Bäckbo – good life by the stream

History and present day

Vähäheikkilä is a former area of crofters (mäkitupalainen) and tenant farmers, partially located on the old fields of the Vähäheikkilä manor. The building stock mainly consists of wooden houses and detached homes built in the early decades of the 20th century, along with a small-scale industrial zone.

Historically, several larger factories have operated in the vicinity, providing employment also for the residents of Vähäheikkilä. Until 2010, the Figura factory produced bras and swimwear. The Wärtsilä factory, located by the Aura River, manufactured engines for ships and power plants.

Today, the area is home to charming small-scale industry as well as large, modern halls used for commercial and recreational purposes. The area is diverse yet fragmented: the current buildings and activities tend to turn their backs on the very area now envisioned as the heart of the new plan. An unimplemented street plan has contributed to a sense of neglect.

The new plan aims to highlight entrepreneurship and small-scale industry. A variety of functions and actors is essential for keeping the area vibrant. Efforts will be made to preserve, where possible, the structures and uses of the existing industrial halls.

The ingredients of a good life

Bäckbo offers its residents a sustainable and good life. The aim is to create a residential environment that promotes well-being and supports sustainable lifestyles at both individual and community levels. The final plan is structured around three main axes that support a good life through everyday encounters, activity, and community. In the eastern part of the area, the Generations' Park offers an inclusive and active meeting place for people of all ages, promoting well-being through movement, play, and intergenerational interaction. In the central part of the area, the Stormwater Park provides opportunities to experience nature while playing and enjoying picnics at the barbecue spots. In the west, the Event Square will become a vibrant cultural heart — a space for shared experiences, creativity, and celebration. Helping residents make sustainable choices is the Reusing and Resourcing Hub, located in the western part of the area. The hub provides opportunities for circular economy practices, sharing economy initiatives, and repair services. It includes, among other things, a tool library, a repair workshop, and a shop focused on recycled materials.

Complementing these central places are a variety of smaller everyday meeting points: the terraces at the entrance square, peaceful seating areas along the stream, lively playgrounds, and community gardens. Together, these spaces form a rich social landscape where residents can connect with each other and nature, strengthening the foundations of a sustainable and meaningful life.

Numerous cultivation areas enable sustainable and local food production, direct contact with nature, and the development of community spirit. Allotment gardens, community gardens, and courtyard planting boxes offer space for everyday green actions and strengthening food security. At the same time, they serve as places for encounters, learning, and intergenerational interaction.

Participation lies at the heart of Bäckbo's planning. The area's development emphasizes the role of residents and stakeholders as active builders of the community. Temporary design offices, workshops, and events allow people to influence the planning process in tangible ways, laying the foundation for a strong sense of ownership and identity. In this way,

Bäckbo becomes a vibrant, inclusive, and forward-looking neighborhood where a good life is within everyone's reach.

Landscape architecture

The landscape architecture builds on the existing ecological structures (open fields and meadows, woodlands and Varsoja stream), strengthening natural networks and integrating them seamlessly into the new park system. The plan connects woodland corridors, meadow ecosystems, and water and wetland routes to form a cohesive green and blue infrastructure.

Stormwater wetlands and ponds form a key part of the design, not only managing runoff but also enhancing biodiversity and creating new habitats. Water connects with the open landscape after Generations' Park, first flowing through the Stormwater Park, where it is filtered and cleaned when flowing through ponds and rocky dams before going back underground. After Uittamontie road the stream becomes a playful element in a water play area that offers opportunities for nature exploration and fun next to the daycare center. Along the arboretum the stream flows fast through rapids and slows down on dams. Finally, the stream continues through the urban landscape along a terraced and meandering channel, bringing with it services, seating areas, and new places to pause and enjoy.

The stream flowing through the district will bring life, activities, and spaces for pause to the area. It is not only a scenic and ecological backbone but also the unifying thread of the community – a quiet yet powerful connector in this sustainably developing urban neighborhood.

Existing open landscape forms another network to the park system with the water feature. Open and semi-open meadow ecosystems form a corridor on the northern side of the stream and along the wetlands. Tree canopy forms the third nature network. Existing woodlands are reserved as much as possible and new trees are planted to form a tree canopy along the southern side of the stream. The trees give shadow to the demanding stream ecosystem species. Connections through Bäckbo, that link large forest areas outside the competition area, are strengthened with new trees.

Resident involvement is central to the development and stewardship of the landscape. Local people will be engaged in stream restoration efforts, contributing to the health and vitality of the water systems while fostering a sense of ownership and care. Allotment gardens are planned as part of the landscape strategy, promoting food security, social cohesion, and intergenerational learning. Community-led landscape management events, such as planting days and seasonal maintenance workshops, will further strengthen community ties and ensure the long-term sustainability of green spaces.

Architecture and urban landscape

The architecture of the blocks draws inspiration from the surrounding mixed urban fabric. The area is thematically divided into two parts – an urban, industrial, and rugged west, and a more meadow-like, small-scale, and nature-oriented east. In the west, façades are made of brick and metal, while in the east, they feature brick and wood.

The residential buildings placed in the current small-scale industrial area are four stories high. On the compact plots, T-shaped low-rise apartment buildings are proposed, whose form and functionality can be tailored according to the plot owner's preferences. These buildings take advantage of the elongated plot shape, creating as much space as possible opening to the south and west. The north and south ends of each plot feature flexible courtyard areas that can accommodate garden functions, covered parking, commercial space, or other uses necessary for the new buildings. The largest new

block will include student housing and a public sauna open to all residents of the area.

Some existing industrial buildings will be preserved due to their value to the cityscape. These spaces will accommodate workspaces for artists as well as small-scale commercial units. The easternmost plots of the industrial area will host a self-sufficiency and circular economy center, featuring a small café and shop, a tool-lending and repair service, an apiary, and a large greenhouse. Next to it, in an existing industrial hall, a neighborhood cinema will be established with a new entrance and restroom facilities.

Next to the Figura building, a new community house will be built, bringing together a pop up library point, multi-purpose and meeting rooms, a performance space, and hobby areas under one roof. The two-storey brick building opens southward with stairs leading to the new Event Square.

To the east of the area, along Vähäheikkiläntie road, new three- and four-storey low-rise apartment buildings will be constructed. The floor plans are adaptable, allowing apartments to be combined to suit various life situations. All apartments face south and have balconies, while ground-floor units feature private yards at street level. The shared courtyards include planter boxes for small-scale gardening, fruit and berry trees, a courtyard sauna, a storage building, a playground, and outdoor seating. These buildings also serve as a noise barrier between the park and Vähäheikkiläntie road.

A new residential block for senior citizens will also be located in the eastern part of the area. This block is enclosed and divided into several three- to four-storey sections. The main building, located along the edge of the park, includes a public lunch restaurant on the ground floor and a rooftop terrace.

Development and meanwhile use

The careful and phased development of the area, along with the temporary and adaptable use of spaces, is a central part of our planning process. The aim is for the area to serve diverse user groups from the earliest stages of planning and construction. Temporary use allows for experimentation, supports future decisions, and creates space for communal activities even before the area is fully completed.

Art and culture play a key role in both the development phase and the final identity of the area. Art will bring life to the space during the construction phase, both indoors and outdoors. For example, the former ABC service station will serve as a platform for art and events. Spaces for artistic work and small-scale commercial activities—such as cafés, bakeries, and restaurants—will also be sought within the small-scale industrial buildings, reinforcing the character of the area and serving both current and future residents. In the final plan, art will link the different parts of the area together, creating a recognizable and distinctive identity.

The area will be developed in three phases. The first phase focuses on traffic arrangements and the initiation of temporary uses. Necessary modifications will be made to Vähäheikkiläntie street, including improvements to walking and cycling routes. Porkanpuisto park will be transformed into a temporary flower-picking field by sowing annual meadow flowers.

The construction of a stormwater park will also begin in this phase on the meadow between Uittamontie road and Ispoisten puistotie road. The former ABC service station in the area will be activated with art and cultural programming through the City of Turku's *Kulttuurin välitila* initiative. The surrounding area and parking lots will be enlivened with movable furniture and exercise equipment, temporarily transforming the space into a park.

The building at Vähäheikkiläntie 54 will also be taken into temporary use. A pop-up planning office will be established there to present development plans and host co-design events with residents. The same space will be used to pilot functions intended for the future community house. In the small-scale industrial area, pilot services will be tested by temporarily using buildings on city-owned plots. The future streamside area will be activated by removing parking spaces and introducing greenery, seating, and play and recreational spaces.

The second phase will focus on the construction of residential and community buildings. Porkanpuisto will be equipped with a barbecue area and urban gardens, and its paths will be improved and connected to nearby recreational routes. Along Ispoisten puistotie road, a senior housing block and a Generations' Park will be built, while the alignment of Puistomäentie road will be adjusted. New housing will also be developed along Vähäheikkiläntie road. On the west side of Uittamontie road, a stormwater basin and water play areas will be constructed. The central pedestrian path will be strengthened, and infill development with detached houses will occur along Puistomäentie road.

A new community house will be built on the Vähäheikkiläntie 54 plot. The temporary planning office and community spaces will move to the small-scale industrial area. Temporary outdoor furnishings will remain in use, and the entrance square at the western end will be built and integrated into the park pathway. At the same time, the area will be connected to the developing Pihlajaniemi neighborhood on the other side of Rykmentintie road.

In the third phase, residential buildings and the Resourcing and Reusing Hub will be constructed within the small-scale industrial area, and preserved buildings will be adapted for new uses.

The effectiveness of temporary uses will be evaluated annually, and the insights gathered will inform ongoing planning efforts. Temporary activities provide an opportunity for different city departments to test new services and develop cooperation models. For example, the culture, sports, youth, and facility services departments will be able to pilot innovative practices in the area.

Temporary solutions create space for experimentation and offer flexibility in responding to a changing world. They support sustainable development—ecologically, economically, socially, and culturally. Temporary uses help shape the area's identity, engage residents, and create meaningful places even before permanent structures are in place.

Resident and Stakeholder Engagement

Resident, business, and stakeholder engagement will begin early, ensuring that the area's development reflects community needs, especially in public spaces and services. A temporary planning office, located in Vähäheikkiläntie 54, will act as a central hub for participation, hosting co-design events and enabling interactive dialogue.

Special focus will be placed on including voices across generations—children, youth, and seniors—through collaboration with local institutions. Existing businesses, particularly those in the Figura building, will also play a key role in shaping the area's identity.

A residents' council will support the planning process by offering feedback and strengthening trust between planners and the community. Early-stage pop-up spaces will allow for testing community services and co-creating the future community house, fostering collaboration and a strong sense of local ownership.