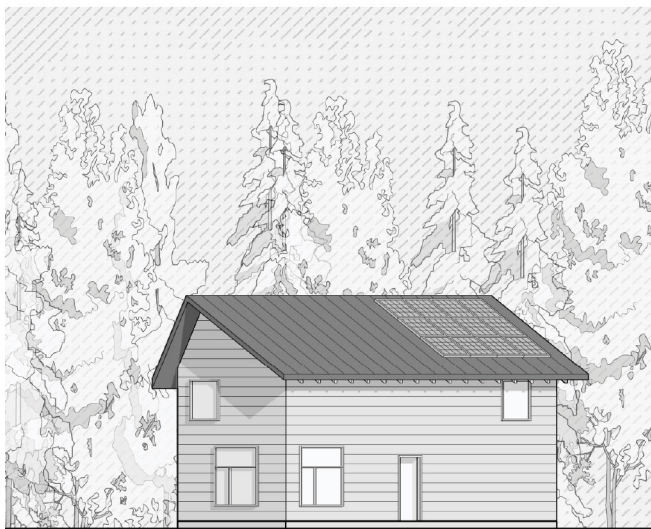
2nd Story Floor Plan



2nd Story Floor Plan



1st Story Floor Plan



1st Story Floor Plan

Figure 5. Two Story House Designs . Image by author.

Additionally, ongoing work has led to relationships with public agencies and local industry invested in Southern Yellow Pine. Finding new uses of this species is imperative to the rural economy of East Texas. Utilizing the species would benefit revitalization efforts in North Lufkin. Wood construction parameters are integrated in the house designs.

Lufkin presents a set of affordable housing challenges that are common to micropolitan communities. Limited housing options prevent community members from having a voice in shaping housing as decent shelter and social infrastructure. The Impact Lufkin proposal offers an alternative, one that considers both the house and the settlement as a way toward social equity and justice.



Figure 6. Shared Common Areas. Image by author.



Figure 7. Exterior Perspective. Image by author.