



## Lower Mall Phase 1: Graduate Student Engagement Workshops

# Engagement Summary Report

## Engagement Summary

UBC is in the process of designing new student housing in the Lower Mall Precinct which will include 1500 graduate-focused student beds, including 400 St. John's College beds. The development will also include new shared amenities, dining and event facilities, and childcare.

As part of the early design phase, two 2-hour graduate student engagement workshops (one lunch and one dinner session) were conducted on January 15, 2025. The purpose of the workshops was to learn more about graduate student and alumni lived experience and perspectives to help shape the design of the housing units and amenities for this project, specifically unit layouts and, room furniture, indoor and outdoor amenities that would accommodate activities they would like to see in future graduate student housing.

Workshops were held at the St. John's College Social Lounge to gather insights from graduate students and alumni on their lived experiences, with a focus on housing. Key insights included preferences for double extra-long beds, flexibility and moveability of furniture, welcoming and diverse social amenity spaces on the ground floor, and outdoor space that balances lively activities (e.g., sports court) with peaceful spots to sit and relax.

## Who Participated

58 students and alumni attended the two engagement sessions, with 58% Masters students, 35% PhD students and 7% alumni.

Students came from 10 different faculties, including Medicine, Forestry, Arts, Science, Law and Dentistry, and ranged in terms of where they lived, including on-campus, off-campus and at St. John's College. Efforts were also made to include students from a variety of cultural and international backgrounds.

## Key Takeaways

Feedback from these workshops were helpful inputs into the design of the project. While not all ideas were able to be incorporated into the design, the design team considered them all. Key findings from participants did shape the proposed design in the following ways:

What We Heard	Design Team Response
<i>Furniture and Room Features (All Units)</i>	
Majority of participants requested double extra-long beds to balance bed size with need for space, built-in closets to create more space, private study space with a desk for each resident, and seating options beside just a desk chair.	All units will feature lifted double extra-long beds to maximize storage while maintaining spacious living areas. Each resident will have a dedicated desk positioned near windows. Furniture will be moveable to support personalization of spaces, with ample storage solutions integrated throughout.

What We Heard	Design Team Response
Students are very interested in options for room furniture (e.g., bed length: XL vs standard) that allows for flexible room configurations in order to customize their space (e.g., desk by the window).	The unit and façade design allow residents to reposition both beds and desks based on window location and personal preference. This layout flexibility enables customization of living spaces to maximize natural light and create personalized study and rest areas.
Other key considerations included thoughtful window coverings (e.g., bug screens, blackout curtains), soundproofing between units, providing bidets with a flexible hose, and pet friendly units.	These important quality-of-life considerations will be carefully assessed during detailed design development. Roller shades, and soundproofing enhancements will be provided. Bathroom fixture options, and pet-friendly unit allocations will be implemented based on operator parameters and prioritization of resident comfort. We are committed to addressing these needs to the fullest extent possible within project constraints.
Room Design (Specific to Unit Type)	
<b>For 2 Bedroom Units:</b> There was a preference for two equal sized bedrooms to provide space for two graduate students, or a small family. Couples preferred a private unit, not a shared unit.	All 2-bedroom units are designed with equal-sized bedrooms, each comfortably accommodating a double extra-long bed and study area. This design supports both roommate arrangements and small families.
<b>For Study Studios:</b> Participants shared ideas for better bathroom hygiene to better align with the cultural and faith backgrounds of a diverse student group (e.g., access to drinking water outside the bathroom).	Study Studios feature bathroom designs that respect diverse cultural considerations through thoughtful fixture placement and multipurpose solutions. While additional water access points outside bathrooms aren't feasible, we've optimized bathroom layouts to better accommodate various hygiene practices. Student Housing and Community Services are exploring options for residents who use bidets, focusing on ways that support this need and are compliant for use across the student housing suite inventory.
<b>For All Studios:</b> Student participants would prefer to have an additional seating option in their studio besides their desk chair to demarcate study/work space from hobby/personal space.	Studios are designed with sufficient space to accommodate an additional personal seating option, if desired. The adaptable positioning of bed and desk allows residents to configure their space according to personal preferences, supporting both studying and relaxation within the compact environment.

What We Heard	Design Team Response
<i>Indoor Amenities</i>	
<p>Students said that social amenity space should be welcoming and clearly visible (e.g. ground floor near entrances and exits) to encourage participation, either from the window into a courtyard or when coming home.</p>	<p>Residential amenity spaces are strategically placed at the ends of the buildings along the central passageway, directly adjacent to building entrances. A covered walkway and entrance surround these spaces, allowing for social interaction while providing weather protection. This design creates visible gathering areas that invite participation as residents enter, exit, or pass through the precinct.</p>
<p>Most participants stated a desire for lots of natural light and big windows (i.e., good for mental health, having plants etc.) while managing issues with heat if the sun is shining on the window.</p>	<p>The amenity spaces feature generous windows that maximize natural light, directly responding to the importance of daylight for mental health and creating vibrant social environments. These transparent façades create visual connections to the landscape in the courtyards while the building overhangs help mitigate heat gain to maintain comfortable interior temperatures. Window sizes impact building energy performance and will be thoughtfully considered. There will be an abundance of natural light to support indoor plants, further enhancing the connection to nature and resident wellbeing.</p>
<p>There was a preference to socialize outside of individual units in a variety of space types that create “living rooms” or small nooks outside their dorm rooms, similar to the existing spaces at St. John’s College (e.g., party room, games room, library, small rooms for zoom meetings, multi-purpose rooms where students can modulate noise based on what the room is being used for) and also a gym and fitness space.</p>	<p>The buildings include a diverse range of social spaces including multi-purpose lounges, quiet study areas, games rooms, and bookable study rooms distributed throughout the project. These spaces vary in size and character to support different activities and noise levels, creating a residential environment that extends beyond individual units and fosters community interaction. The repurposed fire hall provides additional community amenities, offering a unique character and gathering space. A dedicated fitness facility is also provided to support physical wellbeing.</p>
<i>Outdoor Amenities</i>	
<p>All discussion tables raised access to nature as very important, sometimes in very small ways because it provides students with a place to decompress from the pressures of graduate student life.</p>	<p>The landscape design creates a multi-layered connection to nature through diverse outdoor spaces throughout the precinct. The upper courtyard provides an open lawn space for activities, while the lower courtyard features denser plantings creating intimate, nature-rich spaces for quiet decompression. Small pocket gardens and planted edges provide everyday nature encounters along primary circulation routes, recognizing nature's importance for mental wellbeing and</p>

What We Heard	Design Team Response
	providing students with places to reflect and find respite from academic pressures.
Students want a variety of outdoor amenities that can serve different functions (e.g., grass field for socializing and casual soccer, courtyard space with outdoor seating) and provide two different characters: peaceful (e.g., garden with benches) and dynamic/lively (e.g., sport court).	Apart from being adjacent to existing resources like tennis courts, Wreck Beach, and Marine Dr Residence outdoor space, the project design also includes two distinct outdoor character zones: the upper courtyard provides an active, flexible space for various recreational activities, sports, and events, while the lower courtyard features dense plantings creating a more natural, residential atmosphere for quiet respite and contemplation. These contrasting spaces support a full spectrum of outdoor needs expressed by students.
Participants shared a desire for private outdoor areas that are available to residents only (e.g., deck with a beautiful view and BBQ).	The courtyards are designed to be used by all student residents, with the buildings creating a sense of separation from pedestrians. The landscape helps in creating more intimate areas towards the west for residents to socialize, relax and enjoy the natural setting, while the east provides more active spaces for residents.
<b><i>A Day in the Life of a Graduate Student</i></b>	
Graduate students are more mature, have to deal with more adult responsibilities and usually follow 9 AM – 6 PM workdays, which means meant that much of the socializing, decompressing, and other actions in the precinct might occur in the evenings.	Our design recognizes the distinct rhythm of graduate student life through thoughtful amenity programming and space distribution. Evening-focused social spaces feature appropriate lighting and acoustic properties to support after-work gatherings. The community center and sky lounges accommodate flexible hours, while ground-floor amenities are positioned to create intuitive social connections during evening return-to-home patterns, supporting the 9AM-6PM workday schedule typical of graduate students.

## Detailed Takeaways

This section includes more detailed findings organized according to the structure of the workshop. Raw data is available upon request.

### Units

*Conversations about units were centered around beds, closets and storage, desks and shelves, and what is or is not important to have in graduate student living space.*

#### Typical Studio

- Beds
  - Overall support for double, extra-long beds, notably because they allow for more underbed storage

- Ideal if you can choose the length and height off the floor for your bed, with furniture that is sized to maximize the storage area under beds
- Some interest in Murphy beds for maximizing room space
- Closets and Storage
  - Want as much storage as possible – closet, dresser, under bed storage, desk storage
  - Support for closets because it maximizes storage, and a good place to put large items (like suitcases) on tucked on top shelf
  - Concern with bike hooks, since it may limit storage, so provide option for a hook that could fold sideways and allow for a bookshelf instead
- Desks and Shelves:
  - Support for desks that are as big as possible to accommodate two screens, space for books etc.
    - Shelving and pin board could help increase space
    - Like the idea that drawers can go on either side
    - Make sure chair can fit under desk
- Other considerations:
  - Ensure sufficient maintenance of carpets, or use rugs for easier cleaning
  - Desire for built in mirrors
  - Desire for additional seating options, outside of a desk chair

### *Study Studio*

- Beds:
  - Desire for a double bed as a good compromise between big enough bed but optimizing room space
  - Accessibility of bed is key – so keep the beds lower to the ground
- Closets and Storage:
  - Storage is very important for everything from suitcases to winter clothes
  - Storage rooms external to the rooms themselves are necessary
  - Support for under bed storage
- Other key considerations
  - Desire for flexibility and mobility of furniture is very important
    - Choose your own bed length depending on your height
    - Different desk configuration options (e.g., right/left-handed, reading vs. computer focused work, standing desk option)
  - Consider high quality window coverings
    - Privacy considerations
    - Blackout curtains that can darken rooms for sleeping and cooling
  - Recognize role of water and culture (challenge of water only in bathroom, desire for a bidet)
  - Ways to delineate a separation of space (e.g., rugs, reading chair separate from desk chair) for sleeping vs. studying, hobbies vs. work etc.
  - Natural light exposure really helps people want to spend time in their rooms
  - Window screens to keep out bugs
  - Soundproofing between units, and between units and hallways
  - Pet friendly units

- Concern about affordability of future units
- Practical things: mini fridge, plugs where you need them, entryway that has a coat rack and hooks

## 2-Bedroom

- Beds and Bedrooms:
  - Prefer to replace twin beds with 2 queen beds or double XLs to balance the needs of space vs. storage vs. needs of couples
  - Beds should have adjustable heights for accessibility
  - Preference for equal size second bedroom, as two equal size rooms can provide the most near-term benefit, and long-term benefit
  - This unit could work for either two grad students (more affordable), or a family with a child or two. Space for couples would need to be in a private unit, not a shared unit.
- Closets and Storage:
  - Prefer closet to be built in to give the illusion of more space
- Desks and Shelves:
  - Need private study space with a desk for each resident, preferably in-room and by the window
  - Each desk size should be large enough to accommodate a laptop, books, and phone
- Other considerations:
  - Customization, autonomy, uniqueness comes from ability to arrange one's own furniture.
  - Dishwasher can be very useful, but desire for clothes washer/dryer more than a dishwasher
  - Consider sound attenuation between the bathroom and adjacent bedroom.
  - Importance of natural light in living and work/study spaces
  - Demarcation of sleep and study space
    - Valuable to have a table (separate from the desk) in each bedroom, so each has access to study space and private hobby space

## Indoor Amenities

*Conversations about indoor amenities were centered around existing successful amenity spaces on campus, where students currently spend time on campus, and what amenity spaces may be missing at UBC.*

- Natural light is essential for studying and working, so desire for large windows
  - Also consider sun direction for windows and resulting temperature fluctuation
- Prefer to socialize outside of individual units, so need a variety of space types that create living rooms or small nooks outside their dorm rooms:
  - Event/ party room (preferably on a high floor with a view, bookable)
  - Games room (e.g., foosball, board games)
  - Cozy library with large wooden tables for studying, open 24/7
  - Music rooms
  - Multi-purpose/Living room for lounging/reading, crafts, dancing, meetings, co-work space etc. where residents moderate noise levels, depending on activities in the room.
  - Small, soundproof rooms for phone calls and zoom meetings
  - Desire for dedicated exercise space, open 24/7 - with open space for yoga
- Informal spaces are valuable for social cohesion

- Focus on homey, intimate, inviting space with plants etc.
- Furnishings should be moveable to allow flexibility of use for each space
- Accessibility – space should be friendly and available to all users
- Varied size of spaces to accommodate different group sizes

## Outdoor Amenities

*Conversations about outdoor amenities were centered around what types of outdoor spaces students want to see as part of this project, how these spaces should prioritize ecology, and the desired character of these new outdoor spaces.*

- Outdoor space should be naturalized but have useable areas
- Types of desired outdoor spaces:
  - Private deck for residents with a BBQ and some covered space
  - Plaza space
  - Sports court
  - Open space or field to exercise, lay down or hang with friends
  - Small garden with diversity of plants
- Key elements of well-designed outdoor open and green space:
  - Benches and tables
  - Value of trees for shade
  - Desire for two different characters: Peaceful vs. lively
    - But both should be inviting
  - Connection to water is important so encourage the team to use some type of water feature
- Good precedent of multi-functional outdoor space is the SJC courtyard:
  - Amenable to volleyball, badminton etc.
  - The visual connection encourages people to join in
  - Areas for sitting are sunny at different times of day/seasons

## Day in the Life

*Conversations about a Day in the Life of a graduate student were centered around what types of activities students are doing during a typical day, and where and when these activities occur. From these conversations are further considerations related to student experience, quality of life, etc.*









- High value placed on common study spaces that have varying levels of activity (e.g., balances social and study) and can be used for multiple hours in the evenings
- Most valued places to relax individually or as a group seemed to be outside, in natural settings with beautiful landscapes or views (e.g., Rose Garden)
- Multipurpose rooms and lounges were noted as successful when they were in a central location and visible from further away (e.g., ground floor, glass windows) so you feel invited in and can see what's going on inside before entering
- Desire for a variety of smaller social spaces (e.g., smaller than the SJC Social Lounge) to reflect a home (e.g., living room, dining room, TV room, games room, party room, bookable study space, gym with diversity of equipment)
  - Graduate students are looking for spaces to invite friends to



- Deliveries (e.g., groceries, Doordash) considerations are key for future proofing the building for the next 100 years
- Because of the workload, study spaces are important amenities. Both communal and private (in-room) study spaces are key.
- Concept of saving time vs. saving money when it comes to meals
  - Different preferences depending on the program a student is in (e.g., MBA student wants meals made because has limited time, SCARP M.A./6th year PhD student wants to make their own meals because on a limited budget)

### Selection of Favourite Precedent Images

Participants were asked to choose an image that speaks to them about this project and the needs of graduate students. The table below summarizes key themes from what participants shared back about their choice of image, speaking to why they picked their image and how they could imagine its spirit incorporated into the project. Note: not all participants shared back.

Key theme or “vibe”	Examples of Images	
Indoor communal space with greenery and natural light (E.g., photos of indoor atrium, rooms with plants indoors)		
Multipurpose and informal spaces that allow for studying/napping indoors		
Lots of favourite spaces are outdoors that have amazing views and greenery (e.g., Rose Garden, cherry blossoms)		
Provides sense of social connection and desire to have spaces to do activities with friends		



## Next Steps

Public engagement on the proposed design is taking place on May 21 and the project will be presented to the Board of Governors for approval in September. Construction is expected to begin in 2026, with an estimated completion in 2029.