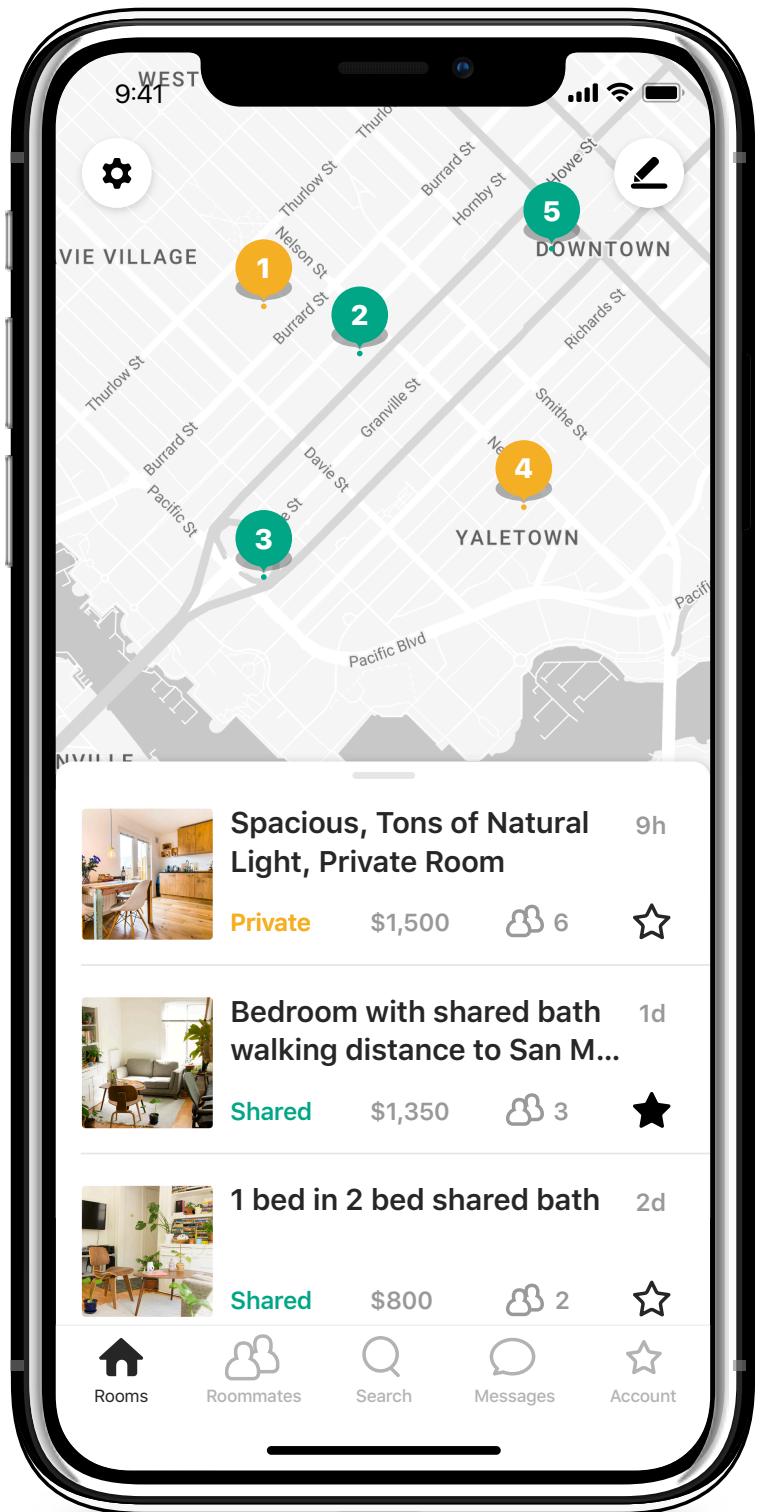


PRACTICE PROMPT

Room Finder

Many people on the rental market have a hard time finding an apartment in their price range and desired location. One solution is to live with roommates. But what do you do when you don't already have potential roommates lined up? Design the search & results screen for a mobile app that helps people find available rooms in shared houses or apartments near a selected area.



PROPOSAL

Roomer

Roomer is a mobile app with a search experience that encourages users to explore and discover rooms and roommates through a chain of posts that are connected through people's interest. Designed with the goal to help people find a room and/or roommate that fulfills their needs.

The Problem

People are having difficulties finding a new place to live in that is within their budget and desired location.

One solution to this would be finding a roommate, but that in itself is not an easy task.

Due to the purpose of this prompt, I won't be focusing on the problem itself, but the current experience within this sector and how I approached it.

"Since you're living with this person every day, it's not a process I like to rush. Some people just want a person to fill the room and pay the rent. Not me. I'm looking for the right match."

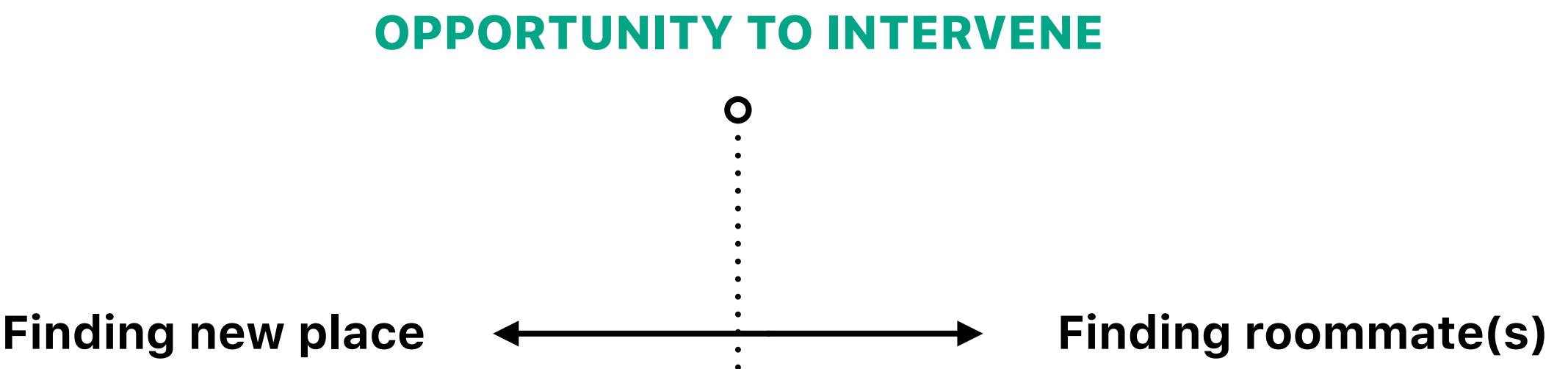
Hilary Lane, has gone roommate hunting 4 times in 6 years
[Washington Post, 2016](#)

Scope



To afford to live in the place they wish to, they must find someone to split the bills with, but also to live in the same space everyday. Not everyone has the perfect roommate lined up before they move, as this in itself is a factor that people spend a lot of time to pick carefully.

Finding the right place is even more difficult when you're struggling to find the perfect roommate. So I narrowed down the scope by framing the problem around improving the experience behind finding roommates in order to improve the current experience within room finding.



"It's not like most other relationships, where you're open-minded. I'm signing a contract to live with you for at least a year; I'm going to find out every bit of information."

— Anne McNulty, found one of her best friends through a Craigslist ad she posted when searching for roommates

Existing Services



There are many services that have made an attempt to become the leading platform to help people find their perfect roommates. Some connect with Facebook profiles to match each other's interest, some ask users to rate themselves, and some encourage users to answer a very long survey about their lifestyle and personality.

Is the roommate hunting system that bad?
Does it need improvement?
Is it capable of being improved? } YES, BUT WHY?
WHAT IS THE STRUGGLE?

Craigslist
Anonymity
No Registration
vs.
Safety + Security

PICKING THE RIGHT PERSON

Why is it difficult?

CONTEXT/ENVIRONMENT

↳ TOO MANY BAD MATCHES due to
the city's poor economy + lack of
safety/security on Craigslist.

"In order to "disrupt" a system, that system has to be both in need of improvement and capable of being improved."

Kim Velsey, senior editor of New York Observer
[Observer, 2014](#)

Key Insights



I gathered some insights after conducting research on the user base as well as the sector.

*"We have so much more experience in dealing with social situations and picking up on social cues than reading through résumés and applications, **it's hard for someone to form a judgment or even a gut feeling just looking at a piece of paper."***

— Sander van der Linden, a social psychologist at Princeton University

- ▶ **One way to find the best fit quickly is by tracing your own social network; "friend-of-a-friend".**
- ▶ **Craigslist is the primary method for a reason: it gets the job done without requiring users to reveal any information about themselves.**
- ▶ **People cannot confidently evaluate someone until they meet in person.**
- ▶ **Finding a roommate is less personal than online dating.**

Recap



After conducting some research on the demographic and context of the service, I asked myself three questions to come up with a few design principles to identify what to focus on.

WHO ARE WE DESIGNING FOR?

People in search of a **new place and/or a new roommate**.

WHAT PROBLEM ARE WE TRYING TO SOLVE?

Difficulties finding a place that fulfills your desire/need: **budget, location, roommate**.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

People could search for a new place **when and wherever they want** and find potential roommates **accurately**.

WHAT DOES FAILURE LOOK LIKE?

The feature that was intended to provide **additional value becomes a friction** due to lack of actual benefits.

Allowing users to access when and wherever could lower the barrier of entry for spammers.

Design Principles

I aimed for an experience that allows for a quick exploration without registering, while emphasizing the discoverability and relevancy of each post.



Anonymous

The service must promote the user's safety and anonymity.



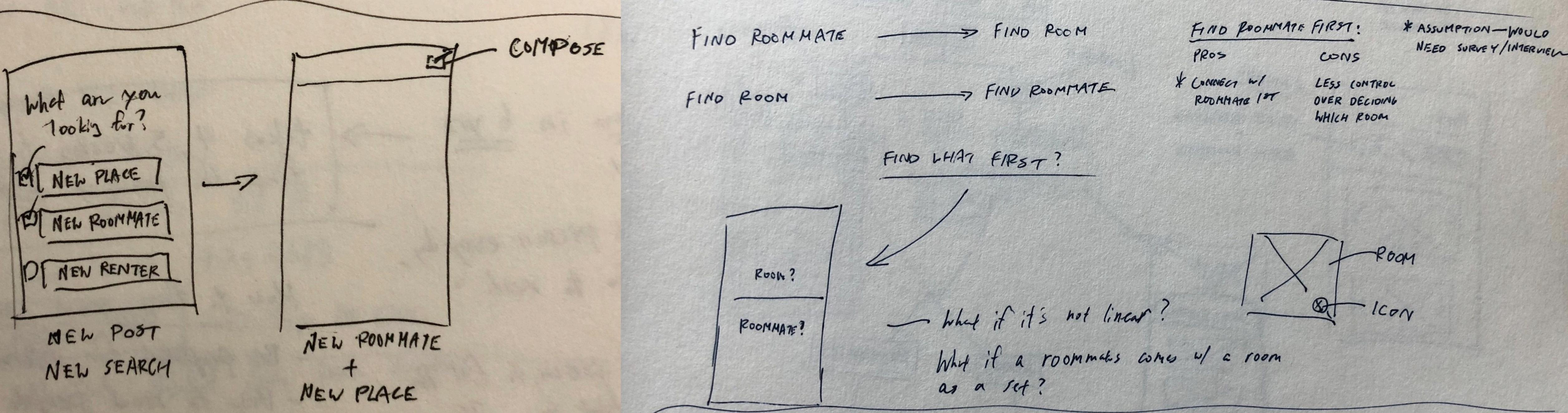
Quick Evaluation

The service must allow for a quick search while providing useful information.



Explore & Discover

The service must afford exploration and present different results to improve discoverability.



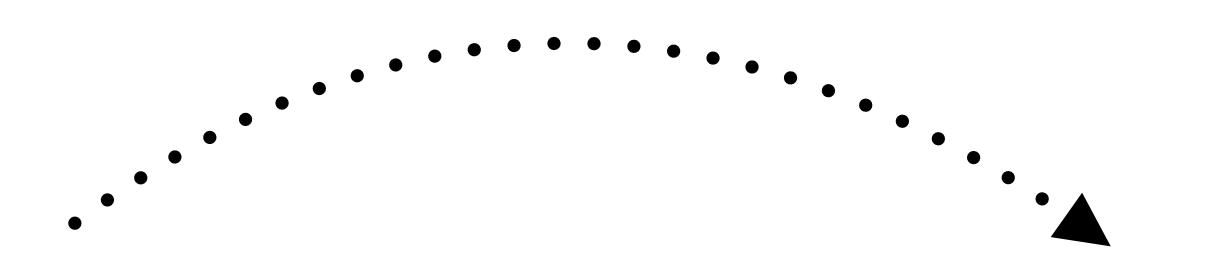
Initial Concept 🌐

When jumping onto the UI, I began thinking about what content users would see first. At first, I drew out the UI to only offer one path, to find roommate(s) first and find a place together, with the assumption that this approach would encourage people to get along with their roommates. But what if people don't want to be friends with their roommates? The UI must allow users to pick what to search for based on their needs.

Current Behaviour



When beginning this process, people either look for roommates first and find a place together, or find a new place they like and then seek for potential roommates who are interested. Although this is a matter of preference, the latter is more popular since the person will get more control when making decisions down the road, such as interviewing potential roommates, deciding how to split the bill, etc.

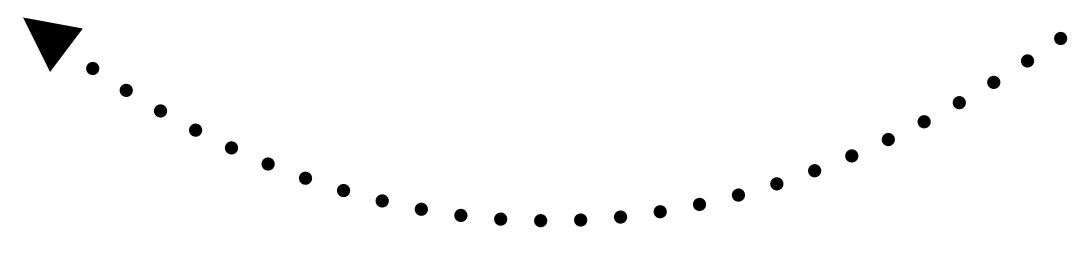


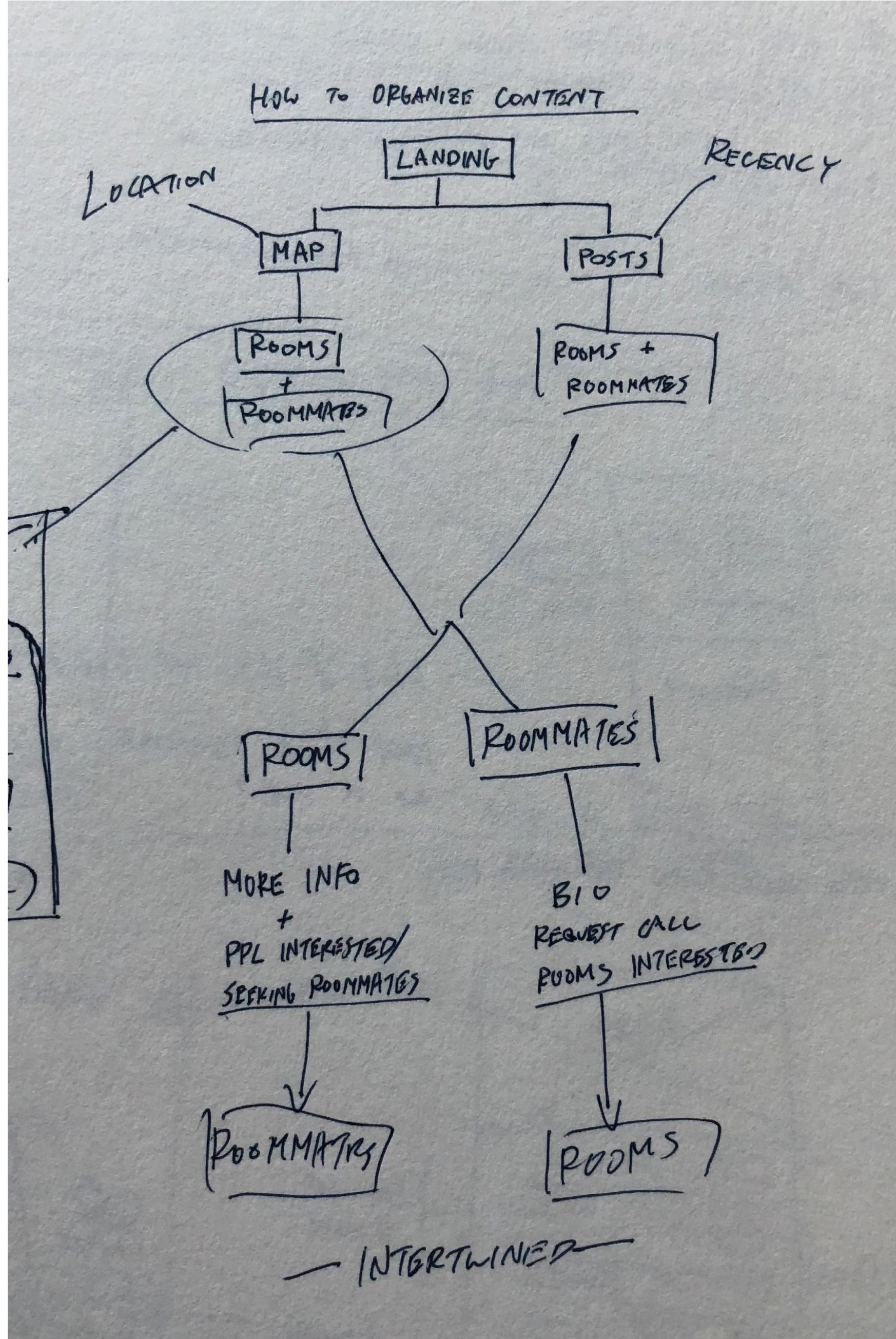
**FIND NEW PLACE WITHIN
BUDGET + DESIRED LOCATION**



Which one should I find first?

**FIND A ROOMMATE TO
SPLIT THE BILLS WITH**



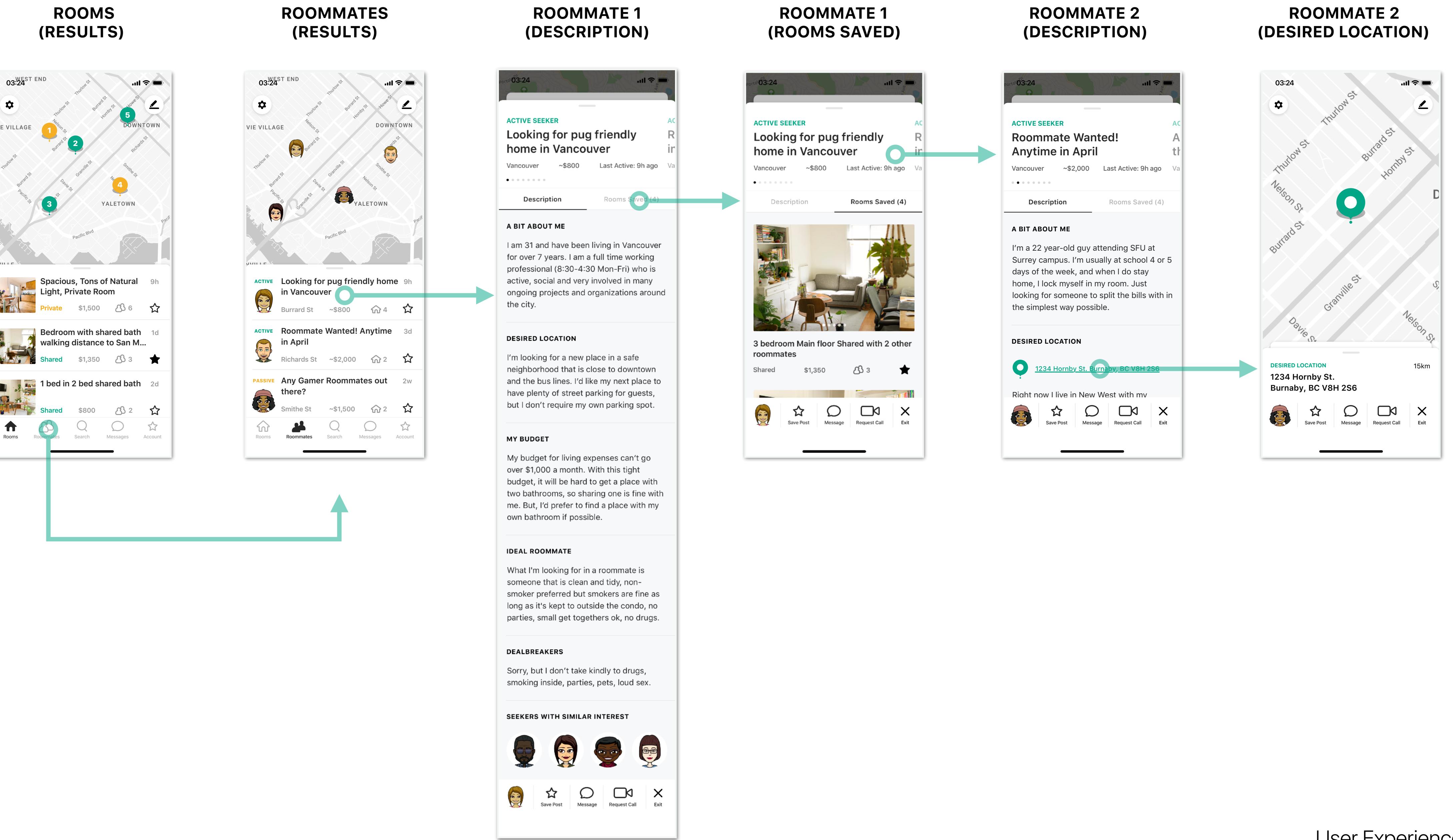


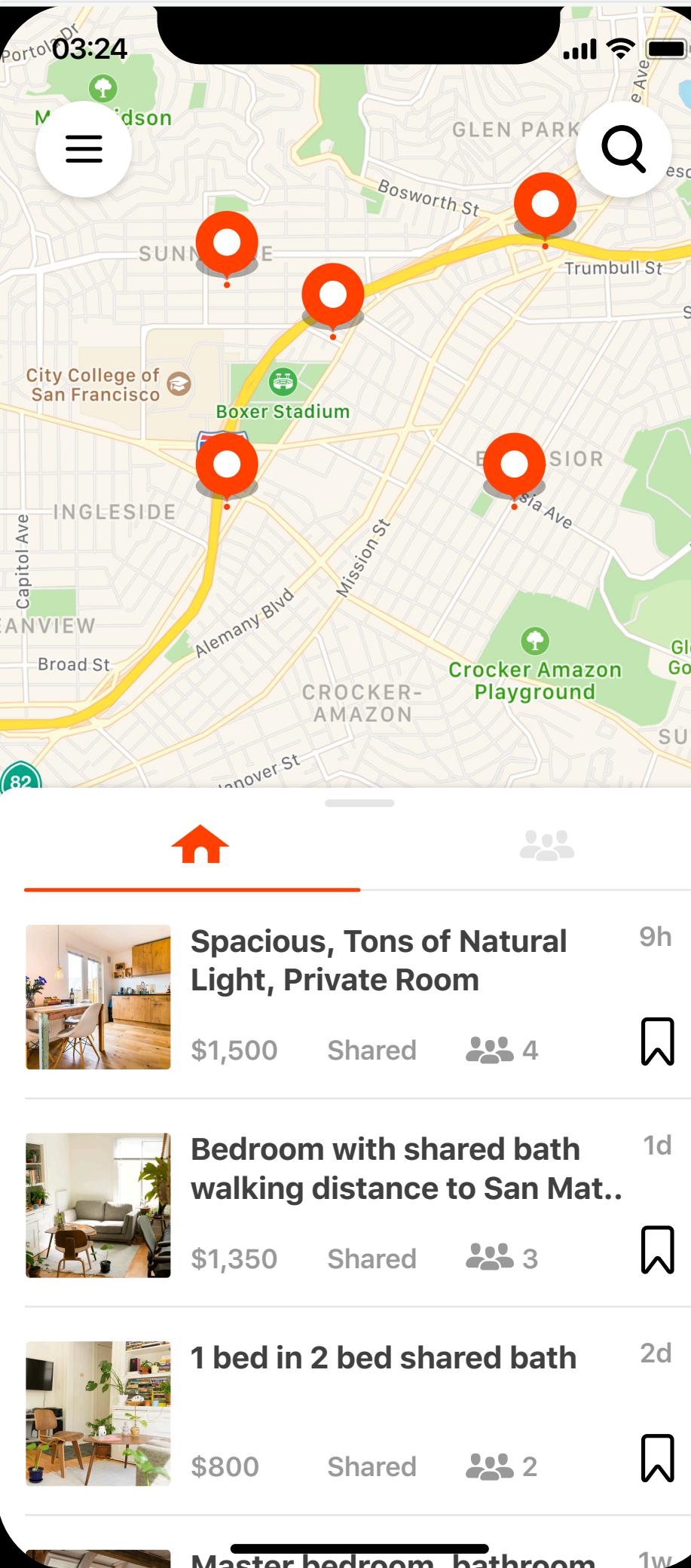
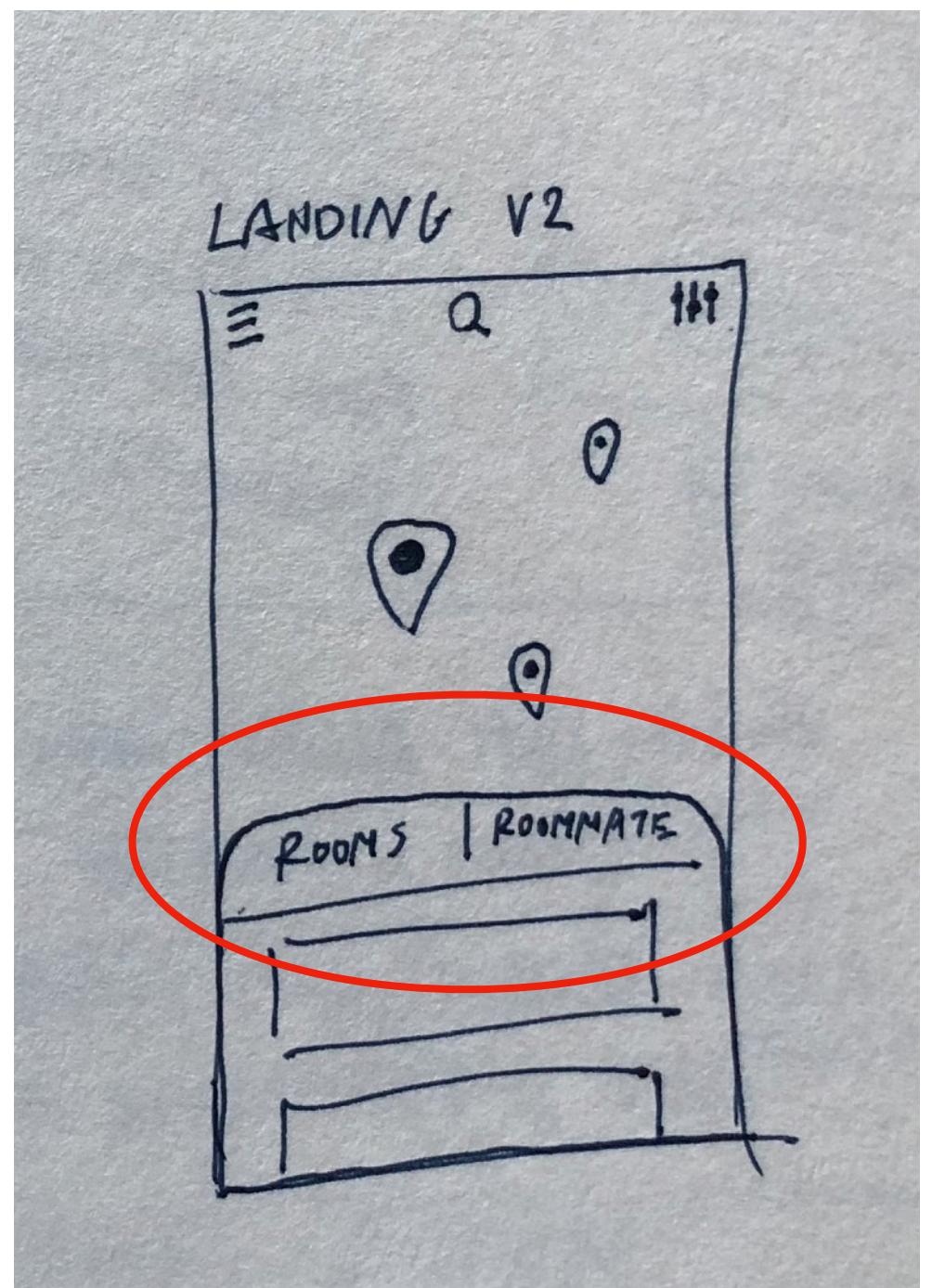
Explore & Discover



I wanted the overall user experience to mimic that natural behaviour by **providing multiple ways to search for rooms or roommates.**

By taking this approach, I was able to weave the content by creating more than one path to find rooms and/or roommates, as this allowed users for **more exploration and enhanced the discoverability** of relevant information.

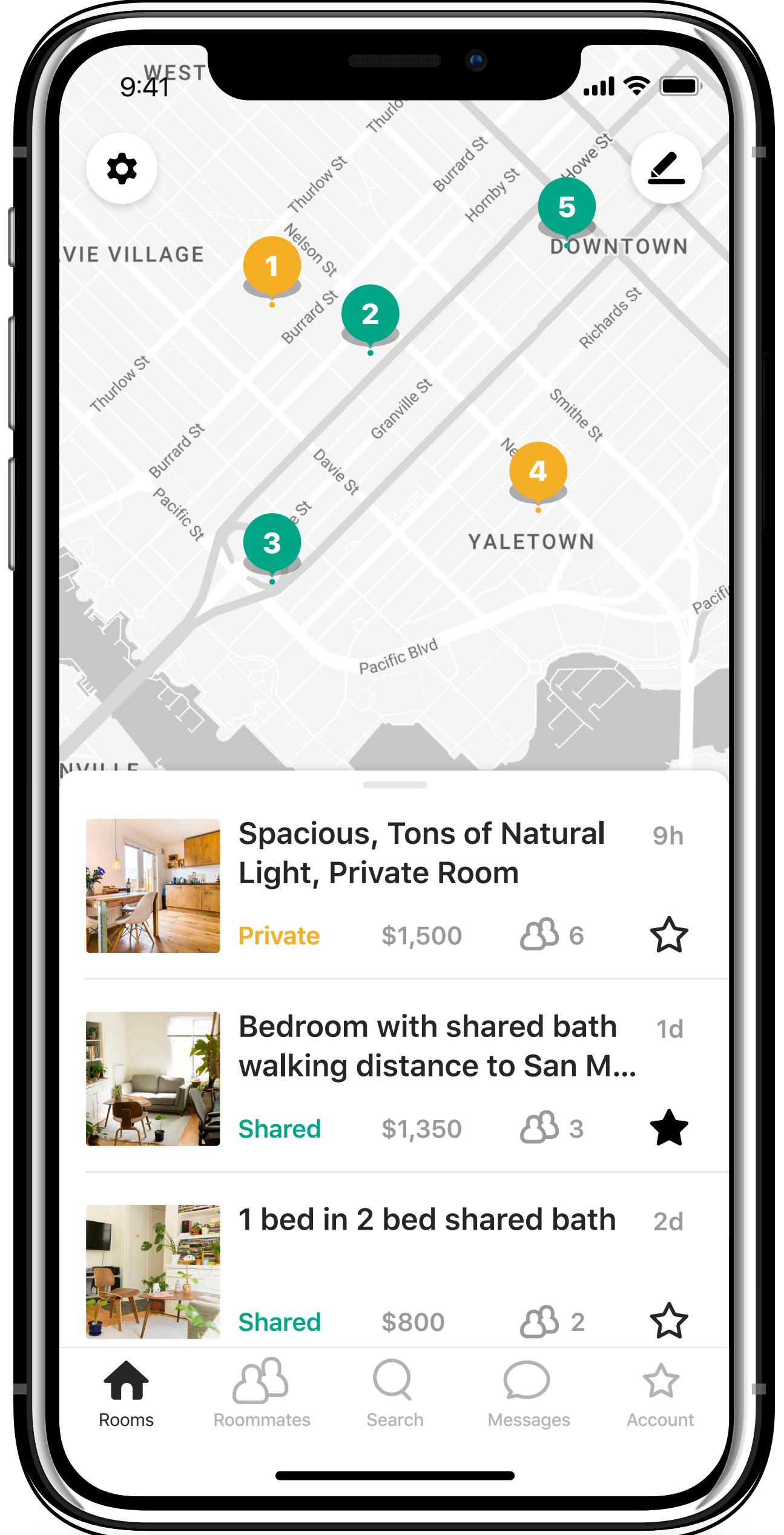




LANDING SCREEN

Early Iterations

In the early iterations of the landing screen, I only placed two tabs to split the content inside the card since I initially aimed for a quick search experience. Yet after reframing the problem around finding roommates and providing value, it became necessary to design the navigation for an experience that allows users to explore and find results from multiple angles.



LANDING SCREEN

Exploration

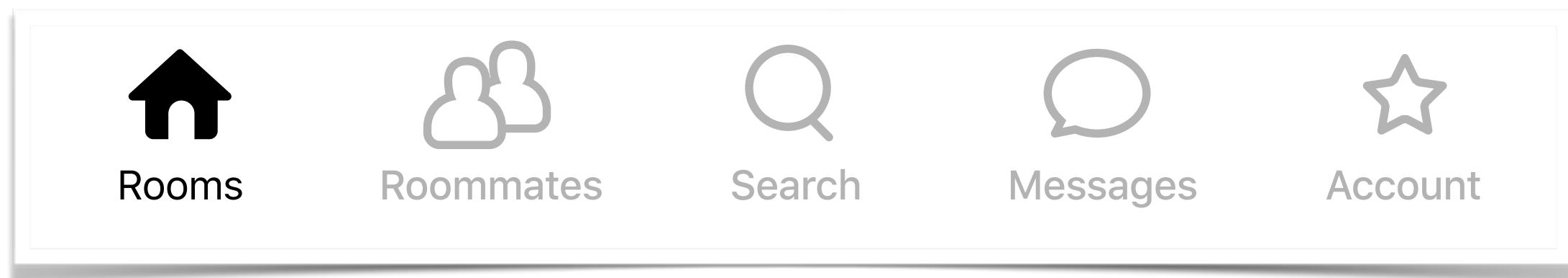
This is the landing screen of the app. Users are presented with a map and a list of available rooms around their current location. Users would be able to adjust their location and radius by scaling the map or by tapping on the “more” button on the top left.

With multiple ways to explore, users could follow their intuition by searching based on their needs and priorities. The bottom navigation bar allows users to see their options upfront while intertwining the content to make different results discoverable.

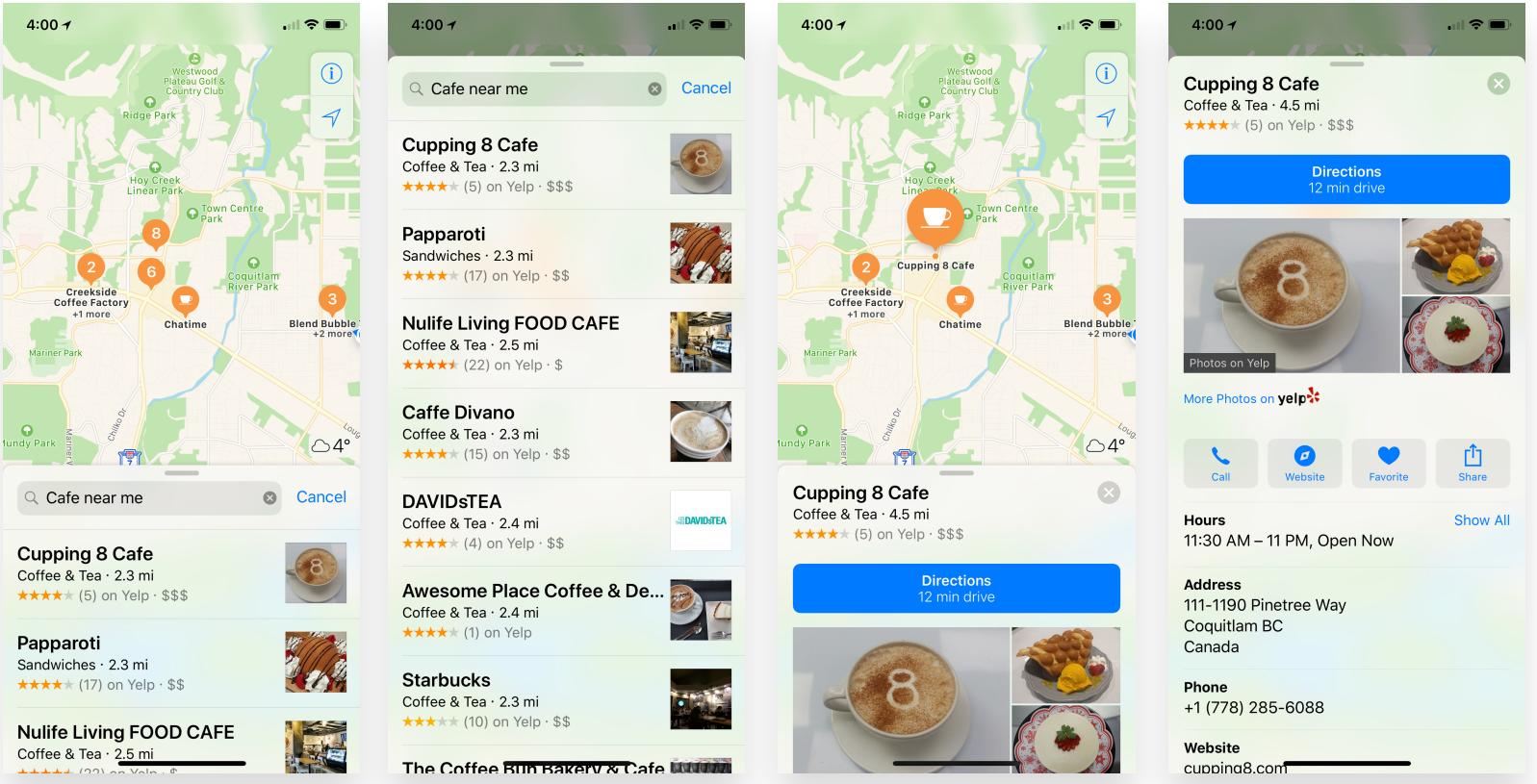
Navigation



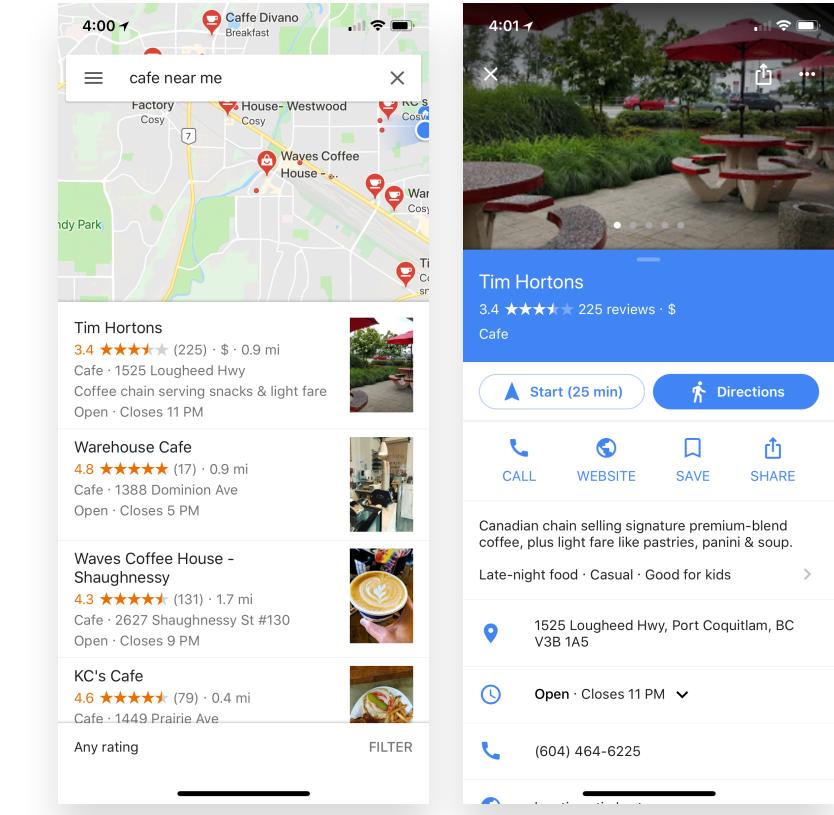
I brought down the two tabs and integrated the bottom navigation bar to afford exploration. By making this decision, I was able to bring down the search button—prominent feature of this experience—and create the “Add Post” button on the top right. I imagine that creating your own post wouldn’t require the user to register for an account, similar to how Craigslist works.



"Search + Find"

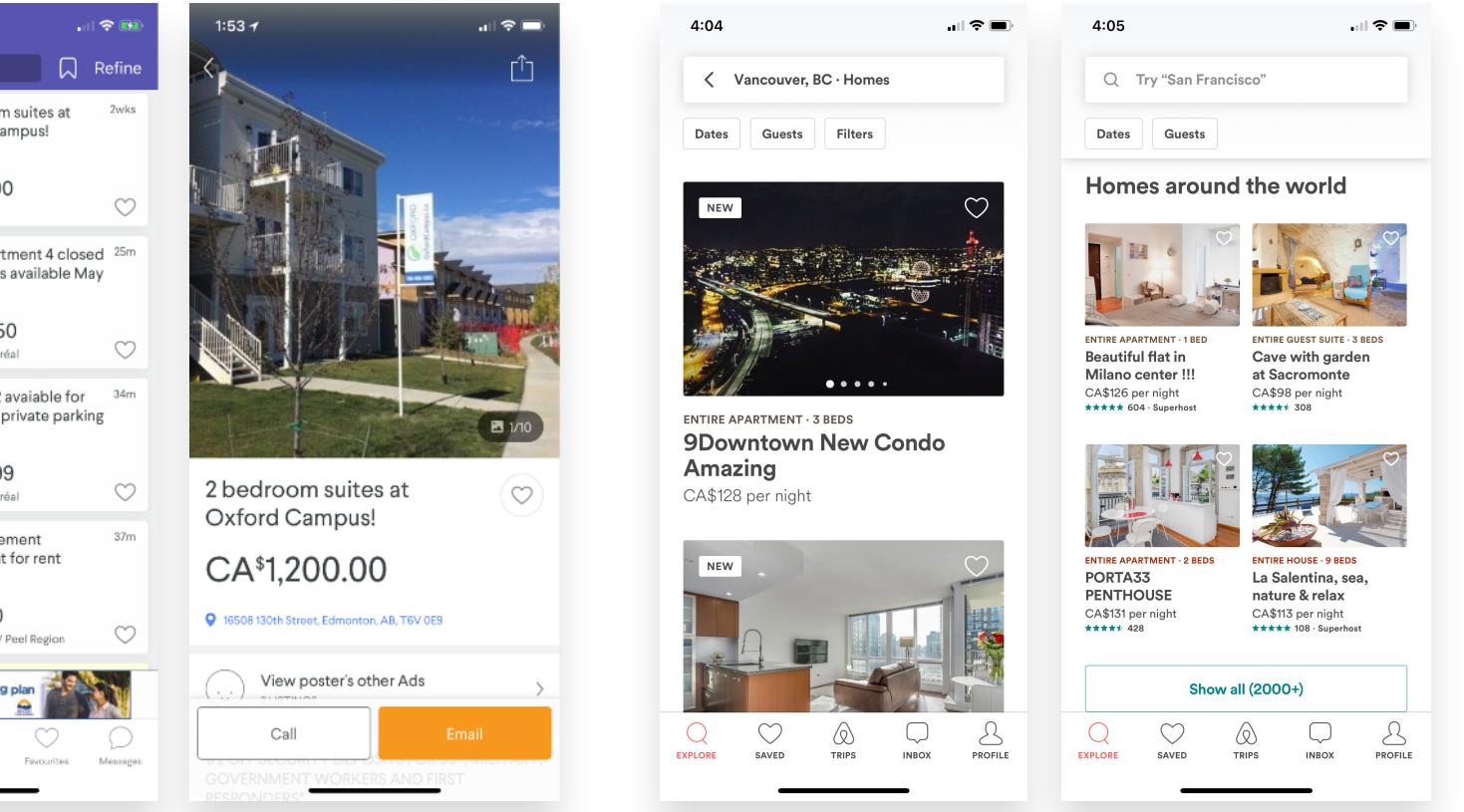


iOS Maps



Google Maps

"Search + Consider"



Kijiji

Airbnb

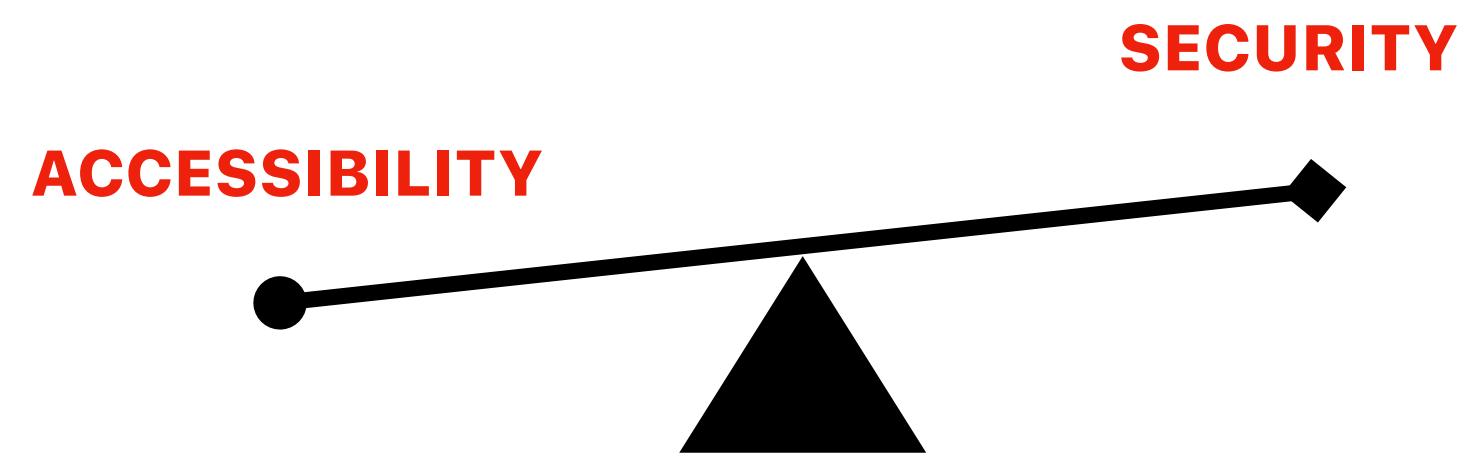
INSIGHT

Precedents 😐

After making this refinement, I realized how the iOS Map and Google Maps, that contain the interactive map with card overlay, are more aimed for a "search and find" experience, whereas Airbnb and Kijiji, which contain the bottom navigation bar, are both more for "search and consider". Of course this is due to the purpose of the product and the UX/UI reflecting the context.

Appeal of Craigslist

After looking into different services and how people find roommates, I learned that the primary method of finding roommates is through Craigslist. Craigslist is powerful because it lets people post whenever, wherever, and browse with ease without registering for an account.



HUFFINGTON POST: 04/06/2012 07:32 pm ET | Updated Dec 06, 2017

San Francisco Craigslist Roommate Nightmares

\$650 — room, room, room (pittsburg / antioch)

"Willing to barter for room or partial rent or all rent. Welcome all offers however random. One time someone offered to be a house mouse / sex slave. Worked out for a week took some great photo's in the studio."

\$300 Shared housing, lookin for a fun female roommate :-) (san jose north)

"And what I am looking for is a roommate that is single, (or at least not attached to someone), and would love to live in a home for very little rent and also would love to share the same bed a few nights a week ;-) hehehe... You wouldn't just be renting a room, you would be renting a whole home for only \$300 per month,,, If you're interested, send some pictures."

\$50 cheap rent and servant

"I enjoy financially taking care of women and being a servant to them. I am willing to provide free rent and complete control over the household and over me. You would have no obligation, sexual or otherwise. If this interests you, please email me.."

Red Flag District

Despite being the go-to platform for room/roommate finding, Craigslist holds numerous problems within its system. Safety has always been a concern, especially with posts for roommates, users must be careful with the information they give out online.

Anonymity was one of the main concepts behind the user experience, yet it also conflicted with the idea of Safety. Remaining anonymous is one reason why a service would feel safe for users since they aren't required to reveal any personal information, but this small-ask lowers the barrier of entry for scammers. The down side to this is that this open system contains inconsistencies in terms of the legitimacy of the posts and responses.

Why Do Third-Party Services Fail !?

People continue to use Craigslist because they know other people use it as well.

More users mean more results. Craigslist also contains the most unfiltered results and despite the scammers, many posts are in fact relevant. The interface may not be the best but it's simple and easy to use for people to find what they need.



Lack of long-term users

People look for a new place or roommate a few times a year.



Cyclical

A lot more people search during off-campus housing season.



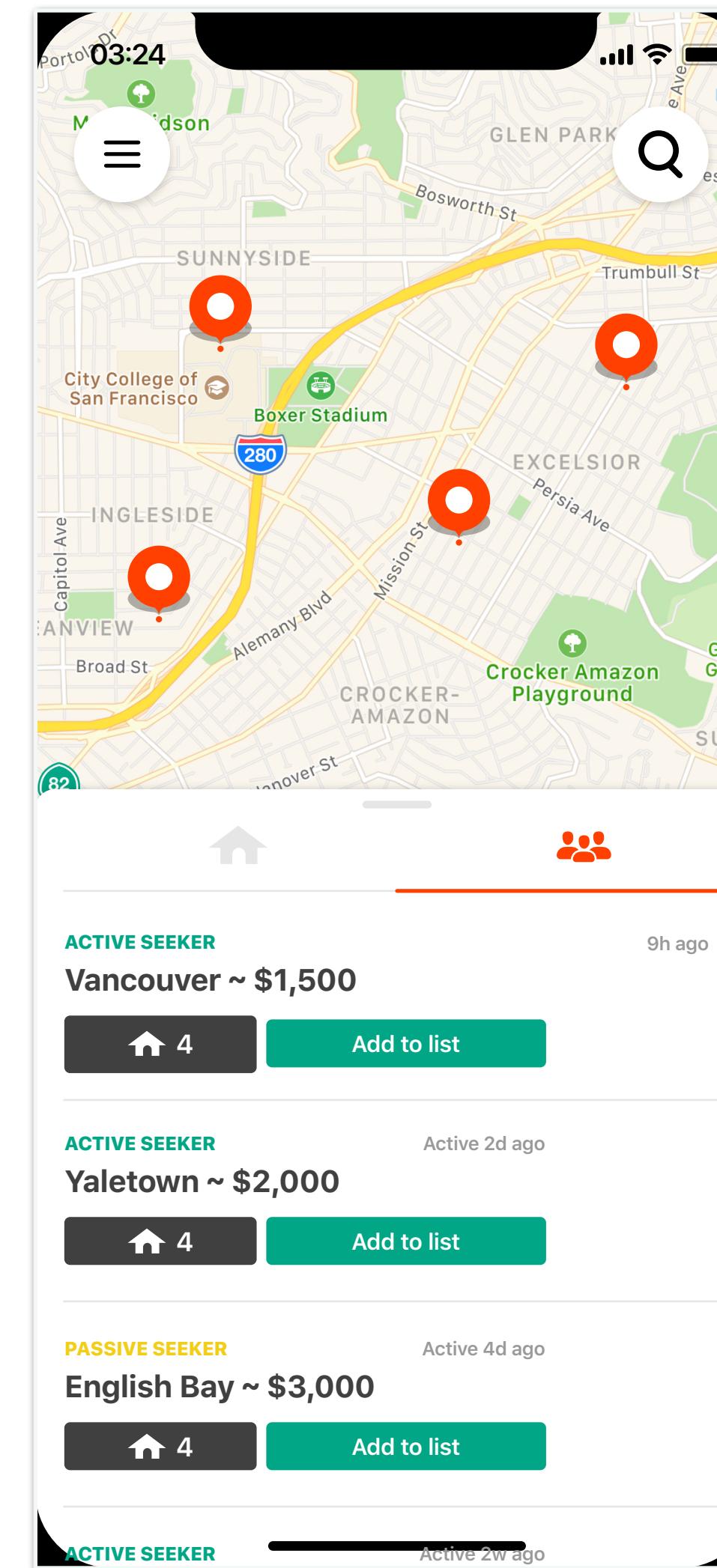
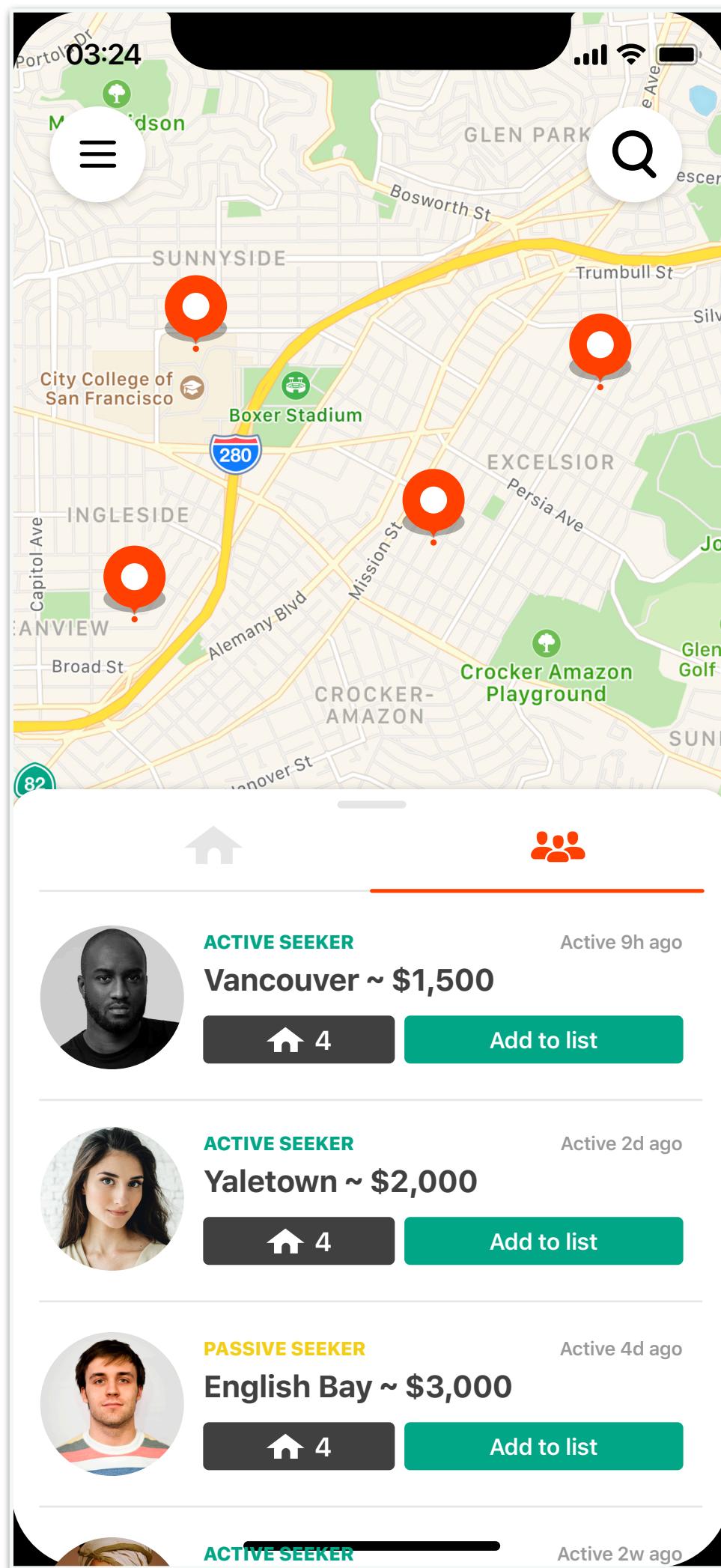
Generating growth

Services are expensive so they struggle to reach people.



Monetization

People will use Craigslist because it's free and has more users.



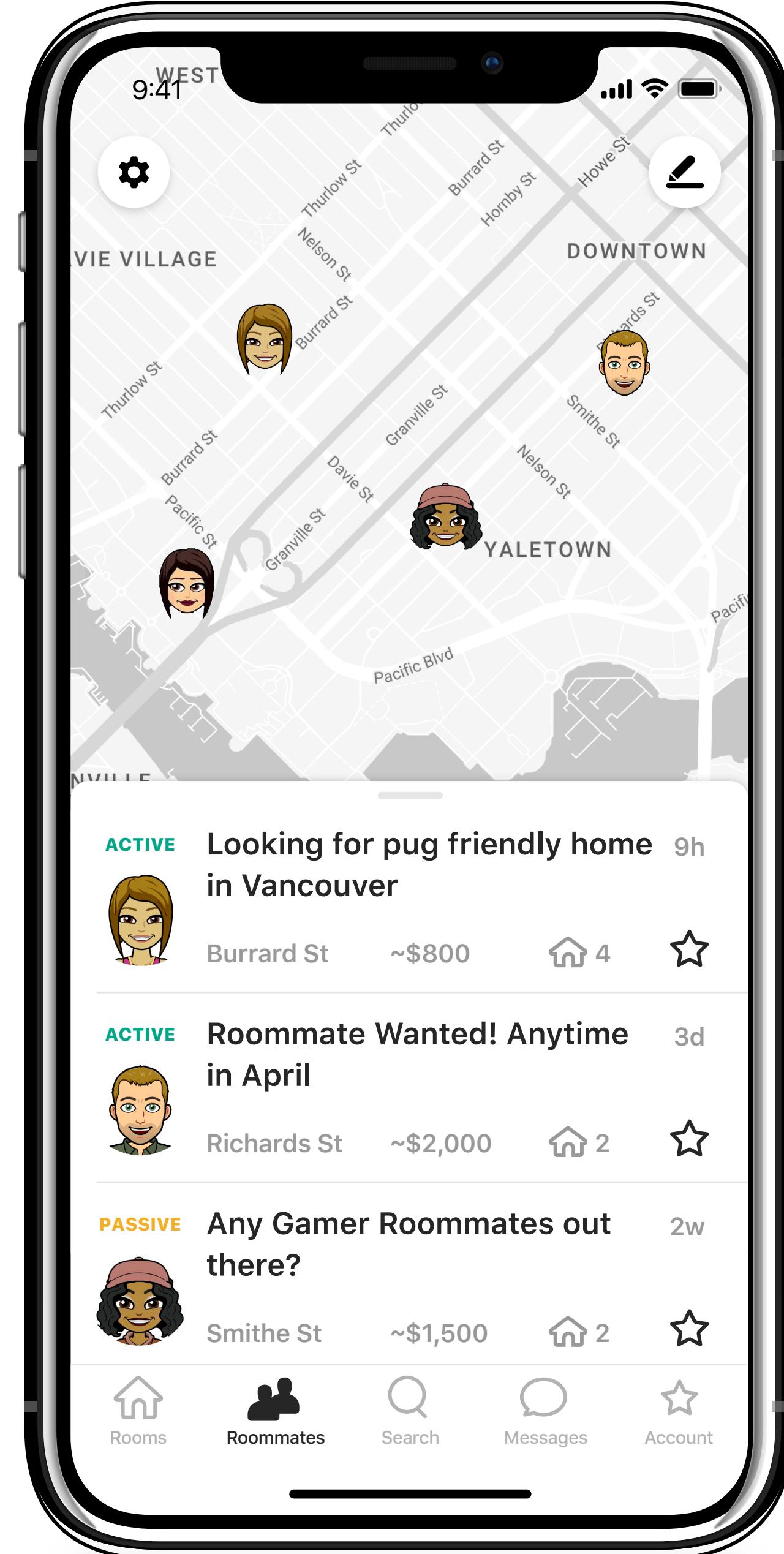
EARLY ITERATIONS

ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Anonymity

Prior to implementing the concept of anonymity, the earlier iteration included profile pictures for each post for roommates. The intention behind this was to convey a more personal feeling. I wanted to convey people's character through the Roommate section of the UI.

Yet this went against the idea of anonymity so I wanted to figure out a way for users to remain anonymous while being able to convey their character. After I removed the images, the posts became mundane and impersonal, so I wanted these posts to express users' personalities without revealing their identity or meeting in-person.



ROOMMATES: RESULTS

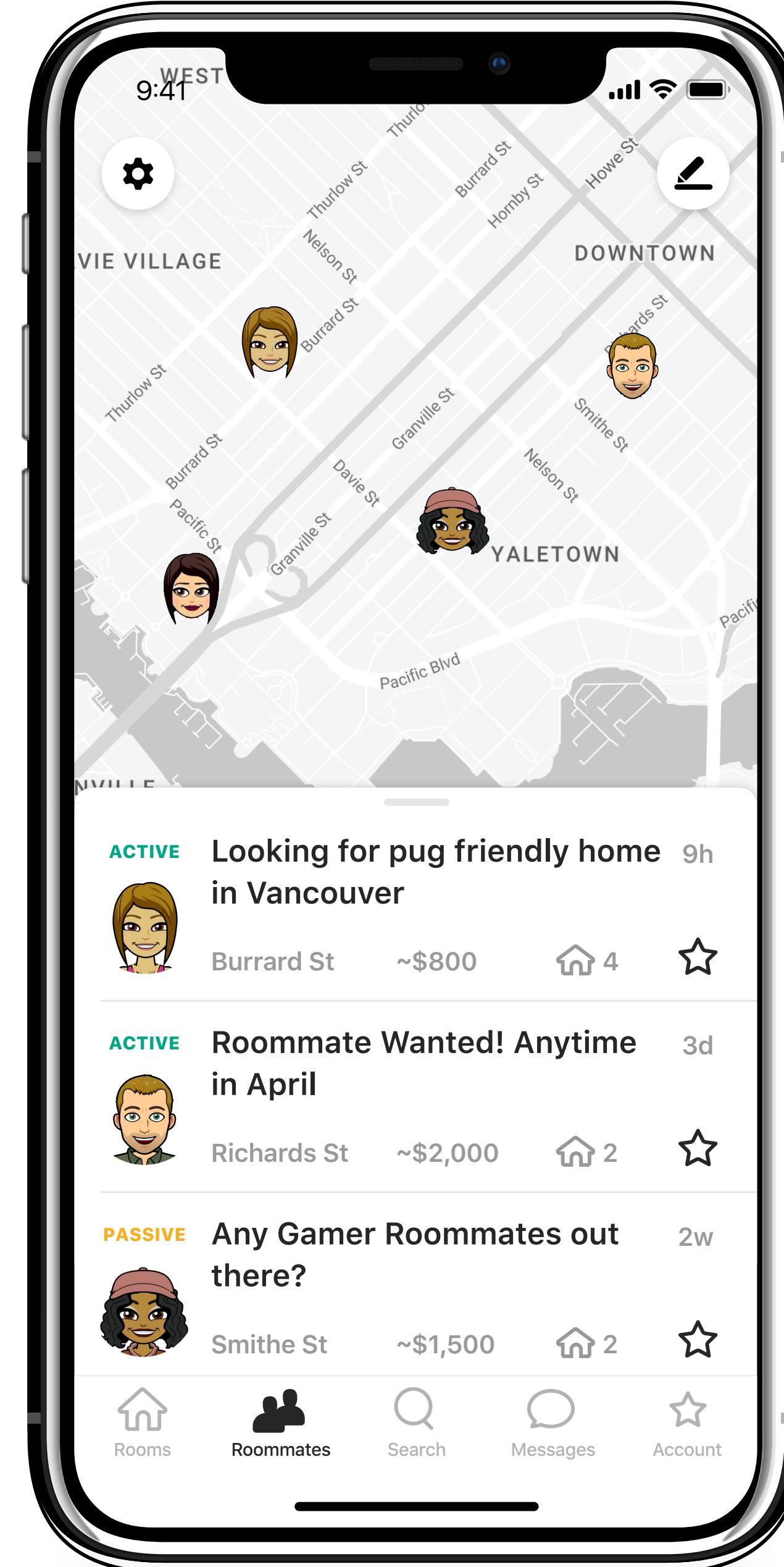
Bitmoji



My solution to this was the integration of Bitmoji. With this, users don't have to fully reveal themselves but can still give a glimpse of their identity through the digital space.

Bitmoji is a product used by millions of people everyday, and they continue their growth today. Bitmoji acts as this middle-ground between a selfie and an emoji. It's able to communicate what emojis cannot, which is an "identity" and. An emoji could be anyone in the world, but a Bitmoji becomes a symbolic representation of yourself.

Today, Bitmoji is your digital identity.



Benefits of Bitmoji



Digital Identity

Allows users to remain anonymous while portraying themselves in a playful way.

Incentive to Register

Only account holders would be able to use Bitmoji to give users an incentive to create an account. Another benefit of creating an account would be saving posts.

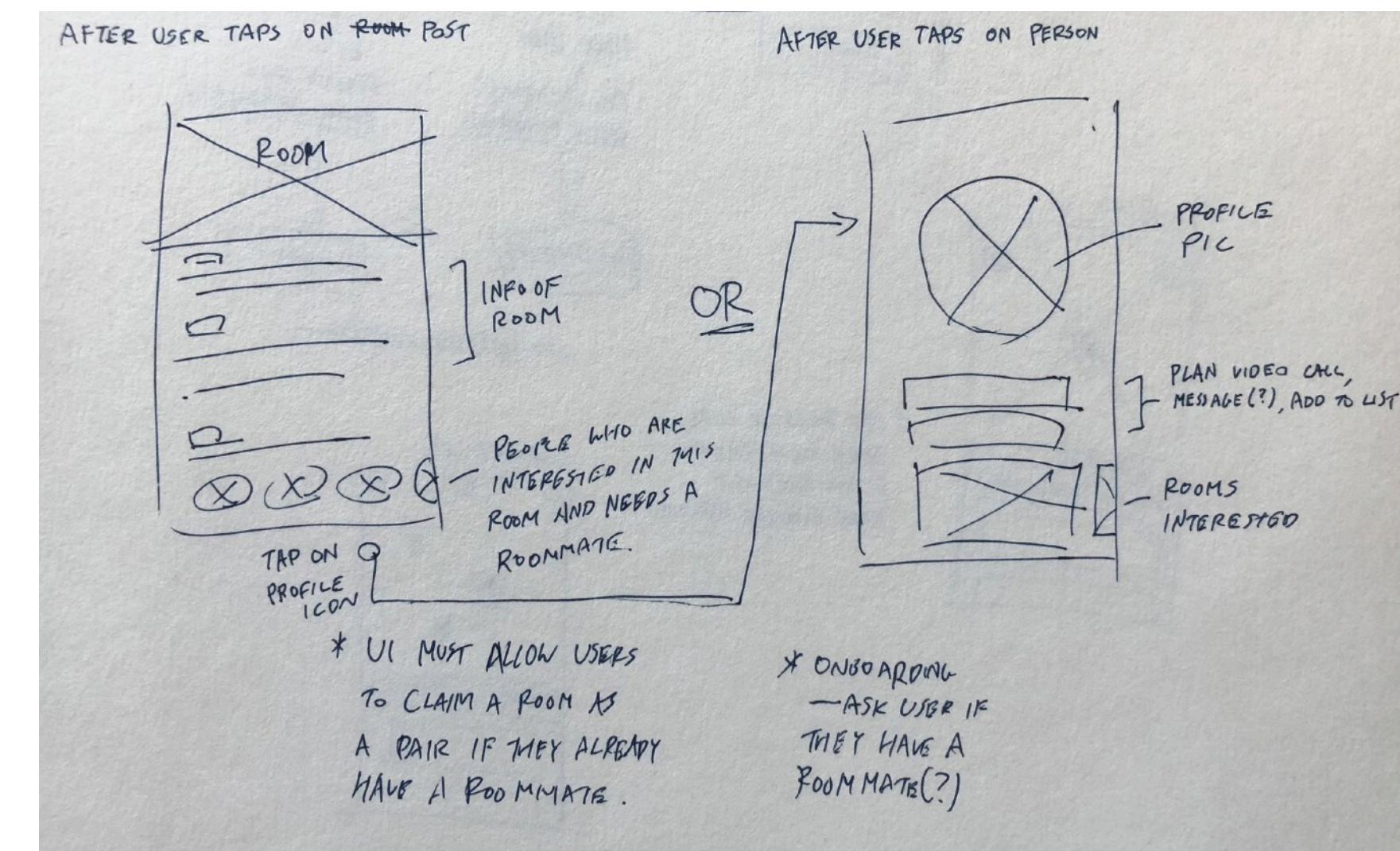
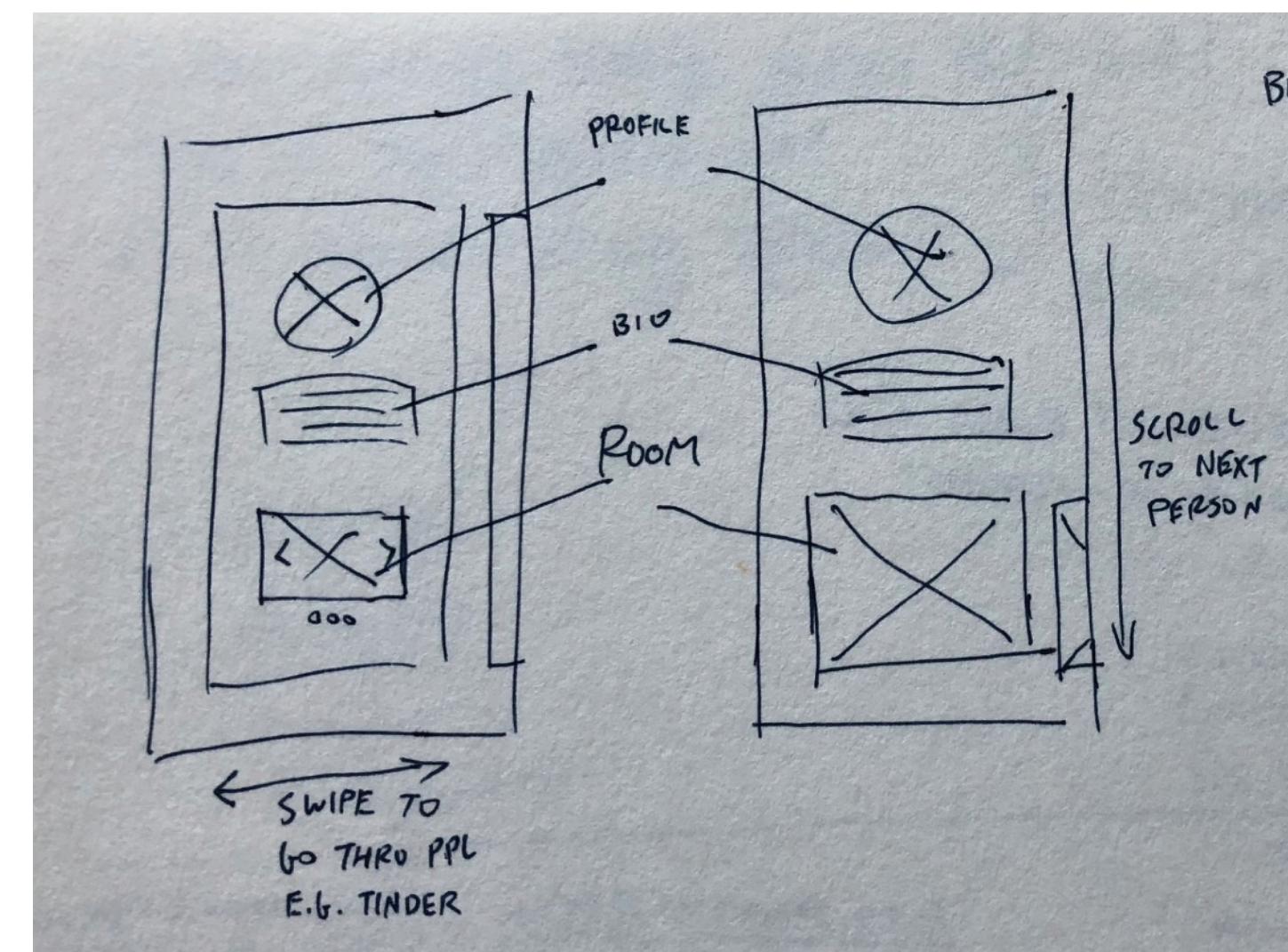
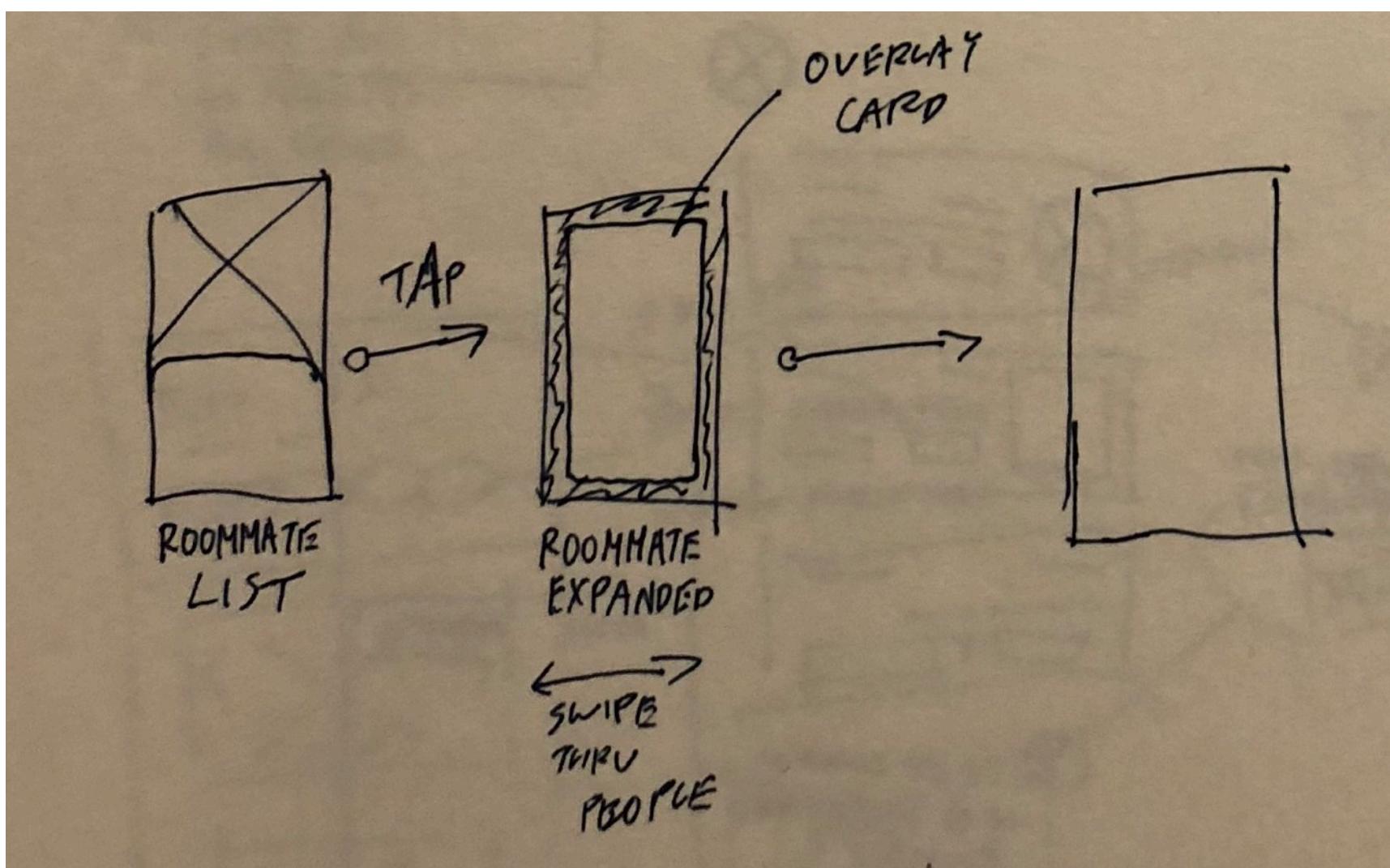
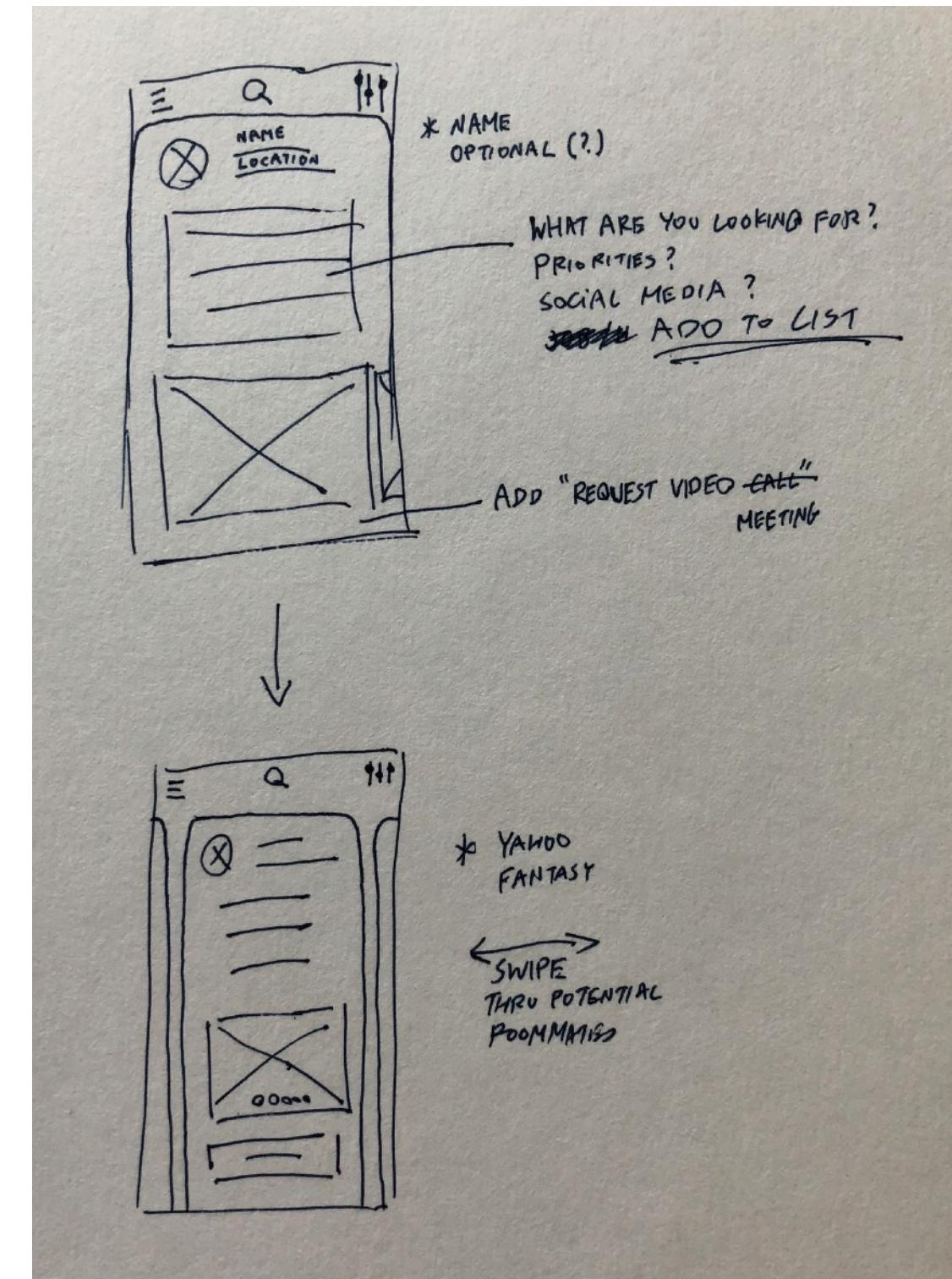
Safety

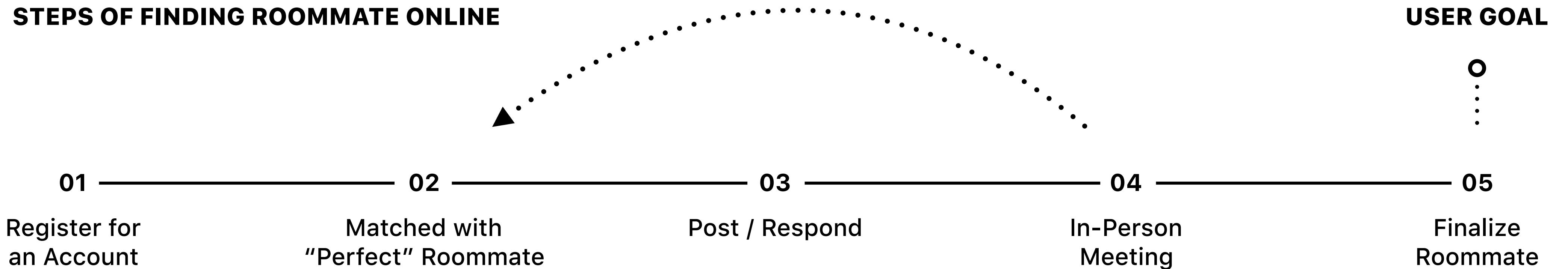
ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Early Exploration

Next was the screen after the user taps on a post. Again, going back to the concept of Quick Evaluation, I wanted users to be able to get the most useful information quickly while navigating through a list of potential roommates.

Some attempts I made was the card-style that allow users to swipe through posts, as well as making different entry points to present posts that are similar to the user's interests.



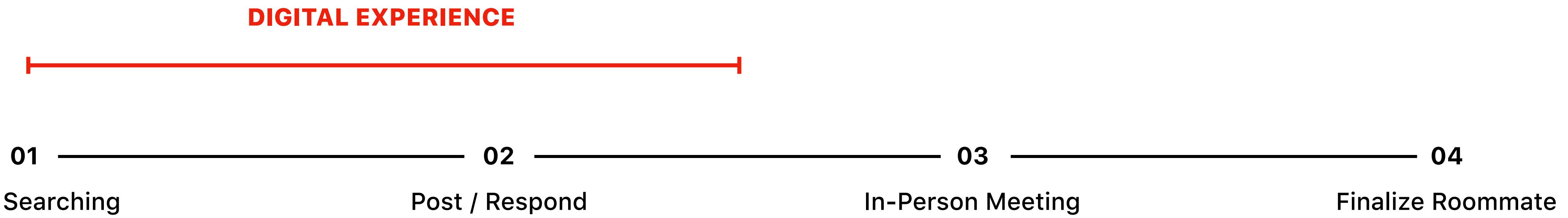


Current Online Experience 😬

When designing the roommate screen, I dissected the current experience behind finding roommates online. Existing services fail to attract users since the features they offer don't provide enough value for the user to continue using it. Instead they add a layer of friction to the experience.

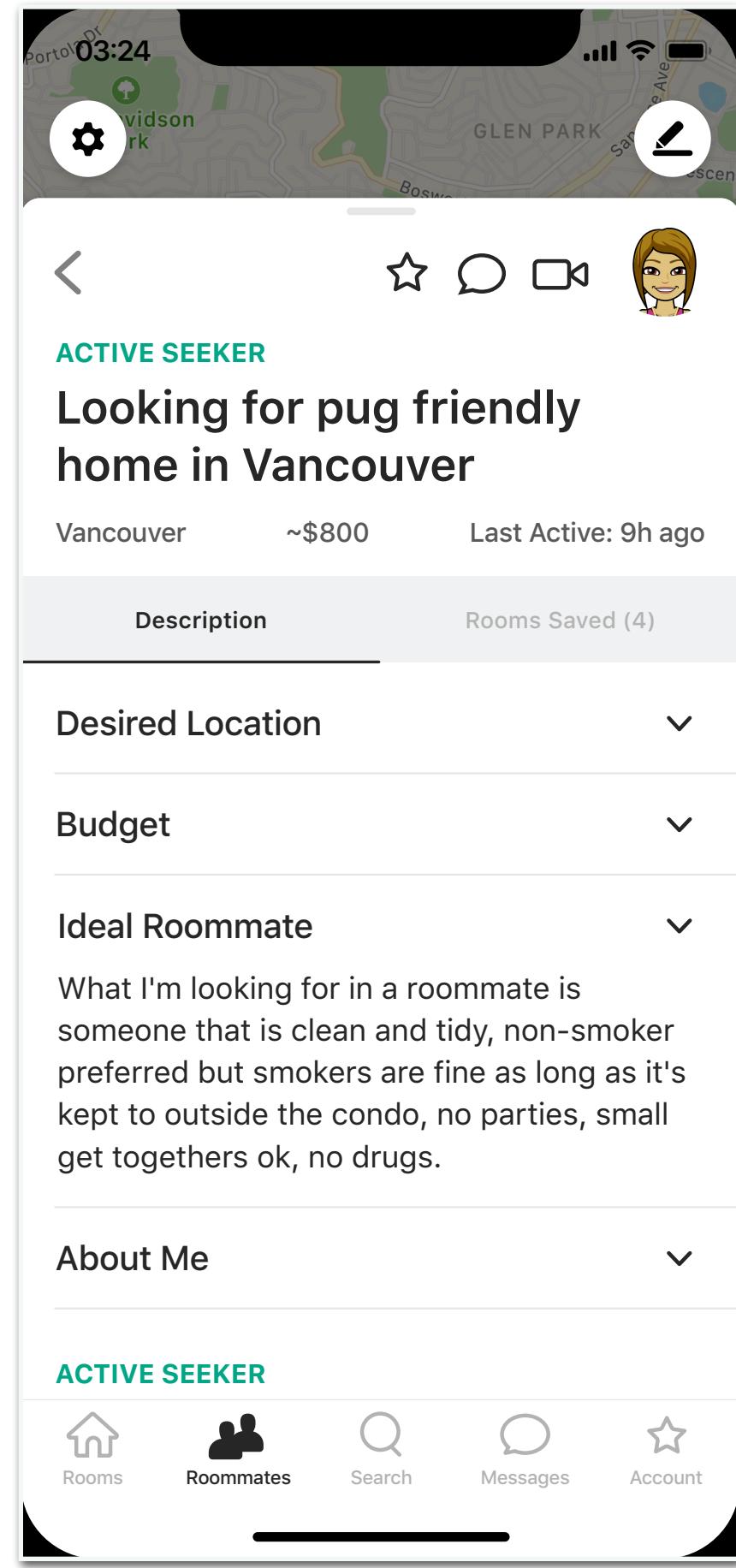
"They try and play "matchmaker" without giving people the opportunity to discover and connect with people on their own." (Quora, 2015)

Plus the accuracy of these matches are questionable so people end up spending more time than they should be. It's not worth answering surveys or revealing personal information if it isn't making the process any faster/easier for them.

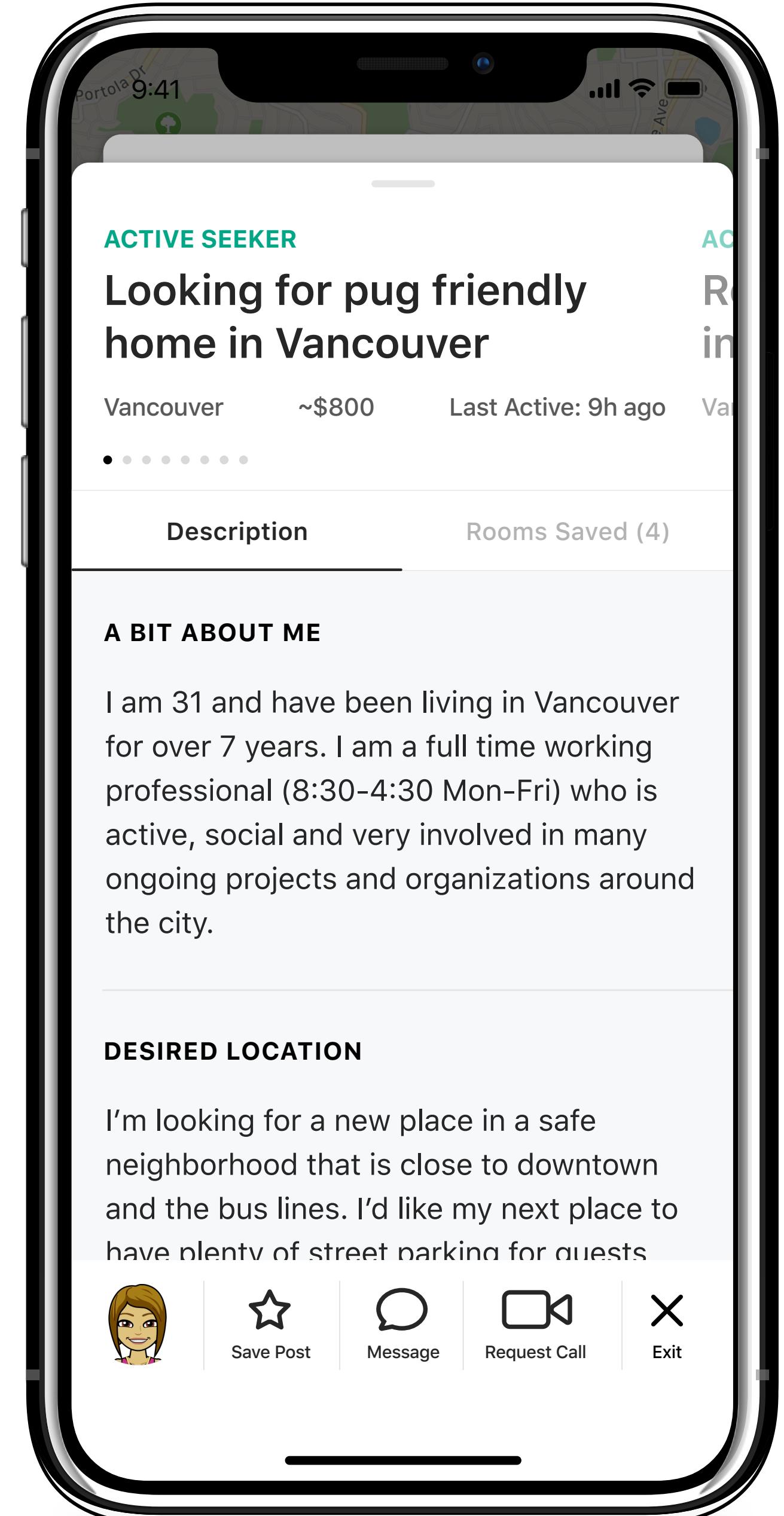


Proposed Experience 😊

Although it is almost impossible to pick new roommates for people accurately, we could help by improving the experience prior to deciding who to meet in-person with. The goal was to help people build a reliable list of potential candidates that they could consider to meet and discuss in-person. It was about encouraging users to meet in-person with more assurance.



First Iteration



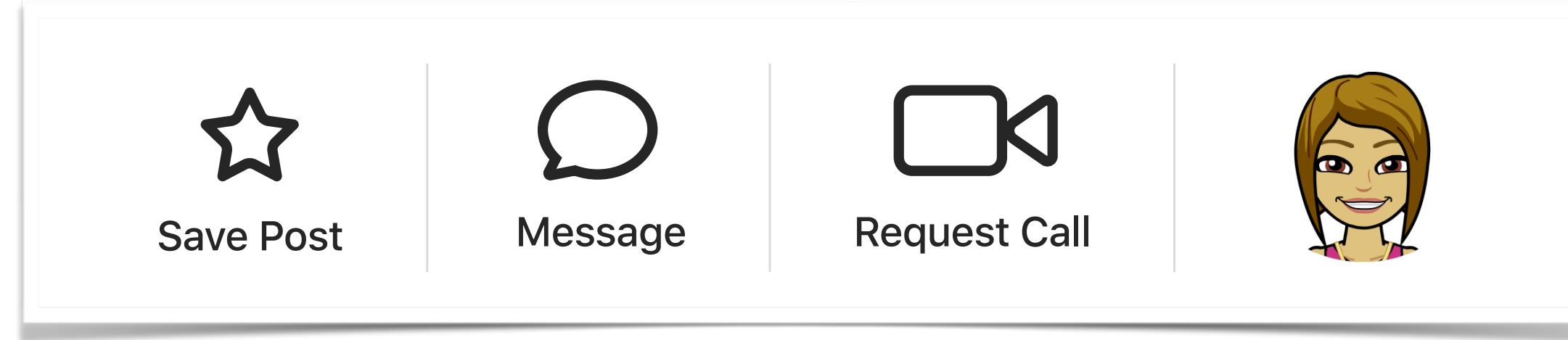
ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Discover via Interaction

Once the user opens a post, the card will come up and the bottom navigation bar would switch to one for seekers. This change reduced the number paths for users, which allowed for a more straight forward interface. Throughout the interface, I avoided placing any buttons on the top of the card since it's more difficult to reach when holding the phone with one hand.

Switching to this bottom navigation bar when the user opens a post was done with the aim to encourage users to swipe through different posts. It's a lot easier to explore content when you don't have to go through multiple pages, so I thought scrolling and swiping was the best interaction to afford such experience.

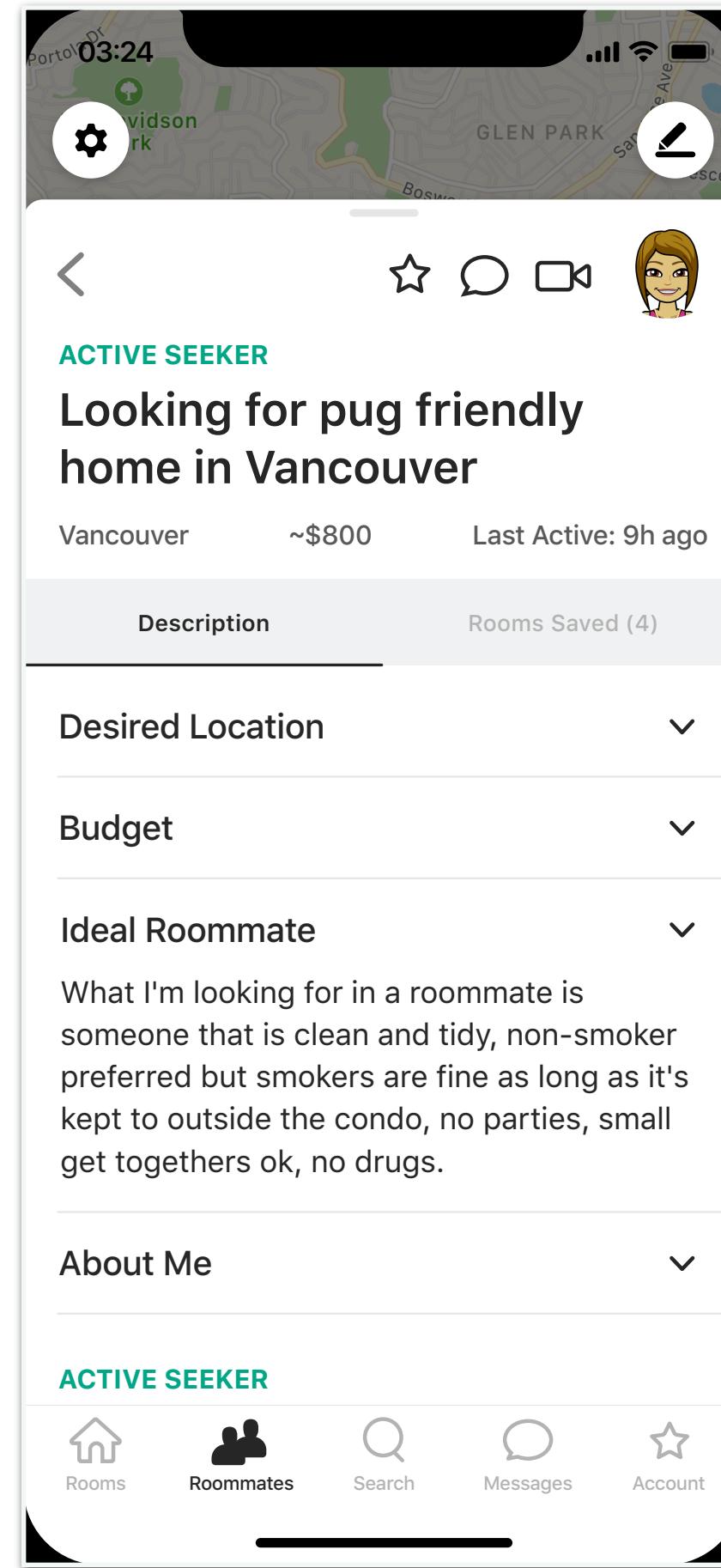
One concern is that this switch could confuse users, but I also think this switch could be made clear with interactions.



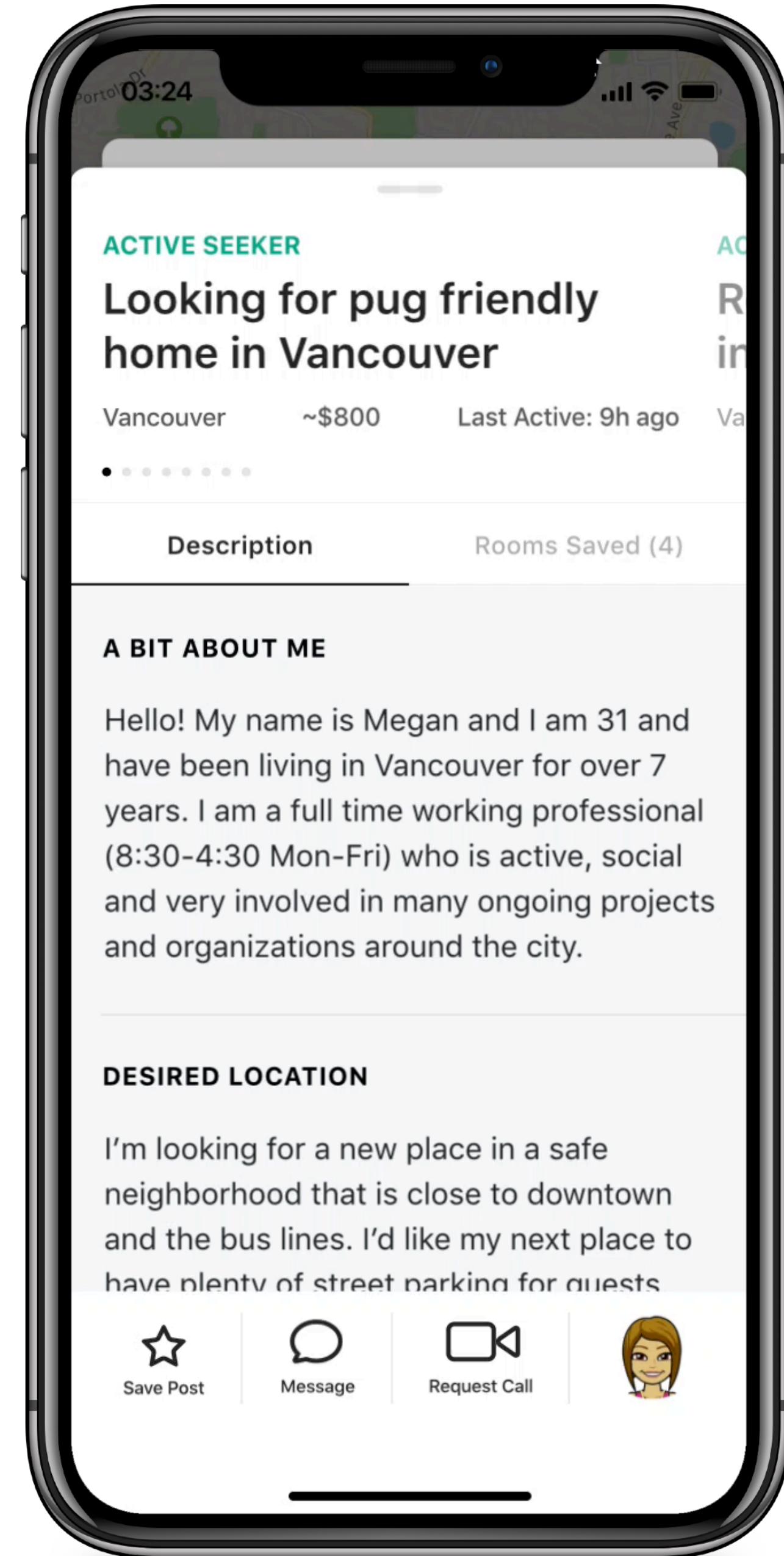
ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Call to Action

I chose to include a “Request Call” since making a video call was the closest experience to meeting in-person. Video calls act as a filter that builds assurance for people who are worried about meeting strangers. By actually seeing their face and talking to each other, users are able to make a better evaluation without meeting in-person.



First Iteration



ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Enough Information

With the proposed experience in mind, I designed the UI so users are presented with chunks of information with the attempt to reduce the visual weight that comes with the blocks of text. Yet I chose to scrap this idea since this interface would require users to tap on each header if they wanted to read everything. Instead, it was a lot more simpler to have users scroll.

I chose the following headers based on numerous Craigslist posts and various perspectives on writing the best ad on Craigslist to find roommates.

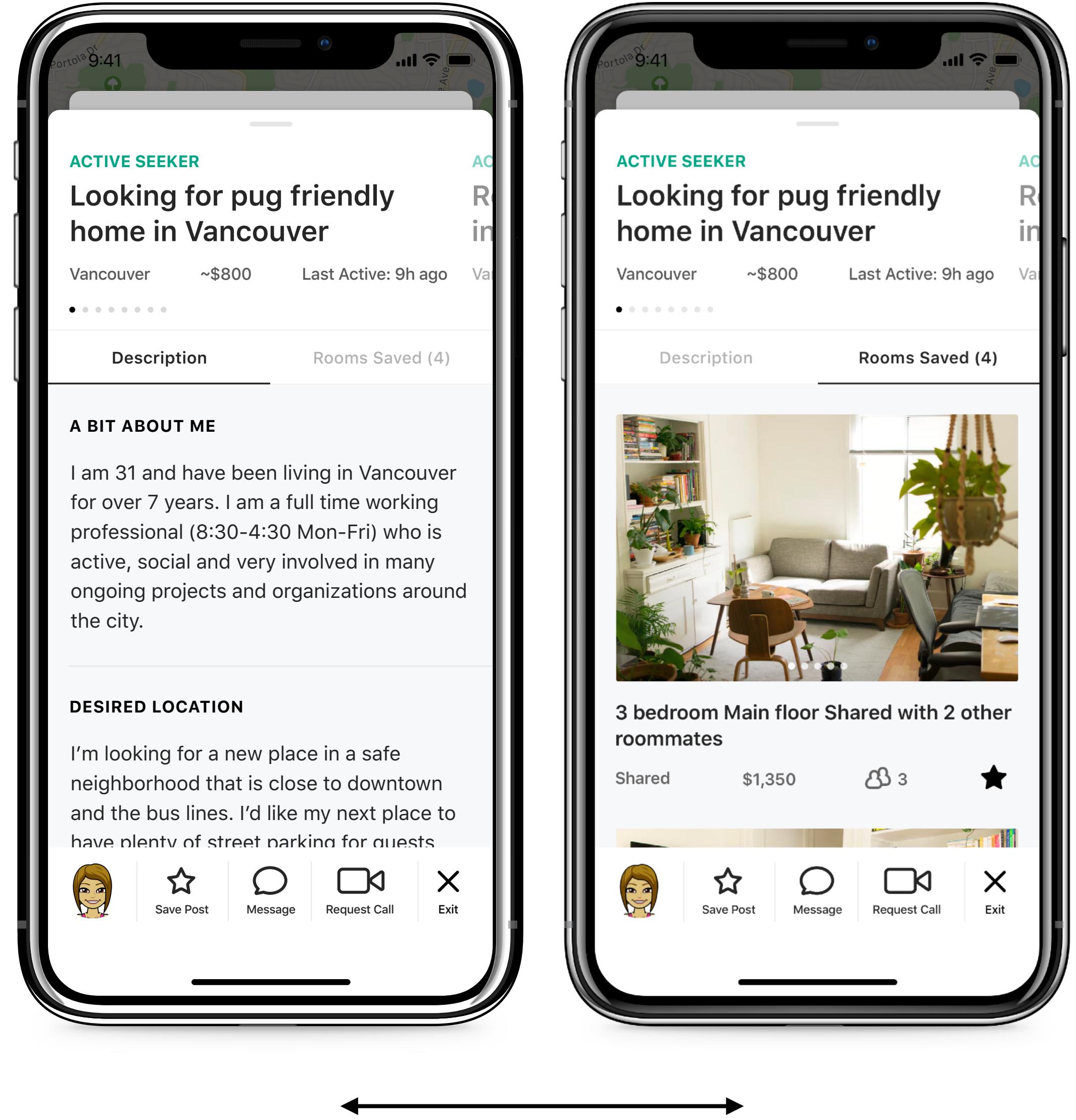
About me
Desired Location
My Budget
Ideal Roommate
Dealbreaker
Seekers with Similar Interest

ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Explore & Discover

Users could view the rooms other seekers have saved on their list to see if you have any mutual interest. This is another way users could discover new rooms as well.

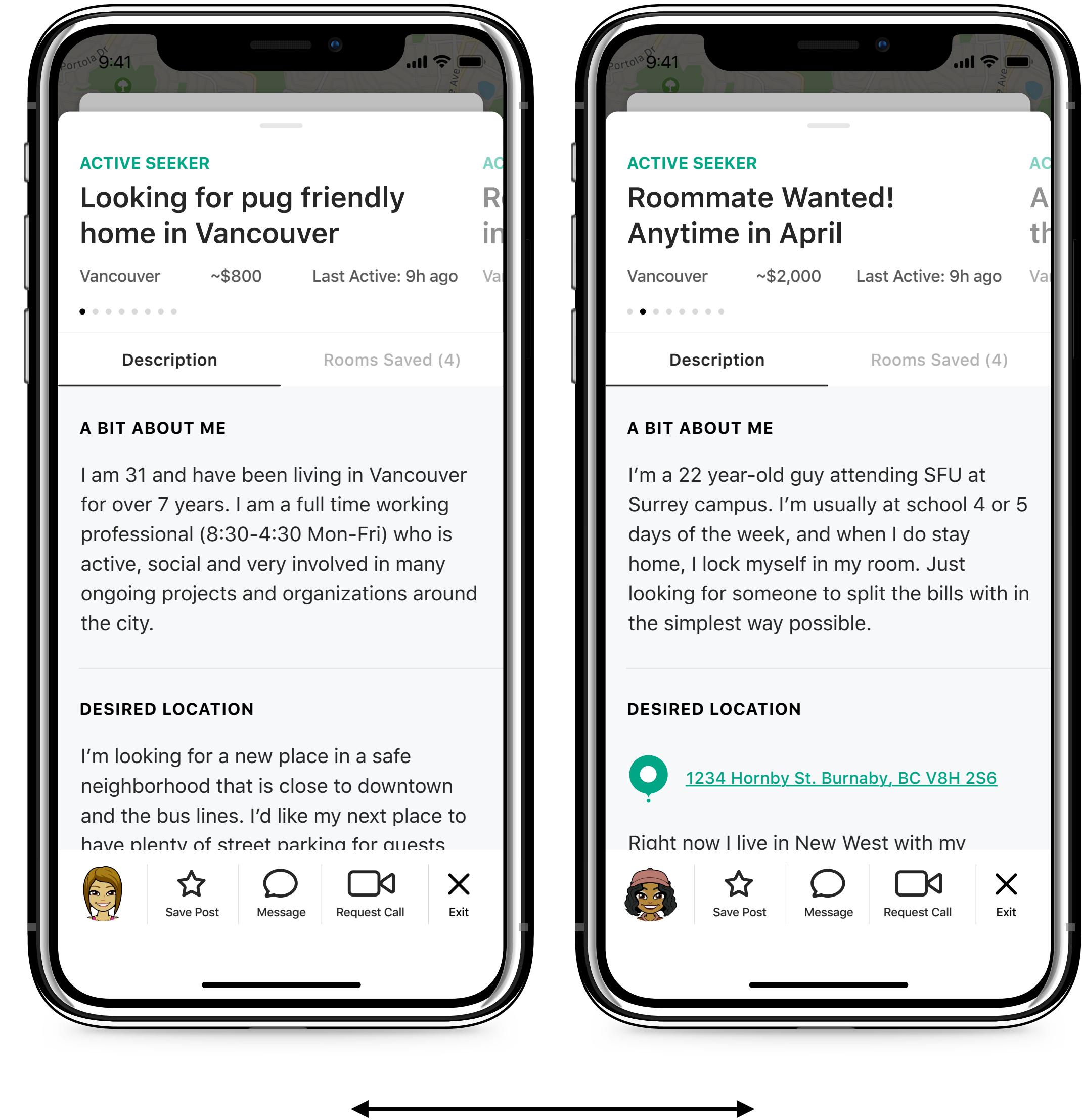
Again, this feature wouldn't be available if users don't create an account since they wouldn't be able to save posts without one.



ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Explore & Discover

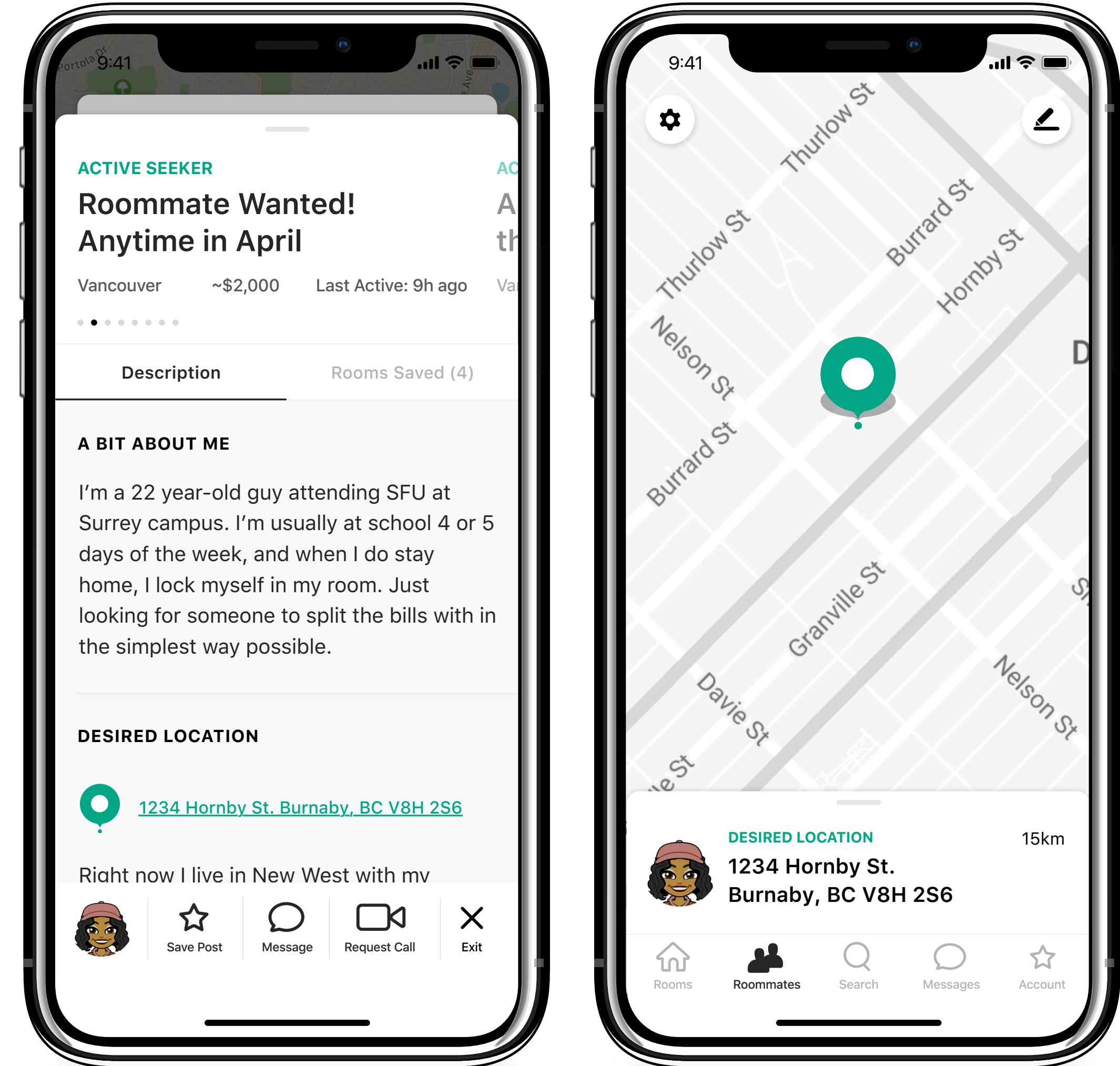
By swiping the headline horizontally, users are able to sift through posts individually, rather than having to return to the list of results. With this interaction, they're able to quickly evaluate potential roommates and hopefully find a new friend.



ROOMMATES: RESULTS

Explore & Discover

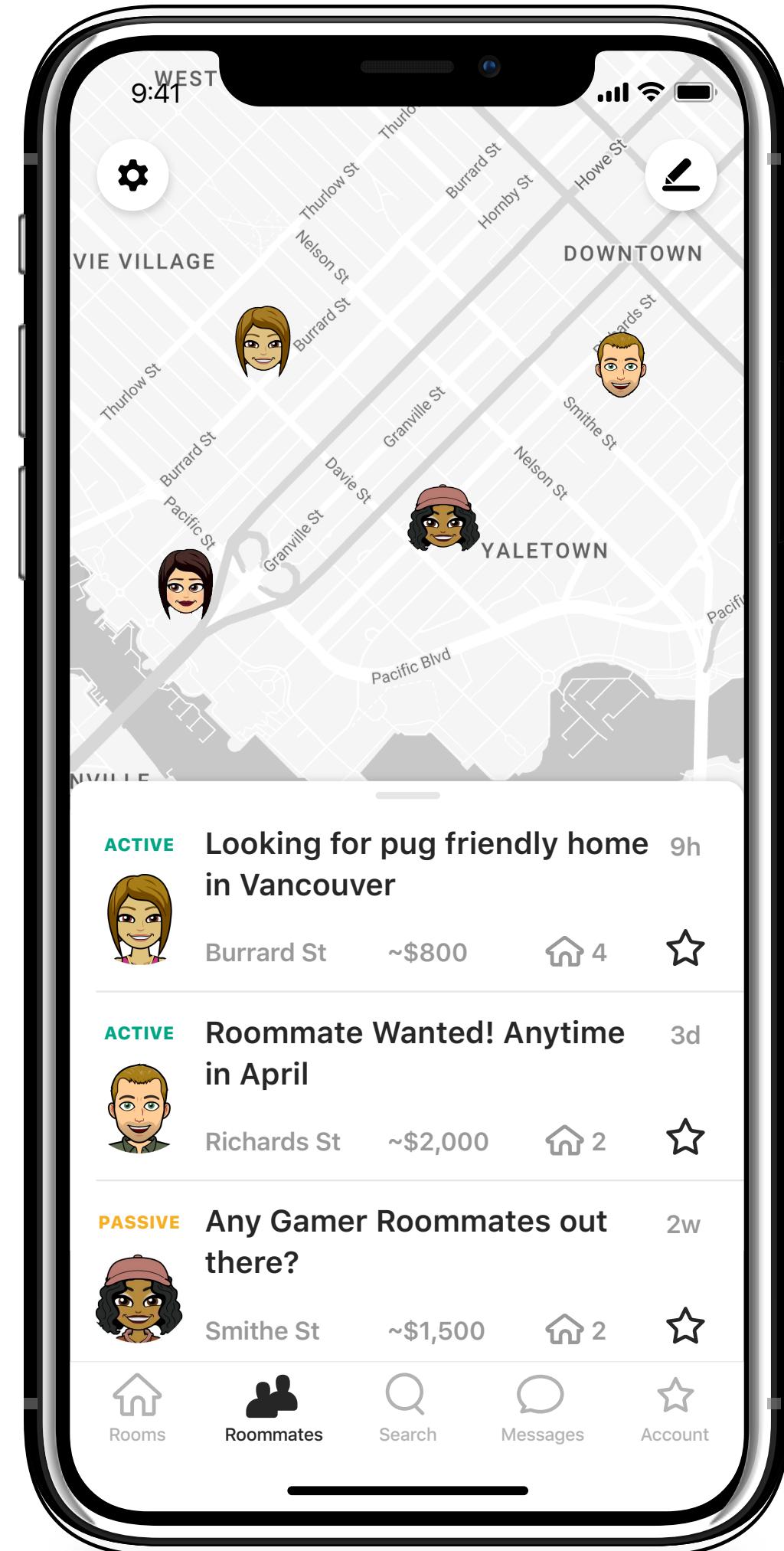
If a seeker found a room first and is now looking for a roommate to move in with, they're able to include the location of the new place inside 'Desired Location', so people who are browsing can tap on the address and identify the location immediately.



Additional Value

Creating a system that encourages users to create an account and be part of a community was realized by providing additional benefits such as saving a post and using Bitmoji.

My goal was to give users just enough incentive for users to create an account without becoming a distraction of the content users seek for.



Self-Assessment

Next step for me would be prototyping these to communicate the interactions more clearly. I also plan to conduct more research on the safety aspect of this experience to make a stronger case and have the UI reflect that.