

Granny-Flats and Duplex-Pensions

The July-August '78 *Ways and Means* had a report on a program in Victoria, Australia, to build "Granny-Flats"—small, efficient living units for elderly residents on the property of the older citizen's children. A great idea in itself, but even more it points out the social impacts of our restrictive single-family-residence-only zoning practices. Many of our multi-bedroom, two-bath residences can be built (or converted) to divide up into a smaller house and an attached apartment—allowing a less expensive home for small families, ability to expand as a family grows, and then to later rent out unused space as children grow up and move away. It would make possible for older families and individuals to get rental income, have other people close by, and younger people around to shovel snow and make repairs. Duplex houses used to be (and should be) a common and wise kind of pension fund. (A California study—*Rainbook*, p. 48—showed that public pension funds could obtain better returns by investing in housing than in corporate stocks. Better yet, cut out the middleman and make it possible for people to do so directly themselves!) Duplexes provide a more secure income source for retirement than many pension funds and also provide a better kind of rental housing than most apartment houses. Having the owner living in the other half of a duplex always seems to ensure better maintenance and upkeep for the renter, and better treatment of the rental unit for the owner. Granny flats and duplexes are socially good housing patterns, wise investment, and a good way to convert oversized housing to better use patterns as our energy glut bottoms out. All that is required is a zoning change to allow owner-occupied two-family housing in present R-1 zoning areas. —TB