

Washington Commons Design Narrative

Washington Commons Location

Washington Commons is the new construction of a 50-unit affordable rental community for family households, consisting of studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. This also includes 1 on-site staff unit. Entitlement approval is expected to be received in early 2024.

The proposed project occupies a relatively shallow 0.75-acre site fronting on E. Washington Street across from the City Library and Golden Gate Transit stop, and the County Fair Grounds. It is also close to shopping and other community amenities.

Commercial uses are located on each side of the property along E. Washington Street, and to the north of the site are single-family, duplex, and triplex residential structures.

Physical Characteristics/Design

The design team carefully considered the design of the site, buildings, and units at Washington Commons to ensure they comply with the City's Zoning and General Plan requirements, as well as complement the existing neighborhood character and meet the needs of the residents. The site design, buildings, and landscaping were designed to fit within the context of the neighborhood character, which consists of a mix of commercial and civic structures. In addition, measures have been taken to address climate change and enhance the pedestrian experience.

The four-story building fronts directly onto E. Washington Street to create an active, urban street edge. The main floor is elevated approximately 18 inches to address geotechnical requirements. A "front porch" is incorporated on this elevated base to create an arcade and provide connection from the main entrance to the sidewalk. Residential units will activate the façade on all floor levels. Outdoor patios and play areas at the rear of the building extend the indoor amenity areas to the outdoors.

The overall building design is contemporary with a light, neutral palette. The façade is stepped along the street edge, reflecting the angle of the site, and providing additional articulation to the façade. The primary building material is cement plaster, however, an accent material such as cementitious siding may be incorporated as an accent material at the wall base. Deeper colors are also incorporated at the base and in select accent areas within the façade to provide additional interest.

The building walls and windows will be designed to achieve acoustical ratings that support a peaceful interior environment. The equipment, furnishings and fixtures will be constructed of durable materials to ensure long-term sustainability of the property.

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The 4-story building will be constructed as a Type VA wood-frame building with a slab on-grade foundation system and will be equipped with an NFPA-13 fire sprinkler system. An elevator will provide accessibility to all units.

All the units will be adaptable per the CBC 11(A) except for that 15% of the units will be “mobility units” designed per CBC 11(B). In addition, 4% of the units will have communication features. Each residential unit will be furnished with kitchen appliances, including cabinet storage, dishwasher, garbage disposal, refrigerator, stove, and a kitchen sink.

Parking and Site Access

The project is not required to provide any parking; however, it is a goal to try to achieve a parking ratio of approx. 0.5 spaces per unit or 25 spaces. To achieve this, the project proposes a vehicular driveway along E. Washington Street close to the eastern site boundary. This entry drive aisle, perpendicular to the street is 26 ft. wide as required to accommodate an aerial access fire truck. To minimize the impact of parking on the site, the drive aisle behind the building is proposed to be 22 ft wide as allowed elsewhere within the City of Petaluma such as within the Central Petaluma Specific Plan. Similarly, the size of spaces varies to accommodate “uninstall” parking, compact spaces, electric vehicle spaces and accessible spaces.

Secure bicycle parking will also be provided within the building adjacent to the rear resident entrance, and two guest bicycle spaces will be provided near the main entrance along E Washington Street.

Amenities

There are a variety of resident amenities and services. These spaces are designed to encourage socialization and create a thriving, active community. They include a centrally located lobby with mail center. Offices for Property Management and Resident Services are conveniently located near the lobby. A community room with demonstration kitchen and storage, and a community laundry facility are centrally located and provide access to a large outdoor courtyard. A central maintenance room and a large bicycle storage room are also provided.

Outdoor amenities consist of active and passive recreation areas (play area and quiet sitting areas). This includes outdoor play space for children. The outdoor spaces are intended to allow indoor social spaces to expand to the outdoors and activate the space between the building and the street edge.

Landscaping will be integrated into these spaces and will include drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, vines, and ground covers.

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Sustainable and Green Building Elements

MidPen is committed to sustainable development including the use of advanced green building methods, recycled content materials, energy-efficient and water-efficient appliances, photovoltaic panels, and drought-tolerant landscaping. Washington Commons will be evaluated per Build It Green GreenPoint Rated standards.

The project will be all-electric with no gas hook-ups or gas appliances and will include an electric hot water system. A photovoltaic system will be installed. Throughout the site, there will be bio-swales, drought-tolerant landscaping, and drip irrigation systems. The units will have Energy Star appliances as well as energy-efficient light and water-saving fixtures in the kitchens and bathrooms. Double-pane Low-E windows will be installed to maximize natural light and minimize solar heat-gain. In addition, GreenLabel Plus carpet and low-VOC paint will be used in the interiors of the units, further creating high quality and healthy homes for the residents.

Land Use Conformance

The project is located in the MU1A land use zone. Although the project generally conforms to the development standards for this mixed-use zone, there may be some waivers required to achieve the necessary density. They include but may not be limited to:

1. **Ground-Floor Use:** The City's General Plan prohibits ground floor residential units in the mixed-use zone. This project requires a waiver from this requirement to achieve the necessary density.
2. **Setback:** The mixed-use zone has a transitional step back to the adjacent R-3 Zone to the north. This project requires a waiver from this requirement to achieve the necessary density.
3. **Tree Mitigation:** City of Petaluma Zoning Code, Chapter 17: Tree Preservation requires tree mitigation for the removal or impacts to existing oak trees. Due to project density, on-site mitigation measures are unachievable. Alternatively, in-lieu fees are cost prohibitive. This project requires a waiver from this requirement to achieve the necessary density.