Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce

Affordable Housing

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DESIGNING FOR COMMUNITY

Intention, input and observation early on can help architects create buildings that strengthen connection and well-being.

Fremont's Cedar Speedster connects a micro-community of tenants and patrons with porous public spaces that engage the neighborhood.

PHOTO BY BUILT WORK PHOTOGRAPHY

In February, I wrote in this publication about the need to invest in our health through housing. One of the three pillars of design for human health and well-being is designing for community.

BY JEFF REIBMAN
WEBER THOMPSON

Today, we look specifically at design strategies to support community building. While I will focus on mixed-use housing design, many of these same principles can apply in workplaces and other project types as well.

WHY DESIGN FOR COMMUNITY MATTERS

Americans report feeling lonely and disconnected in ever higher numbers. The influences of technology, the pandemic, and our highly mobile society have all made it harder to establish and maintain meaningful connections.

Research points strongly to a connection between loneliness and our physical health, particularly the negative effects of long-term loneliness and isolation on a broad range of illnesses, from heart problems to depression and cognitive decline. Conversely, those reporting a strong sense of community and belonging have been found to have better physical and mental health outcomes, leading to a higher quality of life.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

First, recognize the existing community around your future project. Don't limit your definition of community to only the new building users.

Most sites will have existing community networks surrounding them, and possibly even already using them. Existing businesses may be important gathering places and even a seemingly vacant lot may serve as a play space. These gathering spots, referred to as third places, are essential for finding the people we connect with outside of work and home.

Effective community engagement before the project begins can reveal opportunities, build support for coming development, and help inform the design for better integration. Find out what is successful and useful around the site now, and what additional retailers or services the community needs. Your future building users will probably need them too.

Finding a way to provide something of value to the existing community will create opportunities for people to connect to existing networks and is also good business. Building owners willing to invest in good retail design and curated tenants create additional amenity and positive branding for their buildings while knitting building users together with the existing community.

HAPPY LITTLE ACCIDENTS

Buildings and their surroundings are full of small opportunities to bring people together. At their worst, these spaces can actually discourage interaction. Cramped, uncomfortable or barren spaces can make encounters difficult and awkward.

Simple design strategies can turn these small, accidental encounters into opportunities. Think about unprogrammed, high-traffic spaces like elevator lobbies, mail rooms and hallways where people are likely to see each other in passing. Don't neglect the sidewalk out front, either. Make sure there is enough room for people to be comfortable with another person in the space, and that lingering to talk won't impede circulation.

Incorporating elements of visual interest, like art or unique design elements can put people at ease and even serve as conversation starters. Pets can also be effective icebreakers. If they are allowed in your building, make sure the design encourages pet owners to use the same circulation spaces as everyone else. A few simple moves can be the difference between a friendly hello and someone just hurrying by.

GATHERING SPACES

We've all seen our share of well-intentioned community spaces that end up underused or feeling unwelcoming. Regardless of scale or budget, indoors or out, there are things we can do to make gathering spaces more effective and comfortable.

Start by recognizing opportunities for synergy. One successful space can help to activate another adjacent area. Place amenities near high-traffic areas and group spaces with different program goals together, providing visual connections when appropriate.

The ability to see into a room before deciding to enter is key. Seeing other people can help draw us in, signaling that this is a desirable place to be, just like a lively restaurant is more inviting than an empty one.

That said, it's also impor-

tant to provide transition spaces at entries. Give newcomers a place to stand and adjust rather than plunging right into the busiest part of a room. Similarly, edge space such as window seats and alcoves increase the versatility of a space. They can provide a comfortable opportunity to pull away and observe, have a more private conversation, or share a larger space with others who may be using it differently.

Biophilia, our natural affinity for nature and living things, is also a powerful design tool. Being close to nature helps put us at ease, making it easier to overcome the anxiety that might prevent us from meeting new people, or allowing us to have deeper conversations as we become more comfortable.

Studies in academic buildings show more pro-social behavior in spaces with biophilic design incorporated. Locate gathering spaces to take advantage of natural light and views, particularly views of nature whenever possible. Even decorating with natural themes can have a positive impact. Connect indoor and outdoor spaces for greater activation and flexibility.

FEEDBACK AND ITERATION

Finally, recognize that one size does not fit all. Give people choices with different program elements and styles.

A post-occupancy study on a multi-family housing project we completed revealed an interesting result. The large community room was very successful at attracting kids, who enjoyed the vibrant design and used the TV screen for video games, but adults avoided the room because it was too loud. Dividing the area into two smaller spaces, with visual connection but some acoustic separation and different design themes would have been more successful and broadened its appeal.

On a subsequent project that also anticipated a lot of families, we adjusted our approach. Rather than one large community room, we took advantage of an opportunity to provide a smaller amenities space adjacent to the elevator lobby at every floor. Each space is programmed a little differently to encourage different groups to gather there. Post-occupancy studies can be a great tool for learning and improving our designs.

Shaping the built environment is a big responsibility. People in the AEC community recognize this and are proud of the opportunity to contribute something positive to our region for years to come. What could be more important than encouraging personal connections to strengthen the very fabric of the community we call home?

Jeff Reibman is a senior principal and equity partner at Weber Thompson, leading the firm's affordable housing and senior housing practice as well as mixed use, mid-rise teams.

At the Rise on Madison on First Hill, tenants can experience biophilic benefits with access to a rooftop terrace with expansive views.

PHOTO BY MORIS MORENO

INSIDE

ON THE COVER

The Africatown Plaza design team created the iconic facade of the building with a series of undulating forms wrapped in Corten weathering steel, inspired by the baobab trees of Africa, which were historic gathering spaces.

PHOTO COPYRIGHT BRUCE DAMONTE

DJC TEAM

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WELL-DESIGNED INDEPENDENT LIVING FACILITIES HELP EASE HOUSING CRISIS

Affordable, low-maintenance residences providing social connection and universal design are needed to empower older homeowners to downsize.

Washington's Affinity at Arlington by Inland Group includes individual balconies as well as communal terraces and other shared outdoor spaces.

PHOTOS BY ROB MILLER

BY LAURA DOUGHERTY
CUSHING TERRELL

Experts have predicted a "silver tsunami" that would bring much-needed relief to the strained housing market. The theory suggested that, in 2024-25, a wave of baby boomers would downsize, placing their too-large homes on the market for younger growing families who have struggled to break into homeownership.

Yet as we're nearing the end of 2024, this prediction hasn't quite panned out — often because it isn't cost-effective for older Americans to downsize (if they even want to, as AARP data shows that 77 percent of adults 50 and older would like to remain in their homes).

As reported by The New York Times, it was traditionally assumed that older adults would sell their houses (mortgages paid off) to fund their retirements. But a historic housing shortage is pinching that notion. Often, a smaller home just isn't cost-effective: An NPR report that cited Redfin data found that most baby boomers with mortgages have low rates — meaning it wouldn't make financial sense to take out a new mortgage when rates are now about 7%.

It leaves the housing market in a stalemate: Young families that need homes with multiple rooms can't afford the few that are on the market, but finding new residences is too cost-prohibitive for many older Americans to vacate just such houses that would bring relief to inventory and prices.

One solution to this problem is to create new, affordable properties that address what an older population is looking for in a home: a low-maintenance residence with social connection and universal design.

Independent living (IL) residences — which are often age-restricted — are one such option. These properties are ideal for older adults in relatively good health, as they do not offer the personal care or medical services that are found in assisted living or nursing homes.

This is not to say they don't keep wellness in mind: IL residences offer spaces for a variety of healthy activities — yoga, pickleball and gardening, to name a few — as well as built-in community, which can fight loneliness, one of the biggest health concerns for many older Americans.

IL properties can also be a more affordable option for a number of reasons, often purely as a result of being focused on older residents. Some property owners will ensure the residences are mixed-income, which allows for subsidies via federal, state and local sources (and not through cheaper construction or finishes).

These programs provide subsidies for rental rates based on area median income. That means IL properties that welcome a diversity of economic backgrounds provide greater economic accessibility to everyone.

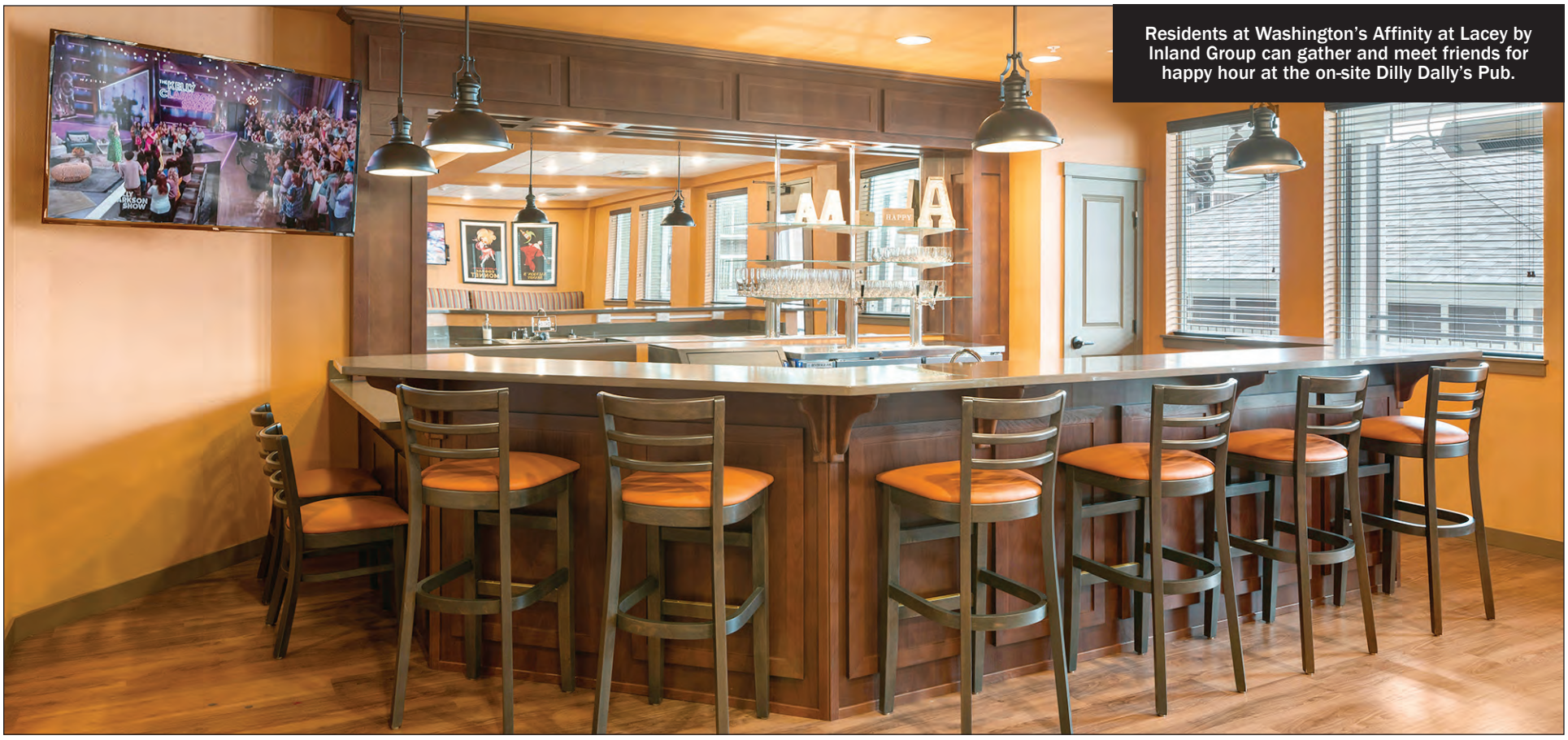
Once this affordability piece is met, the focus can be on other features that meet residents' needs, including designing a homey (albeit smaller!) atmosphere, communal spaces and universally accommodating facilities.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Many new residents to IL communities have lived in their previous homes for decades, so for the transition to a multi-family unit to be smooth – and appealing – it has to feel as personalized and cared for as their former home.

Each residential space can be considered a scaled-down version of a full house, with many of the amenities a person has grown accustomed to — but in a smaller space.

While moving into a communal setting can feel like reverting back to college dorm days, elevated finishes such as solid surface countertops and luxury flooring help make the transition more appealing and "mature." This attention to quality acknowledges that residents have put in a lifetime of work, and they deserve a great space that



Residents at Washington's Affinity at Lacey by Inland Group can gather and meet friends for happy hour at the on-site Dilly Dally's Pub.

reflects this fact.

Additionally, the pandemic taught us, or maybe spotlighted, how much people appreciate having access to personal outdoor space. In an effort to give residents a place to relax that is exclusively theirs, units are optimally designed to include a balcony or other private outdoor area whenever possible. The ability to move freely from inside to the outside without needing to share that space (or run into any neighbors) is something anyone can appreciate.

Downsizing does mean that the ability to host guests changes. But even here, common spaces — such as dining rooms — that can be booked in advance to serve meals to friends and family as you might in your own home are available to residents.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STRONGER COMMUNITY

One of the most exciting benefits to IL facilities is the chance to live among other individuals in a similar life stage. But, of course not everyone is necessarily interested in doing the same activity or engaging in the same pastimes. IL facilities are equipped with amenity spaces that can provide opportunities for solitude or quiet activities (libraries, reading rooms, raised garden beds), creative activities (game rooms, craft rooms, wood shop), physical activities (fitness room, yoga studio, pickleball), or entertainment (theater, internet cafe, adult lounge).

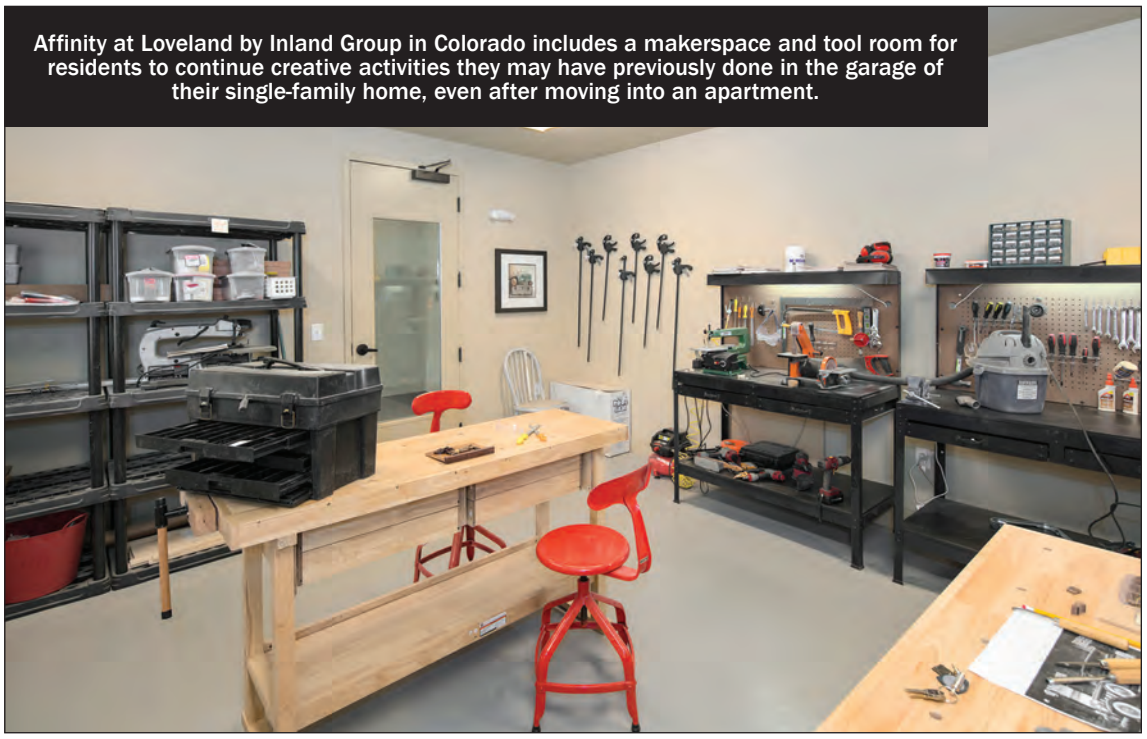
Because planners can't assume what everyone will want to do on any given day, rooms should be designed with flexibility in mind (why design a room specifically for pilates if the residents who eventually fill the space don't care much for the activity?). An ideal and agile community/amenity space could be used for a quilting club one afternoon, and then as a potluck space the following evening.

These facilities can be a tool used to fight loneliness: In 2023, a national poll found that about 37% of U.S. adults aged 50-80 years experienced loneliness, and 34% reported feeling socially isolated. This can have enormous negative repercussions, as loneliness is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, dementia, stroke, anxiety, and depression.

By designing spaces that allow for a multitude of ways to find and engage in community, residents can keep their independence longer by harnessing positive wellness attributes that come from socialization.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR SAFETY AND INCLUSION

The concept of universal design is one of inclusion: If someone with the greatest accessibility issues can use something, it becomes easier for everyone's use. An easy-to-grip handrail makes movement easier not just for someone with arthritis, but for anyone trying to ease themselves from point A to point B.



Affinity at Loveland by Inland Group in Colorado includes a makerspace and tool room for residents to continue creative activities they may have previously done in the garage of their single-family home, even after moving into an apartment.

For someone debating the move to an IL community for the purpose of accessibility, consider that the cost of retrofitting your own home can be steep: Adjusting kitchen and bath countertops; adding ramps, elevators or stair lifts; installing nonslip flooring, roll-in showers, grab bars and structural backing; and increasing door widths can add up to tens of thousands of dollars in construction costs, not to mention the time and disruption of in-home construction.

At an IL facility, those universal design elements are built in — and without it feeling like the addition of hospital elements to a family home. Plus, these features exist in the residences and shared spaces before you even know you'll need them.

Some of the typical accessible design features included when building IL communities include multiple elevators to get residents as close to their units as possible. An H-shape design allows for ease of circulation: Shared amenity spaces are in the middle and residences are in the wings, with a simplified path that makes most trips a straight line with a single turn and minimal overall travel. Outside, covered walkways can reduce slipping during inclement weather.

When designed well and made affordable, independent living communities can solve myriad problems, not the least of which include easing the housing crisis and reducing concerns that come with aging. IL properties filled with a diverse population of older adults lower everyone's cost of living — lifting a burden from Americans of all ages.

Laura Dougherty is a senior architect and associate principal leading Cushing Terrell's Denver design studio.

HOME IN TACOMA AND THE MISSING MIDDLE: AN ALLY IN THE SEARCH FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

"Missing middle" projects provide a diverse range of housing types and costs, increase density and create a wider array of attainable home ownership options.

Completed in 2018, the Wedgeview development is a successful example of rowhouse-style apartments in Central Tacoma.

IMAGE BY WC STUDIO

Conceptual rendering of a new nine-unit apartment building in Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood.

IMAGE BY FERGUSON ARCHITECTURE

Several years ago, an employee of mine made the difficult decision to move to Des Moines, Iowa. While I lost a gifted designer, a witty friend, and the Dungeon Master of our monthly D&D campaign, I was thrilled for what he and his wife were able to do in Des Moines that they had lost hope of doing in Tacoma: they bought their first home.

BY BEN FERGUSON
FERGUSON ARCHITECTURE

It's no secret to anyone living in Tacoma and the greater Puget Sound that the housing outlook feels abysmal. Like my employee, many of Tacoma's residents find it impossible to envision themselves owning a home. Those who need to relocate to the South Sound are struggling to find affordable housing. These people are middle-income earners like nurses, junior police officers and fire fighters, teachers, and yes, people in the built environment industry.

THE MISSING MIDDLE

As an owner of a Tacoma-based small business, it hurts to watch my staff wrestle with this current reality. But we're seeing encouraging signs coming through our studio doors: more developers are looking to build "missing middle" housing projects.

These project types range from detached single-family homes to house-scale buildings with multiple units (duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes) to mid-size apartment buildings. As a component of increasing affordable housing, missing middle, also called "middle housing," adds to a more diverse range of housing types and costs, increases density and creates a wider array of attainable home ownership options.

We commonly think about "affordable housing" as

housing stock that is subsidized by the government, and made available to people who qualify based on low-income level thresholds. In reality, that definition applies to the way policy works to provide housing for people who otherwise may not have safe options. Instead, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing as "housing where the occupant pays no more than 30% of gross income for housing costs, including utilities."

This is where the "missing middle" fills a gap in the housing market for moderate-income earners who don't qualify for subsidized housing but who struggle to find homes with rents or mortgages that cost 30% or less of their income.

HOME IN TACOMA

Missing middle housing types are currently allowable in certain parts of Tacoma, but a new zoning initiative by the city seeks to increase possibilities and clarify requirements for building more of these projects in more single-family neighborhoods.

The Home in Tacoma Phase 2 (HITP2) code—developed by the City with consultant Mithun, and subconsultants ECOnorthwest and Parametrix— was issued to the Tacoma City Council this summer after two years of intense planning and community outreach by the Tacoma Planning Commission (TPC). As a member of the Tacoma Permit Advisory Task Force, I have been involved in planning discussions for HITP2, providing architectural expert feedback and permit process insights.

The final recommendation by the commission is a promising and historic shift in Tacoma zoning code.

While the plan covers a broad spectrum of policy implementations, there are three main keys to the code's efficacy:

- Updates Tacoma's Zoning Map to replace existing Residential (R) zones with new Urban Residential (UR). The new UR zones are differentiated by the allowable density and housing types in each zone. This widens the types of housing allowable across the city, increasing density and creating a more diverse housing stock.
- Establishes density, scale, Floor Area Ratio, setbacks, form-based housing types, and other controls allowable in each new UR zone. While these design requirements do not address style or character, they are intended to keep middle housing projects within the neighborhood scale of the community they are in.
- Implements Unit Lot Subdivision (ULS) law passed in Washington state, which allows separate ownership of individual middle housing units. This allows properties to be subdivided into individual lots, enabling units to be separately owned and thus reducing the land costs for each home. This works particularly well for Houseplex, Rowhouse and Courtyard Housing types.

The plan also includes development bonuses to encourage construction of missing middle housing attainable by households earning 60% to 80% of the area median income (AMI) for rentals, and 100% AMI for ownership, expanding the demographic of potential homeowners and renters.

COMMUNITY REACTION

The community has been vocal during HITP2's formation and review. During the Planning Commission's public comment period between February 5 and March 8, the city received over 1,500 comments from Tacoma citizens, and at the Tacoma City Council's September 24th meeting to review the HITP2 package, 50 people signed up to speak. While the feedback the commission received has largely been supportive, several reoccurring topics of concern were voiced over and over: tree retention policy, parking requirements, infrastructure updates and the potential for displacement of existing residents already struggling to maintain their homes.

Truthfully, I too shared some of these concerns while participating in discussions during my involvement developing HITP2. As a local architect who works with local developers to create the best projects we can for my hometown, I feel deeply that we have a responsibility to look out for our neighbors.

Home in Tacoma is a practical compromise that balances the needs of current homeowners with those of people who wish to be homeowners tomorrow and can't envision a future where that is feasible. As a born-and-raised South Sound homeowner, father, mentor and leader, I want that future to be attainable to as many people as possible.

Ben Ferguson is the managing principal and founder of Ferguson Architecture in Tacoma and serves on the city of Tacoma's Permit Advisory Task Force.

The eight-story 11th Ave Apartments were the first multifamily apartment building to go through design review in Capitol Hill's new higher-density zone.

RENDERINGS BY TISCARENO

SMALL-SCALE HOUSING OPTIONS TRANSFORM SEATTLE NEIGHBORHOODS

Architects can provide innovative approaches in smaller-scale and more affordably constructed projects.

In order to increase the housing supply and comply with regulations from the state, Seattle is undergoing a Comprehensive Plan process, where nearly every corner of our city will be upzoned—it has the potential to increase density across the city.

BY GABRIELLE GLASS
TISCARENO

This could bring about significant changes not only for residents but also for developers and architects. Many arterial streets in the current zoning plan will receive an upzone to Lowrise 3 (LR3). This is designed to open up new affordable housing opportunities.

Architects can provide innovative approaches in smaller-scale and more affordably constructed projects. A prime example is a project I'm currently working on in the U-District. Originally focused on a Small Efficiency Dwelling Unit (SEDU), our client asked us to explore alternative cost-effective building types, including single-stair apartment buildings or a cluster of townhomes instead.

This article looks at how the proposed zoning adjustments, along with the benefits of small-scale projects and the design efficiency of single-stair buildings, can work together.

WHAT SEATTLE'S DRAFT UPZONES MEAN FOR SMALL SITES

Recently the city of Seattle released an update to the comprehensive plan. The draft zoning updates would upzone many arterial streets in Seattle to LR3 (Lowrise 3), which allows housing to be constructed up to five stories. Typically, these upzoned areas are narrow and often just one or two lots deep along arterial streets, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for development.

LR3 zoning allows for a mix of uses, including:

- Cottage housing developments
- Townhomes and rowhouses
- Apartments (including compact single-stair apartment buildings)
- Micro-apartments

SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS: A SMART SOLUTION

When working on smaller sites, architects can assist developers in choosing the most efficient and cost-effective design solutions for that site. The LR3 zone offers flexibility of project type, allowing a variety of project types to meet local demands. Each project type has its own benefits and considerations.

For our project in the U-District, we studied different options in order to provide our client with the best possible design to meet the needs of the community and the constraints of the site. Below are some of the attributes of small-scale housing projects that lend them to being part of the solution to increasing the supply of affordable housing:

FEWER LOTS TO ASSEMBLE

The smaller footprint of small-scale projects requires assembling fewer parcels of land than is often required for larger high-density projects. In some dense urban neighborhoods, like Seattle's U-District, housing demand is high while available land for development is limited.

Land assembly can be a complex and costly process, and small-scale projects, particularly those that can be built on one or two lots, avoid the difficulties of purchasing and assembling large parcels of land. This makes these projects more feasible for developers working with tighter budgets or faster timelines.

FLEXIBILITY IN USE

An architect can review the local zoning and building codes to see if there are options available to lower construction costs, like using a single exit stair.

One of the advantages of LR3 zoning is the variety of building types allowed, permitting developers and architects to decide which building type best suits the neighborhood's market demands, the client's budget and the site's constraints. This flexibility allows developers to respond to changing housing needs while remaining cost-effective.

LOWER OVERALL COSTS

Due to their smaller overall size, smaller projects inherently require less capital than larger developments. Where land prices are high, as they are in urban areas, a smaller building footprint will lead to smaller land costs. The flexibility permitted by the zoning code allows developers to weigh the local demand with the

current construction costs and provide an in-demand and cost-effective housing option.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Smaller footprint projects do come with their own set of challenges as well. The same basic functions of a building, including accessibility, trash, bike storage and car parking are still present, but smaller sites allow less flexibility on how to address these functions. An architect can see if there are ways to reduce these requirements, like checking if a reduction in parking is permitted.

SINGLE-STAIR APARTMENT BUILDINGS FOR EFFICIENCY

As we explore different design options for our U-District project, the idea of a single-stair apartment building stands out.

The building code in Seattle is more permissive compared to other jurisdictions, which often limit single-stair buildings to a low number of stories. The city of Seattle permits a single exit from an apartment project that includes up to five stories of above grade residential units with up to four units per floor.

While there are restrictions on how many units these types of projects can serve, single stairs provide a number of advantages, particularly when it comes to reducing overall project costs. The affordability and flexibility that this regulation provides are proving to be popular with other jurisdictions that look to Seattle when updating their codes.

BENEFITS OF SINGLE-STAIR DESIGNS

- **Smaller Footprint:** A single-stair apartment building requires less space, making its design ideal for narrow or irregularly shaped lots that are common in urban areas. A smaller building footprint can be tucked in with adjacent buildings in a neighborhood, helping to preserve the urban form while simultaneously addressing the housing shortage by adding more units.
- **Increased Efficiency:** Single-stair designs are more efficient, particularly on smaller sites. For smaller scale buildings, a reduction in required circulation space makes it possible to develop efficient buildings without compromising on the number of units. By providing a single exit, a project can reduce the number of required stairwells and connecting corridors. Architects can use the reduced circulation requirements to maximize unit square footage. For example, in our U-District project, reduced circulation space translates into larger units with more bedrooms, increasing the housing options and helping to address housing affordability in the city.
- **Cost Savings:** Fewer staircases and corridors in a project reduce overall construction costs. These cost reductions include savings on construction materials along with construction labor. Long term, ongoing building maintenance is reduced due to the reduction of shared building spaces. These savings can be critical in making smaller projects more financially viable, especially for small scale developers who may not have access to large-scale funding sources.

As zoning changes create new housing opportunities across Seattle's neighborhoods, architects play a vital role in guiding developers through their options. SEDUs, townhomes and single-stair apartment buildings allowed in LR3 zones provide advantages in construction cost and speed, offering one path to improve housing affordability.

Gabrielle Glass is a project architect at Tiscareno and her recent projects include Solera — a 600-unit, mixed-income development in Renton.

DIALED IN ON EFFICIENCY — DESIGN-BUILD AS A SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY METHOD FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Efficient integrated design efforts make a huge difference in meeting the tighter timeline, budget and lease-up constraints of projects like Tacoma's Housing Hilltop.

BY DALE NEWCOMBE & RUMI TAKAHASHI
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The 231-apartment Housing Hilltop project owned by Tacoma Housing Authority is a bright new addition to Tacoma's Hilltop neighborhood.

PHOTO BY NW SKYVIEW IMAGERY

Starting a decade ago, the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) began outreach and visioning efforts for a community-centered mixed-use project that would provide high-quality affordable homes and ground floor retail spaces to revitalize the Hilltop neighborhood and address a growing need for affordable housing. Over the course of several years, THA, as part of an affordable housing tax credit partnership ("Partnership"), engaged in early design and development efforts for Housing Hilltop, a two-building community in the heart of the Hilltop neighborhood that provides 231 affordable apartments and 13,000 square feet of ground-level commercial space.

That initial vision is now a reality with the completion of the project at the end of September and lease-up activities underway.

THA, like most affordable housing owners, faced unique challenges in financing and designing this project. They needed to assure funding partners of the feasibility of the project's budget prior to the development of a fully vetted building design. Once the project was designed and permitted, they then needed to assure funding partners that the project could be executed with minimal scope changes or cost increases.

It was therefore imperative that THA and the Partnership select trusted design and construction partners who had the expertise and capacity to guide design and estimating efforts that aligned with project financing efforts. THA and the Partnership explored various teaming approaches with a view to improving efficiency and reducing cost for the proj-

HOUSING HILLTOP PROJECT SUMMARY

- 231 affordable homes in a mix of one-bedroom to three-bedrooms.
- 3,000sf of community-oriented retail space and 10,000sf performing arts space
- Efficient building systems including heat-pump hot water heaters and energy recovery ventilators
- Structured parking and bike parking, including 21 electric vehicle-ready stalls
- Vibrant exterior designed by local artists Jeremy Gregory and Lourdes Jackson

HOUSING HILLTOP PROJECT TEAM

Owner:
Tacoma Housing Authority

Owner's Representative:
JH Brawner & Company

Design Builder:
Walsh Construction

Architect:
SMR Architects

Structural Engineer:
Atlas Design Group

Civil Engineer:
Latitude 48

Landscape Architect:
AHBL (read their story on page 12)

MEP:
Emerald Aire, Kirby Electric, Sunrise Plumbing

ect, and ultimately selected Walsh Construction in 2021 to act as a design-builder.

Walsh has a strong track record in the affordable housing sector, having delivered over 57,000 affordable homes in Oregon and Washington to numerous nonprofit and housing authority clients. Walsh then selected SMR Architects, a local firm with 47 years of experience in the affordable housing industry, as their design partner. Embracing a design-build model with the Walsh and SMR team yielded remarkable results, setting a new standard for the delivery of mixed-use affordable housing in our region.

Walsh Construction's diligent phasing of subcontractors led to early completion of both buildings.

PHOTO BY NW SKYVIEW IMAGERY

BENEFITS OF THE DESIGN-BUILD APPROACH

Having worked together on over 35 affordable housing projects, Walsh and SMR were able to quickly ramp up design coordination efforts in an integrated target-value design effort. The benefits of this approach include:

Owner's goals around budget and quality were established early and embraced by the entire team. The team was focused on discipline and efficiency when it came to certain design decisions with intentional goals to optimize functional space, minimize the number of apartment, kitchen and bathroom layouts, and align design decisions around the dimensions of materials (i.e. wall heights aligned with drywall sheet sizes, window dimensions aligned with exterior wall framing spacing).

Walsh and subcontractor perspectives guided design development, providing real time feedback on cost, constructability and quality. The team was able to make early informed decisions, particularly for the higher cost, critical decisions around building systems, structural concrete, framing and building enclosure. Locking in decisions early helped avoid the change orders that are often seen when those parties are brought in at later stages of design.

Walsh's team emphasized efficiency and productivity, with focused meeting agendas. Potential upgrades were considered in a timely manner allowing for proactive, informed decision making when considering options to improve the quality of the project.

Due to the focused integrated design efforts by SMR and Walsh, **the bid set drawings and specifications were thoroughly vetted and complete,** which led to a strong subcontractor

DIALED IN — PAGE 15

BRIDGING THE GAP: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO SOLVE WASHINGTON'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS

Affordable housing providers are forming unique partnerships across the state, including collaborations between public and private non-profits, as well as rental and for-sale partnerships.

In communities across Washington, the affordable housing crisis reached critical levels in 2020 and continues today. Rising interest rates have pushed most first-time buyers out of the market, and ongoing economic challenges have increased the need for affordable housing.

BY NICOLE MILBURN
AHBL

The gap between housing supply and resident needs continues to grow. According to the state Department of Commerce, Washington will need to add more than one million new homes in the next 20 years to meet the demand, with nearly half needing to be affordable. Despite zoning reforms, local administrative requirements related to permitting, design review and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis remain complex and time-consuming, coupled with rising construction costs, making it difficult to meet this need.

COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable housing providers are trying to tip the scale by forming unique partnerships across the state, including collaborations between public and private non-profits, as well as rental and for-sale partnerships. While rental housing is becoming more affordable, for-sale housing remains a key factor in building generational wealth, particularly for BIPOC communities who often face income barriers to home ownership.

AHBL's partnerships with housing authorities, communities, and architects are contributing to progress in affordable housing development. Working with partners like SMR Architects, a leader in innovative affordable housing design, AHBL has helped fast-track several affordable housing projects across the state.

We spoke with Kate Smith, principal at SMR Architects, who emphasized the importance of community engagement and progressive solutions in meeting housing needs. As board president of the Housing Development Consortium of Seattle King County, Kate pushes for policy reform, increased funding opportunities and supporting the collective strength of the affordable housing community.

INCREASED RESOURCES AND FUNDING

In recent years, increased funding from city, county, state and federal sources has energized Washington's affordable housing market. In 2023, Seattle renewed its housing levy at nearly $1 billion to reinvest in the community.

A first of its kind in the nation, the Covenant Home Ownership account began in Seattle and has expanded statewide, providing down-payment assistance to those historically discriminated against through redlining. Additionally, the Housing Trust Fund received a $400 million investment, aimed at funding numerous projects.

A recent middle housing bill also passed, providing over $1 billion for housing development. Other funding initiatives, such as the Veteran's Housing Levy, have passed in recent years, creating local funding pipelines throughout Washington.

"Still there is a need for more progressive funding," says Kate Smith. "We're seeing permitting and political roadblocks, increased operating costs, high interest rates and rising insurance rates making a huge impact on affordable housing developers."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Two successful examples of AHBL's affordable housing projects are the Housing Hilltop project in Tacoma and the Catholic Charities Housing Services Sunnyside development in Yakima.

Housing Hilltop exemplifies the efficiency of the design/build delivery system. This approach allows for highly collaborative design phases, better cost control, and maximizes project dollars—critical in affordable housing.

A thoughtfully planned urban landscape of trees and drought-resistant plantings was designed to provide healthy green space and shade to Housing Hilltop.

PHOTO BY WILLIAM WRIGHT

In partnership with Walsh Construction and SMR Architects (read more about their work on the project on page 10), AHBL provided landscape architectural services for this project. This forward-thinking development features two mixed-use buildings with 231 affordable units, two podium courtyards, and street trees.

AHBL also actively participated in charrettes and community meetings. Community concerns included fears of losing cultural identity, rising housing costs, and the affordability of retail spaces for small and BIPOC businesses. In response, the Housing Hilltop project offers 13,000 square feet of commercial retail space, a 10,000-square-foot performing arts and community gathering space, and housing policies designed to allow displaced Hilltop residents to return to the neighborhood.

"Affordable housing developers have really started to listen to what communities are looking for and not just focusing on what they think the need is," Kate explained.

Earlier this year, AHBL's civil engineering and landscape architecture teams worked with SMR Architects on an extensive community outreach process for Catholic Charities Housing Services – Diocese of Yakima (CCHS)Sunnyside Housing Development. CCHS applied for a grant from the Citizens Institute on Rural Design (CIRD), in partnership with the Housing Assistance Council, which helps communities with populations of 50,000 or less convert their own ideas into reality.

To engage the community, we hosted a three-day public workshop, facilitating discussions on both rental and for-sale housing. Neighbors and community leaders were invited to meet with city and county officials to share ideas and help guide the future of affordable housing in the area. The first phase of the project is anticipated to begin in 2026.

MOVING FORWARD: BRIDGING THE GAP

Housing development involves many complex challenges, and additional state and local actions are still needed to ensure that new housing options become a reality across Washington's communities.

In 2023, the state legislature adopted several housing-related bills, including House Bill 1110. To support its success, AHBL's planning team is currently helping several cities integrate HB 1110's middle housing provisions into local plans and regulations.

Through our civil and structural engineering, landscape architecture, land use planning, land surveying services and policy efforts, AHBL is committed to advancing Washington's affordable housing goals. We are dedicated to working together to close the affordable housing gap in the coming years.

Nicole Milburn is a consultant specializing in content development for large and small firms and currently serves as a contract marketing coordinator with AHBL.

NAVIGATING CARBON REDUCTION: EVERETT HOUSING AUTHORITY SET TO ACHIEVE CLIMATE POSITIVE SITE DESIGN

Using a new climate calculation tool gave the design team a projection of how many years it would take the site to become climate positive, where carbon sequestration outpaces carbon emissions.

BY CHRISTINE ABBOTT & JASON HENRY
BERGER PARTNERSHIP

Designing with the climate in mind can be a technical and financial challenge for any project typology, let alone an affordable housing project. How can projects such as these measure carbon impact within a limited budget? Are there cost effective and time efficient tools to mitigate carbon impacts?

Zooming in on the process of designing for sustainability reveals the complexity. Options become more layered and nuanced. To create more transparency and ease in this effort, Climate Positive Design —with grant support from the Landscape Architecture Foundation— launched a tool called Pathfinder in 2020. Pathfinder is a free, web-based app that provides project-specific guidance on reducing carbon footprints while increasing carbon sequestration.

The Climate Positive Design Challenge, designed by Pamela Conrad from CMG Landscape Architecture, is on par with the Paris Agreement, and sets targets for how many years project types should strive to be climate positive; five years for parks and gardens, 20 years for plazas and streetscapes, and 25 years for infrastructure projects, for example.

Berger Partnership is an early adopter of the program (one of the seven biggest users in the first six months after launch) and has since leveraged our experience with the tool to apply it nimbly to more projects.

Today, designing for a climate positive outcome doesn't require a separate phase of work, but instead a few days of analysis and subsequent evaluation with the client. Serving as the landscape architect for the Everett Housing Authority's (EHA) Park District development offered us the opportunity to test Pathfinder on an affordable housing project. EHA's willingness to embrace carbon positive site work is worth highlighting, because it shows the tool is efficient enough, and powerful enough, to both make a difference and be logistically viable for the project.

The Park District development, located in the Delta Neighborhood of Everett, will become a mixed-use and mixed-income community with 1,500 homes, 1.5 acres of park space and a mix of retail and civic programs. Previously known as Baker Heights, the 16-acre site has been vacant since 2019, and is now poised to become a mixed-use and mixed-income community with 20,200 square feet of retail/restaurant, 24,000 square feet of office, 26,400 square feet of non-profit space in addition to housing.

The housing authority is working towards a phased, 10-year design and construction process. Our team, brought on for the first Planned Development Overlay (PDO) Phase, has continued work on the Phase 2 for design and construction of the southeast block including the largest park space.

Using the Pathfinder tool, our team plugged in the specifics of the project to receive instant carbon feedback on a "Climate Positive Scorecard," offering detailed statistics and a projection of how many years it would take for the project, as currently designed, to become climate positive, where carbon sequestration starts to outpace carbon emissions from building the project. After this point, the landscape sequestering elements - plants and trees in particular - render the project a net benefit to the carbon crisis. This feedback truly drove the design direction to improve carbon sequestration and reduce emissions.

In earlier discussions, the design team developed three options with input from EHA; options varied with more or less green space, a different number of trees of different tree sizes, and so on. EHA was leaning toward a preferred option with more park space, and when the Pathfinder analysis showed that the preferred option was indeed the most climate positive, it solidified a decision

CARBON REDUCTION — PAGE 15

IMAGE COURTESY OF BERGER PARTNERSHIP

PROJECT TEAM

Architect
GGLO

Landscape architect
Berger Partnership

Design consultant
Makers Architecture and Urban Design

Civil engineer
MiG

PDO project manager
Framework

Townhouse architect
Johnston Architects

Tenant improvement architect
Graham Baba

Broker and consultant
Real Retail

SEPA consultant
EA Engineering

Geotechnical engineer
GeoEngineers

Arborist
Urban Forestry Services

Traffic and transportation planning
Gibson Traffic Consultants and Heffron Transportation

CENTERING COMMUNITY, ART AND COLLABORATION AT AFRICATOWN PLAZA

The Africatown design team was guided by community input and Afrocentric Design Principles including the use of color, pattern, uplifting the community and making do with what is available.

The building's undulating front facade is designed to be instantly recognizable as the center of Africatown.

PHOTO COPYRIGHT BRUCE DAMONTE

At the corner of 23rd and Spring in Seattle's Central District, Africatown Plaza is now home to 126 families who previously would have been forced out of Seattle by the rising cost of living. While this affordable housing is much needed, the story of this development is about community, art and collaboration.

BY JON HALL
GGLO

Led by Africatown Community Land Trust (ACLT) in partnership with Community Roots Housing, the building is the culmination of more than 15 years of action and organization, with eyes on the future for more opportunities to take direct action against gentrification, the housing crisis and the lack of opportunities for BIPOC communities.

COMMUNITY INFORMED DESIGN

Long before the current architects became involved, the leaders of ACLT met with the neighbors and residents to bring forth ideas for this new development. The property was originally purchased by Lake Union Partners as part of the larger block, then donated to Forterra, who transferred it to ACLT.

Here, ACLT sought out ideas through design ciphers and other community led and inspired design and information gathering sessions. Visionary architects including Donald King and Sharon Sutton helped guide the community vision of what this space could become through these ciphers facilitated by the University of Washington College of Built Environments.

Building upon this community legacy, ACLT then formed an architectural design partnership between GGLO, David Baker Architects, and Laurie Allison Wilson to bring those initial ideas forward to reality. With the design team in place, we held multiple community gatherings to continue to bring forth additional ideas, goals and aspirations from the stakeholders before we started the design process.

We heard about the effects of gentrification within the Central District which had changed this neighborhood from more than 80% Black residents in the 1950s to fewer than 10% Black in the early 2000s. We heard from current and former residents about the importance of recognition, but also growth, of this rich diverse neighborhood history which had helped make Seattle what it is today.

Stakeholders uplifted Afrocentric Design Principles including use of color, pattern, uplifting the community and making do with what is available. Those were highlighted in addition to the community's desires for spaces for gathering, celebration, art and a welcoming place to return home to.

With the ideas from the community firmly rooted, our design team forged the development of the design to craft the building and surrounding site. We then brought those ideas back to the community several additional times to check, confirm, and refine the design, while ensuring it was in keeping with the initial information from the stakeholders.

ICONIC ELEMENTS

The design team created the form of the building with a series of undulating forms wrapped in Corten weathering steel. This element is to be the icon of the development, instantly recognizable as the center of the concept of Africatown. Inspired by the baobab trees of Africa, which were historic gathering spaces, this feature provides shelter, shade and community for the ground level plaza. The plaza is to be the center of celebrations, gatherings and community educational opportunities for decades to come.

The plaza's patterns of curving forms in the concrete and lush landscaping evoke the story of water and nature as life giving forces creating a place of refuge and home. Site Workshop's landscape architectural design with plants inspired by ,and adapted from, international locales provides additional references to communities across the globe. A community garden for the residents to use sits on the front porch, allowing for creativity and ownership of the space by the residents.

The patterning and coloration of the panel siding was inspired by African textiles. The design team arranged the texture of the vertical boards in a series to recall the patterns within the fabric in a cost effective and visually appealing manner. Earthen tones set the backdrop with punches of bright red and yellow to provide drama and interest to the building façade.

With the building itself as art, ACLT then put forth a call for artists from around the city and across the world to further develop creations to inspire and educate. From the patterns on the exterior screens, to the paintings on the interior columns, to the textiles which are part of the interior of the building, and the paintings and collages which will hang on the walls

AFRICATOWN TEAM

Developers:
Africatown Community Land Trust and Community Roots Housing

Architects:
GGLO and David Baker Architects and Laurie Allison Wilson

Landscape Architect:
Site Workshop

Civil Engineer:
Coterra Engineering

Structural Engineer:
PCS Structural Solutions

Mechanical Electrical Plumbing Engineers:
Glumac

Interior Designers:
DREAM and GGLO

General Contractors:
Absher Construction and M.A.D. Construction

in the future gallery, art is integral to Africatown Plaza.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The emphasis during the development process was not only the creation of new homes for people, but looking towards the future for the next developments.

The Sankofa bird of African heritage which looks simultaneously backward to history and forward to the future was a guiding icon within the design and development team. The community's and ACLT's goals of the creation of additional homes, spaces, and places will require increased capacity for development and knowledge. This process has set the stage for future developments of increased size, capacity and complexity.

This design partnership elevated Black designers and engineers providing opportunities for engagement and skill building. The client team grew within their capacity and staff to deliver affordable housing in partnership with the city of Seattle and Washington state.

The construction team was a joint venture between Absher Construction and MAD Construction. MAD Construction as a Black owned contracting team grew in their capacity to deliver housing at scale. Through the realization of the community's goals, a significant number of the construction workers on the site were BIPOC and locally hired.

These goals were forward looking so the next developments can be led by Black architects, Black construction teams and Black developers. With the challenge of housing affordability within the city and the nation becoming so drastic, building the skills of everyone to do more will be one step towards solving the problem.

A NEW HOME

In early October, Africatown Plaza opened the doors and welcomed families to their new home. Marked with a celebration of music, art, inspiration, and optimism for the future this ceremony was the end of one phase of the design. The start of the next phase of the development is just beginning, creating life and opportunities for the new residents. The opening of Africatown Plaza creates a place for gathering and community, inspired by and informed by its history and surroundings looking forward to a bright future.

Jon Hall is an architect and principal with GGLO, driven by a desire to improve our community by creating affordable and environmentally sustainable urban housing.

CARBON REDUCTION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

to move forward with that concept.

Using a first set of assumptions, Pathfinder determined the site would take 64 years to become climate positive, which is three times as long as the 20-year target for mixed-use development that the Climate Positive Design Challenge sets out. We began to investigate the full spectrum of what Pathfinder offers and to collaboratively assess the biggest contributors to carbon emissions in the design: concrete, especially vehicular, but also, somewhat surprisingly, maintained lawn. On the other hand, we looked at some of the hardest-working offset options: large leafy trees, large shrubs, and so on.

We achieved a significant reduction in carbon emissions by increasing deciduous trees by 20%, reducing vehicular concrete by 60%, and replacing half of a moderately maintained lawn with plantings and shrubbery. Also significant, this design option included taller buildings with smaller footprints to accommodate more green space.

These measures vary in their effort and impact; reducing the building footprint was a bigger effort, but replacing half the lawn with plantings was a minor effort with a big effect. Ultimately, the changes shaved 48 years off the timeline for Park District to become Climate Positive, now only taking 16 years, a commendable four years below the target set by the Climate Positive Design Challenge.

Moving toward carbon positive is imperative to slow the warming of our atmosphere, and the latest climate science underscores the urgency of building projects of all types to address carbon emissions.

Within landscape architecture, the Pathfinder tool offers emissions data with minimum effort and cost, allowing designers to make technically informed site design decisions that move the needle toward carbon sequestration and reduction. This reduction is critical to protect essential resources and people in the future.

Christine Abbott is project manager at Berger Partnership with a focus on sustainable site design. Jason Henry is a partner at Berger Partnership and leads the firm's climate positive design efforts.

DIALED IN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

response. A high level of diligence and care in the bid packages was evident to potential subcontractors, which created a high level of buy-in.

The design-build delivery structure provided a solid foundation of trust, collaboration and transparency. This ethos extended beyond the core project team to the subconsultants and subcontractors which led to collaborative and efficient problem-solving and decision making.

Affordable housing owners must make commitments to their funding partners to deliver projects within a total budget and to lease-up apartments within a certain timeline (often needing to hit 100% occupancy by a specific date). Walsh and SMR embraced those constraints and successfully delivered the Housing Hilltop project ahead of schedule and below the target budget.

This delivery model also yielded numerous other qualitative and quantitative results for THA:

- Due to the conditions of project funding, the Partnership needed to get building permit issued quickly and Walsh and SMR's efficient integrated design efforts led to a building permit application within eight months of the team mobilizing, and permit issuance five months after application. This is a notable accomplishment for these two large mixed-use buildings. The city of Tacoma is to be commended for their role in this result as they have developed an effective cross-agency prioritization process for affordable housing.
- Due to the efforts outlined above, a strong bid response resulted in a final price in late 2022 that was less than the previous pricing from early 2022 - quite the accomplishment in the highly volatile construction market at the time.
- Because of the completeness of the construction documents, there were very few change orders related to design changes – there were no Architect's Supplemental Instructions (ASIs) and fewer than 70 Requests for Information (RFIs). With the small number of design or scope related changes, THA was able to use their contingency for value-add upgrades, including selecting higher quality countertops and finishes, hardware, and enhancing security and communications systems.

The Partnership took a risk in selecting a design-build delivery model for the Housing Hilltop project. The team of Walsh and SMR illustrated that design-build can be an effective model to alleviate risk - to hit target budgets, manage cost volatility, and execute projects efficiently. Walsh and SMR took great pride in meeting THA's and the Partnership's goals for project execution, and most importantly, delivering 231 high-quality affordable homes and retail spaces to benefit the Hilltop community.

Dale Newcombe is a senior project manager at Walsh Construction who has delivered thousands of affordable homes in his 20-year tenure at Walsh. Rumi Takahashi is a principal at SMR who offers high quality, problem-solving and collaboration-centered design to affordable housing and social service organizations throughout the Pacific Northwest.

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