

Architecture as connection: Willow Crossing reinvents TOD with cultural sensitivity in Othello

■ The design emphasizes shared spaces where neighbors can connect, includes visible sustainable design elements, and focuses on inclusivity and representation.

By HUI TIAN and SALONI REGE
Studio 19



Tian



Rege

As Seattle grapples with population growth, rising housing costs, and the climate crisis, the role of architecture in shaping equitable urban environments is under renewed scrutiny. Among the city's recent developments, Willow Crossing — designed by Studio19 Architects in partnership with GMD Development — stands out for its thoughtful approach to affordable housing near transit, combining density with cultural context, sustainability and neighborhood connection.

A CLEAR PURPOSE IN A SHIFTING CITY

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) has become a popular framework for cities hoping to address housing and transportation together. But in neighborhoods like Othello — home to one of Seattle's most diverse immigrant communities — TOD requires more than just meeting targets for unit counts or walkability. It requires a design approach that recognizes and reflects the people who already call these places home.

Willow Crossing, located a block from the Othello Link Light Rail Station, offers 211 affordable housing units in a dense, transit-connected site. But beyond numbers, the project tells a broader story about how buildings can foster belonging and community through thoughtful design.

LISTENING TO A NEIGHBORHOOD

The design team began by studying the neighborhood — not only its physical form, but

its rhythms and stories. Othello is home to generations of refugee and working-class families, with over 40 languages spoken and a vibrant landscape of small, family-owned businesses. The project took these cultural narratives as a starting point rather than an afterthought.

Architecturally, the building's exterior patterns draw from East African tribal textiles — interpreted in a modern way. The use of color, rhythm, and detail is not only aesthetic but expressive, referencing traditions found within the community. The structure's massing was broken down to align with the scale of the surrounding streets, aiming to avoid the anonymity that often marks large developments.

PUBLIC REALM AS A PRIORITY

Rather than isolate the housing from its surroundings, the project opens itself to the street with public-facing elements that aim to support everyday life. A landscaped entry plaza, seating areas, and retail frontage help activate the sidewalk and create opportunities for gathering and exchange.

Retail spaces are scaled with intention — not oversized or impersonal, but appropriate for local entrepreneurs and nonprofits. These decisions reinforce the neighborhood's identity as a place of small, community-led businesses. While TOD projects can sometimes risk feeling imposed, Willow Crossing is designed to feel rooted in its context.

COMMUNITY LIFE, INDOORS AND OUT

Inside the building, the design emphasizes shared spaces where neighbors can connect. A private courtyard offers a quiet retreat, while a rooftop garden provides opportunities for residents to grow food, socialize, or simply enjoy a view. Common rooms and circulation areas are planned to encourage casual encounters among households.

Instead of treating amenity spaces as afterthoughts or luxuries, the development treats them as essential parts of the building's social infrastructure. Details like the scale of benches,

Project team

Developer:
GMD Development

Architect and Interior Design:
Studio19 Architects

General Contractor:
Sierra Construction Company

Structural Engineer:
DCI Engineers

the softness of planting, and the accessibility of entries are all part of an effort to design with people in mind — not just units.

SUSTAINABILITY EMBEDDED IN THE PROCESS

The project was designed to meet the Evergreen Sustainable Development Standard, Washington State's benchmark for affordable housing sustainability. A living green wall softens the entry and highlights the building's commitment to environmental design.

Environmental features like biofiltration planters and a planted roof are visible elements that also serve functional goals — managing stormwater, improving air quality, and reducing urban heat.

Behind the scenes, the development team worked to ensure that energy-efficient systems, healthy materials, and native landscaping were included in ways that balanced cost with performance. By embedding sustainability from the outset, the project avoided expensive add-ons and made environmental stewardship part of its core value.

MAKING THE PIECES FIT

Willow Crossing was made possible through a combination of public financing tools, including tax-exempt bonds, local housing funds and support from nonprofit impact lenders. The development also involved a street vacation process, which allowed for more cohesive site planning and the



Willow Crossing's landscaped courtyard offers communal gathering spaces that reflect the project's inclusive ethos. Photos by Anton Benedikt

creation of shared outdoor spaces.

Coordinating the funding and permitting required sustained collaboration among public agencies, design professionals and the developer. Rather than taking a cookie-cutter approach, the team worked to tailor solutions that fit the site, the community and the project's long-term goals.

A MODEL FOR FUTURE GROWTH

As more American cities turn to TOD as a strategy to address housing and mobility, Willow Crossing offers a useful model. It demonstrates how affordable housing near transit can be more than functional — it can be contextual, expressive and inclusive.

Rather than lead with buzzwords, the project leads with presence: a building that feels like it belongs, a landscape that invites neighbors in and a design language that speaks to the people who live there.

For cities like Seattle, where

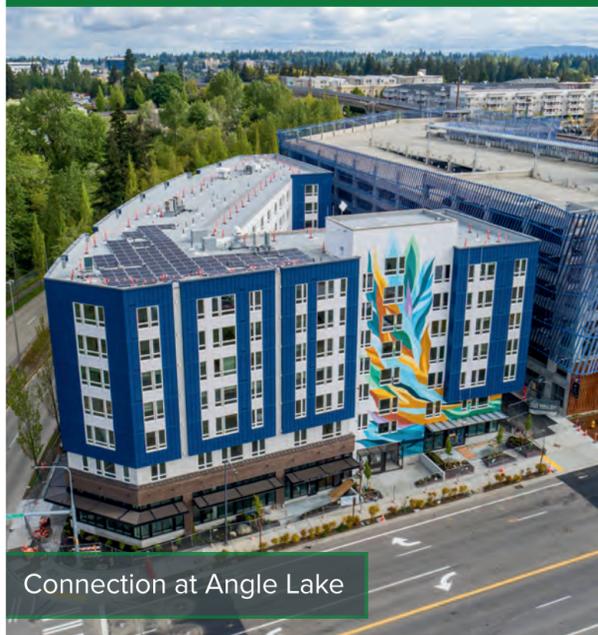
See **WILLOW** — page



The interior design of the community lounge inside draws on warm textures, vibrant patterns and flexible furniture to encourage casual interaction and a strong sense of place.



Walsh Construction Co. celebrates the 2025 completion of two remarkable Transit-Oriented Developments at the Angle Lake and Northgate Stations.



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eTOD: Creating inclusive places where transit meets home

■ *The Multicultural Village is designed to fulfill the promise of public transit for broad social impact, serving families earning between 30%-60% of median income with family-sized housing and targeted community services just steps from light rail.*

By **ASTRID HUANG**
Schemata Workshop

The Multicultural Village (MCV) is a comprehensive community hub designed not just for housing, but for fostering connections, access to resources, and creating economic opportunities. Initiated by Open Doors for Multicultural Families (ODMF) in partnership with Mercy Housing Northwest (MHNW), the development will provide 233 homes, all 100% affordable, making a significant contribution to the region's housing supply.



Huang

At the heart of this vision are two floors of community services to support and reflect the community. ODMF will operate a 22,000-square-foot Family Resource Center (FRC) and a 10,000-square-foot inclusive Early Learning Center (ELC) that will provide high-quality, affordable childcare, and early childhood education.

The project - it is a vision for what inclusive and community-centered equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD) can look like when deeply rooted in the needs of the people it aims to serve.

A FOCUS ON SERVICES AND COMMUNITY

The FRC will serve as a vital lifeline for local families, many of whom are immigrants and refugees, offering culturally and linguistically responsive services ranging from case management, and mental health support, to legal advocacy and education support.

The ELC will provide high-quality, affordable childcare and early education in an inclusive environment where children of all abilities learn together. This pedagogy, developed at the University of Washington Haring Center, nurtures empathy and emotional intelligence from an early age. Working families often face a shortage of accessible childcare options that align with their cultural and linguistic needs - invaluable for fostering long-term community stability and helping families thrive.

Strategically located next to the



Aerial rendering of the Multicultural Village with the light rail station in the background. Over half of the apartments will have two, three, or four bedrooms, aiming to provide much-needed family-sized housing close to transit. Images courtesy of Schemata Workshop

future Kent Des Moines (KDM) Sound Transit light rail station, MCV is designed to fulfill the promise of public transit for broad social impact. In addition to being 100% affordable (serving families earning between 30%-60% of the area's median income), over half of the apartments will have two, three, or four bedrooms, aiming to provide much-needed family-sized housing close to transit.

The project is intentionally crafted to be accessible and inclusive for people of all abilities. While 20 percent of the homes are specifically tailored for individuals with intellectual and development disabilities (IDD), the entire community will benefit from design elements that promote ease of use, mobility and integration.

These accessible features, embedded throughout the development and exceeding code minimums, foster a supportive, community-oriented living environment where residents of all abilities and cultural backgrounds can thrive. Onsite resident services offered by ODMF and MHNW will focus on supporting all members of the family with programming that promotes housing and educational



The development includes a 22,000-square-foot Family Resource Center (FRC) and a 10,000-square-foot inclusive Early Learning Center (ELC).

success, health and wellness, and economic empowerment.

A 4,000-square-foot food hall on the ground floor, operated by Project Feast, will support immigrant entrepreneurs by providing opportunities to gain employment and incubate food-related businesses. This effort fosters a neighborhood micro-economy reflective of the area's cultural

diversity, contributing to economic development, vibrant street life and community pride. The focus is on representation, opportunity and belonging — not just profit.

A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE BELONGS

An early aspiration of ODMF was that the building design

would reflect and honor the history of the land it occupies. Collaborating with Headwater Peoples, an Indigenous consulting firm, design decisions were made to ensure that all residents have access to exterior natural views by thoughtfully positioning com-

See eTOD — page

Project Team

Project Initiator and Operator of Family Resource Center and Early Learning Center:
Open Doors for Multicultural Families

Developer and Housing Operator:
Mercy Housing Northwest

Food Hall Operator:
Project Feast

Architect for Multicultural Village and Family Resource Center:
Schemata Workshop

Architect for Early Learning Center:
CAST

Landscape Architect:
Berger Partnership

Civil Engineer:
Latitude 48

Structural Engineer:
CPL

Interior Design:
La Union Studio

Indigenous Design Consultant:
Headwater Peoples

Art Program Manager:
Eunice Wayman Art Services

Universal Design:
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Shared spaces make housing affordability a reality in Seattle's single-family zones

■ A mix of individual and shared spaces can bring homeownership within reach for more residents.

By LEAH MARTIN
Allied8

When Barbara Busetti and I founded Allied8 in 2015, we made a promise to each other to develop something different. Our development couldn't just be run-of-the-mill, but rather, it had to be something that served as an example of how a small firm could contribute to housing affordability in Seattle and elsewhere. We set our sights on single family zones (now called Neighborhood Residential in Seattle) and more specifically, on building affordable homes in single family zones.



Martin

Our premise was very simple — the average size of a home in Seattle is 2,600 square feet and costs over \$900,000. If that average home could be divided by three owners, then theoretically each owner would be allotted 860 square feet, and it would cost them \$300,000 each.

To do that in a way that people would want to purchase a part of a home that also complied with Seattle's Zoning code, meant Allied8 had to create a new housing typology that didn't otherwise exist on the market, and it would have to rely on the fact that people would be willing to share certain spaces within their home.

Allied8 got to work! We drew, we interviewed hopeful first-time home buyers, we drew more, we created construction budgets, we kept drawing, and then we bought a property. Out of this effort, the "suite" was born and is on full display at Corvidae Co-op in the Rainier Valley, a co-development between Allied8 and Frolic Community.

Before we share the anatomy of a "suite," we need to provide the affordability context of the current and planned zoning

codes. As the Seattle zoning code is currently written, NR zones can accommodate a single-family residence and two accessory dwelling units. The single-family residence (SFR) is allowed to be 50% of the lot area.

On a commonly sized lot of 5,000 SF, the SFR would be 2,500 SF. Per Redfin, the median sale price per square foot (for single family homes) in Seattle is \$592.

There are no affordable homes on the market in Seattle because of this — check out the math: 2,500 SF X \$592/SF = \$1.48 million home.

For those of you familiar with affordable homeownership math, a four-person household that could afford this home would make 219% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Affordability is defined as a household earning 80% AMI or less. The gap between 80% AMI and 219% AMI is staggering. It's no wonder we're in the midst of an affordable housing crisis.

Looking ahead to the Seattle One Plan, which reflects the increased density mandated by the Washington State House Bill 1110, Seattle's planned zoning code will allow four units on a lot.

The math is better, but it still doesn't reach affordable levels. On that same 5,000-square-foot lot used in the math above, four 1,500-square-foot homes would be allowed, but each home would still cost \$888,000. A four-person household that could afford this home would have to make 136% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The gap is still too large to provide affordable homeownership solutions in NR zones.

But imagine if two households could own one of those homes — that's where affordable levels begin to be met. The challenge is to design homes that thoughtfully accommodate shared ownership among different households.

THE ANATOMY OF THE "SUITE"

A conventional dwelling unit contains rooms we use every day

and rooms that we may only use once a week, once a month or less. The "suite" distills the dwelling down to only the rooms and features that are used on a daily basis. Rooms and features that are used less frequently are pulled out of the private dwelling and placed in the communal space, making the "suite" more affordable than a conventional dwelling unit because an owner is paying a privacy premium only on what is used every day, and the rest is split amongst all the other owners.

Additionally, we have proven that people want more choice than what is on the market. Corvidae sold out its "suites" before it sold out its conventional units. We now have six comps that future projects can utilize for loan underwriting and appraising.

The market is undeniably there. With 366,000 renters, Seattle now has more renters than homeowners for the first time in more than 100 years. If only 10% of that population wanted to own a home in Seattle (we believe the number is much higher), then the market for "suites" is robust.

"Suites" are a powerful tool that enable architects and developers to introduce affordability into neighborhoods that have been out of reach for so many households in Seattle.

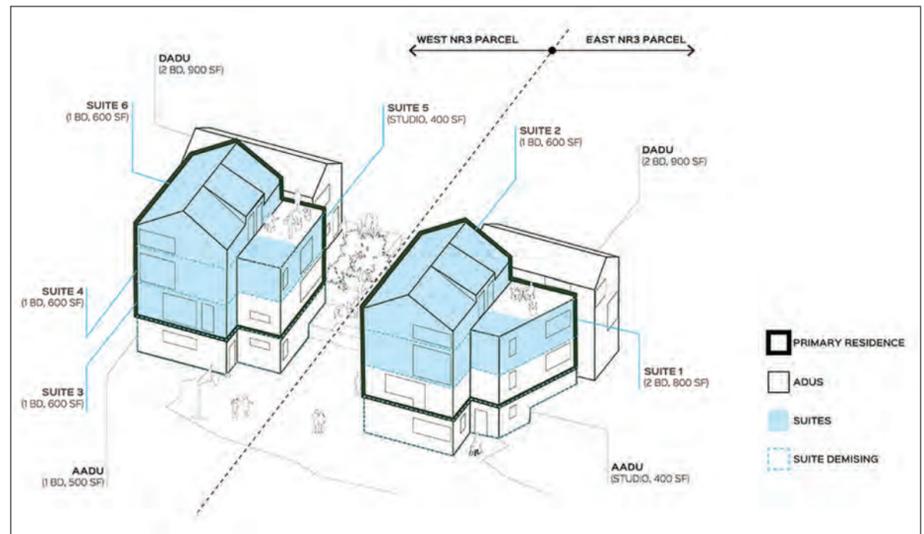
The collaboration between Allied8 & Frolic Community was critical to Corvidae Co-op's existence.

Allied8 unlocked the additional density and affordability in traditionally single-family neighborhoods while Frolic's model of co-operative ownership and cohousing unlocked the ability for individual owners to get mortgages on these suites in a cohesive legal, financial, and social structure that further drove down affordability. Other project partners included Habitat for Humanity, Seattle Office of Housing, Green Canopy NODE, 1st Security Bank, Rainier Valley Community Development Fund, Local Enterprise Assistance Fund.

Leah Martin is the co-founder of Allied8, an architecture, development and advocacy firm based in Seattle.



Homeowners at Corvidae Co-op in Columbia City share outdoor, kitchen, dining, laundry and guest space.
Photo by Rafael Soldi



Corvidae Co-op uses single family zoning creatively to spread 10 individually-owned residences over two lots.
Image courtesy of Allied8

How affordable housing can lead the way in energy efficiency

■ Hobson Place and 125th & Aurora prove affordable housing developments can pioneer sustainable building solutions that reduce energy demand, benefiting the community for years to come.

By MELISSA WECHSLER
Runberg Architecture Group

Affordable housing is often seen as constrained by tight budgets, minimal resources and complex funding mechanisms. Yet, two of Runberg Architecture Group's recent projects prove that these developments can lead the way in pioneering energy-efficient solutions that benefit not only low-income residents but the multifamily housing sector at large.

A MILESTONE IN PASSIVE HOUSE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Located in Seattle's North Rainier Hub Urban Village within a few blocks of the soon-to-open Judkins Park Light Rail station, Hobson Place is a permanent sup-

portive housing development that provides homes and comprehensive services for 177 individuals experiencing homelessness and disabilities.

Developed by Downtown Emergency Services Center (DESC) and Lotus Development, the project is the first permanent supportive housing (PSH) development in Washington State to receive Passive House Institute US (Phius) certification. The project combines independent living with wrap-around services, including a 24,000-square-foot primary and



Wechsler

behavioral healthcare center that serves the building's residents and the local community.

Hobson Place was awarded Ultra High Energy Efficiency (UHEE) funding from the Washington State Housing Trust Fund, as well as grants from Seattle City Light and the King County Housing Development Consortium's Exemplary Building Program. These funding sources allowed greater up-front capital investment to improve building systems and construction techniques, including installation of all-electric plumbing and mechanical systems.

By focusing sustainability efforts on the established Passive House program, the team used Phius certification as an organizational structure to capitalize on the innovative funding sources available and deliver a project that will benefit from a



By centralizing rooftop ERVs and using vertical chases for air distribution, the Hobson Place team minimized penetrations in the building envelope, reduced equipment count and simplified maintenance access.
Images courtesy of Runberg Architecture Group

See HOUSING — page

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An evolution of transit-oriented development in the Puget Sound

■ How transit has evolved in our region from connecting places to driving the development of connected communities.

By **JEFF FOSTER** and **MITCH PTACEK**
CGLO

As substantial public investments strive to better connect our region, transit-oriented development (TOD) provides a substantial contribution to meeting the Puget Sound region's housing needs and sustainability goals with walkable development and livable density. From the initial Sound Transit 1 Line to ST-3, how have we learned from missed opportunities in the past to potential development as it is unfolding today and in the future?



Foster



Ptacek

Prior to the middle of the last century, transit-oriented development was the key driver of urban development, fostering new neighborhood centers further from the main city center. In fact, many of the most loved walkable neighborhoods in Seattle and Tacoma originated as streetcar suburbs, efficiently transporting people to and from downtown.

However, post-WWII suburban

expansion and car-centric development led to the dismantling of streetcar systems and a shift toward low-density sprawl. By the late 60s, worsening traffic and environmental awareness prompted local leaders to reconsider the role of transit. Regional agencies such as the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) began promoting policies that integrated land use with transportation planning, laying the groundwork for future TOD.

SOUND TRANSIT AND THE MODERN ERA OF TOD

After multiple failed attempts (see Jon Talton's timely Seattle Times column, "Light rail is a target to critics, but the economic benefits are clear"), the modern era of transit began in earnest with the passing of the Sound Move plan in 1996 that eventually established the initial "Link" light rail system, "Sounder" commuter rail system, and "Regional Express" bus network.

Most significant for potential transit-oriented development was the opening of the 14-mile Central Link (now the 1 Line) in 2009, connecting Tukwila (and later SeaTac) to Downtown Seattle through the Rainier Valley. While the 1 Line established the foundation for future ST2 and ST3 expansions, political headwinds, geotechnical conditions and cost overruns resulted in a significant reduction to the original ambitions.

Twenty-five years ago, the

Seattle Housing Authority began redeveloping Rainier Vista at the same time Seattle began station-area planning for Columbia City Station along the 1 Line. One of GGLO's earliest TOD projects, this presented the perfect scenario to overlay urban design and planning policy with transportation—connecting mixed-income residents to employment without being car dependent.

The redevelopment replaced all 481 original World War II era low-income homes while also providing several hundred new units for families and seniors representing a broad income range. In total the plan for the 67-acre site provided 895 households in a walkable mixed-income community with new community parks and gardens, pedestrian scaled streetscapes, and community services all adjacent to the Link station.

The award-winning project is a great example of livable mixed-income development, however like the initial 1 Line, the project's low density was a compromise and a missed opportunity for a prime TOD site. The city station planning did not increase allowable height and density to accommodate more than four-to-five-story development—and only in the areas within a block of the station. Though greater height and density was proposed, most of the site remained zoned for low-rise development.

At the time, one public comment asserted that the city was trying to "build skyscrapers in a wheat field" for considering seven-story mid-rise development along the light-rail line. Now

See EVOLUTION — page



Simon's Northgate Station Central Park and M2 Building, with the ST 1 Line at the top of the image. Images courtesy of GGLO



Hines / Fairbourne Redmond Town Center redevelopment.

Building affordable homes with heart

■ The two-phase housing development was designed to target the different needs of families and seniors, building community and resilience for all.

By **EMILY MARTENS**
Opportunity Council

A new chapter in community-centered housing in Bellingham is underway. A still-to-be-officially-named initiative is designed to meet some of the region's most pressing needs: affordable places to live for families and seniors. Led by Opportunity Council, this thoughtfully designed development goes beyond shelter—it's a commitment to inclusivity, sustainability and the power of community.



Martens

Construction on Phase 1 is now in progress and completion is expected in Spring of 2026. The location near Bellis Fair

Mall at the corner of Eliza Avenue and Bellis Fair Parkway in Bellingham offers exceptional accessibility. It's close to public transportation, key services and major employment hubs—making it easier for residents to stay connected. New bike and walking paths are being added by the city of Bellingham to further enhance access and neighborhood integration, while professionally designed green spaces will provide shade and park-like spaces.

PARTNERSHIPS GUIDED BY DATA AND COMMUNITY VOICE

Every year, Opportunity Council, the Whatcom County Department of Health and Human Services and others work together to create a report on homelessness in Whatcom County. Part of a national program, the Point-in-



Phase 1 of the Opportunity Council project will include homes for families and an early learning center, while phase 2 will be tailored to older adults.

Time Count is a community effort to understand the changing face and needs of people experiencing homelessness. Reports from the last two years demonstrate marked increases in both the number of families with children experiencing homelessness and older adults forced into homelessness due to fixed incomes and rising costs.

These reports show that at least 671 households are experiencing homelessness, and that applications for housing in the Coordinated Entry system managed by Opportunity Council reached new highs over the past two years. Internal data points show major gaps in housing options that are both affordable and accommodating to our community members in need.

In response to these critical gaps, Opportunity Council partnered with the city of Bellingham to develop a two-phase housing development project that could help.

When developing affordable homes, it's important to remain sensitive to the needs of people who will use the space. Opportunity Council surveyed community members in Bellingham, including families and folks in the coordinated Entry Housing pool, on what they value in a home.

Responses about factors like location, amenities, common recreation areas, and how homes can best support people's family, lifestyle and culture helped inform the approach to the project. For example, living rooms have been designed to maximize

open space and flexibility, and the building's common areas will be designed to host large residential gatherings while providing quiet, restful environments at other times.

The project is more than an apartment complex—it's a long-term investment in health, housing and community resilience. And it wouldn't be possible without the help of our many community partners helping address the region's housing needs. In addition to collaboration with the city of Bellingham, a leading partner on this project, we've received support from Whatcom County, the Washington State Department of Commerce, the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, Whatcom Community Foundation, and Enterprise Community Partners, as well as

Images courtesy of Opportunity Council a Congressional allocation supported by senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell.

We're grateful to have received housing tax credits approved by the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. We also appreciate support from members of our local community.

PHASE 1: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR FAMILIES

Phase 1 of the project includes the construction of affordable housing units designed with flexibility and accessibility in mind. Every home will be ADA-compliant and follow universal design principles, making them adapt-

See HEART — page

LOOKING TO GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY?

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Evolution

Continued from page 5

passengers wonder why the buildings along MLK are so small.

One stop to the south, lessons learned are being applied at another Rainier Valley TOD site with the redevelopment of Bellwether's Kingway Apartments. Located adjacent to the future Graham Street Infill station, Kingway proposes to redevelop an existing 7-acre low density site with up to 750 affordable housing units.

Several other early TOD projects advanced along the 1 Line with varying degrees of success in areas like Tukwila, Columbia City and Mount Baker, where new housing, retail, and mixed-use developments began to cluster around stations. Despite this, much of the land in the station walksheds is still predominantly low-density residential, surface parking, and auto-centric commercial uses.

The missed opportunities can be attributed to land use policies that limited development, a young transit agency that was not yet focused on supporting TOD, and market challenges of assembling numerous small parcels to create a viable development site. Anecdotaly, Sound Transit staff noted in a past ULI Forum that the focus at the time was just to establish a transit system (in fairness, no small undertaking). While Sound Transit's first TOD project, Senior City in Federal Way, opened in 2010, it was not until 2012 that Sound Transit adopted its initial transit-oriented development policy.

ST2 AND THE NORTH LINE

As light rail expanded north of downtown Seattle to Capitol Hill, The U District and Northgate, so did the opportunities for transit-oriented development. This included Sound Transit's first station area Agency TOD project at Capitol Hill Station with 429 homes, including 177 that are affordable apartments. Continued transit investment and land-use policies stimulated numerous private investments from small infill developments to the reimagining of the former Northgate Mall (Northgate Station).

The initial vision for the redevelopment of Northgate Mall was as much a response to a changing retail market as it was a response to the impending arrival of mass transit. Fortunately, during the initial master planning phase, the ownership group and their team had the vision to rethink initial less-ambitious plans, which gave way to a more holistic rethinking of the entire neighborhood.

The approved masterplan includes up to 940 residential units, 350 hotel rooms, and nearly 2 million square feet of new commercial space, while the total amount of retail space was reduced by about half of its former size. The development is transforming former surface parking and auto-centric retail into a walkable mixed-use neighborhood anchored by the Kraken Community Iceplex and new central park.

North of Seattle, Shoreline and

Lynnwood had the foresight to complete bold station area planning long before the first arrival of any trains. Shoreline completed station area subarea plans in 2016 which rezoned mostly single family residential to Mixed Use Residential (MUR) with a maximum height of 70 feet. A unique aspect of the Shoreline Station Subarea Plan is a phased zoning map that unlocks nearly 70 blocks of TOD density immediately and additional density in 2033.

While the Shoreline Stations just opened in August of 2024, they have already seen approximately 1,700 homes planned or built near the North Station and nearly 3,100 homes built or in the development pipeline near the South Station. This strategy addresses both the evolution of how the market may be more likely to respond to opportunity over a longer period of time, and a more gradual process of change in the scale of development.

Lynnwood's 2005 Subarea Plan envisioned an urban transformation from suburban big box stores and strip retail into a vibrant city center that divides existing superblocks into smaller, pedestrian-oriented streets. In total there are nearly 3,000 housing units in the development pipeline for Lynnwood City Center, including large projects such as Merlone Geier Partner's Northline Village and The District (Formerly Lynnwood Public Facilities District), which includes redeveloping existing strip centers and tripling the size of the Lynnwood Events Center space.

In addition to new development, Lynnwood is planning for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements and the creation of a new Townsquare Park. Housing Hope is also in the planning process for seven-story affordable housing and social services on the surplus ST property adjacent to the new station.

THE EASTSIDE AND EQUITABLE TOD POLICY

On the east side of Lake Washington, TOD is driving the construction of many of the new homes from downtown Bellevue to Redmond. The Sound Transit alignment through the Wilburton and Bel-Red neighborhoods departs the freeway in favor of right-of-way through former light industrial areas that present greater TOD opportunities, attractive parcels for development and an uninterrupted walkshed.

On the north side of the Spring District, state legislation and the Sound Transit Equitable Transit Oriented Development Policy is shepherding the construction of 234 affordable apartments being developed by Bridge Housing. The affordable housing is just the first two buildings of the larger Sound Transit Spring District OMFE Surplus site redevelopment that also includes market-rate housing, retail, office and open space.

The East Link Extension recently celebrated the opening of stations at Marymoor Park and Downtown

Redmond. The Redmond expansion coincides with the 2024 adoption of Redmond's updated Comprehensive Plan (Redmond 2050).

The plan focuses on growth in the three neighborhoods served by new light-rail stations, with opportunities for increased density, reduced parking requirements and higher affordability requirements. Height and density incentives allow for 12 stories in the City Center and Marymoor Village, while 30-story (!) towers could be possible in the core of Overlake Village – time, and the market will tell.

Under the new code, Hines is leading the expansion and redevelopment of the Redmond Town Center (RTC) site, as the development manager for Fairbourne Properties. The proposed Master Plan Development (MPD) will replace surface parking with a new transit-oriented, mixed-use community while enriching the existing main retail street.

The MPD proposes up to 1,040

Housing

Continued from page 4

60% reduction in energy usage over the life of the building.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD: TECHNICAL TAKEAWAYS

Meeting these high sustainability goals required close collaboration between experienced partners including Walsh Construction, O'Brien360, 4EA Building Science as the envelope consultant, and RDH as the Certified Passive House Consultant. Phius certification is known for its stringent performance metrics, particularly in terms of airtightness, insulation, and energy usage. But rather than being a hindrance, these rigorous standards became a framework for innovation.

Key components like a 40-kilowatt solar array, electric heat-pump water heaters, and rooftop Energy Recovery Ventilators (ERVs) made the biggest impact on overall energy efficiency. Although the project was permitted under the 2015 Seattle Building Code — before ERVs were required by the local Energy code in multifamily housing — it was among the first to install these systems proactively.

By centralizing rooftop ERVs and using vertical chases for air

dwelling units along with new retail and potential office development. A minimum of 20% of the dwelling units will be affordable at 60% Area Median Income (AMI).

WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

The Puget Sound region has made great strides in transit-oriented development over the past 25 years, from a transit afterthought to the central strategy to meet our housing and sustainability needs.

In Seattle, as public sentiment towards density and transit-oriented development has been shifting, the city has started removing roadblocks to development. North and Eastside communities have made bold policy changes to allow for greater height and density around transit. Sound Transit, PSRC, and the state Legislature have all taken an active role in planning not just for transit, but for the dense walkable TOD communities that are needed to support it.

The next challenge planners

distribution, the team minimized penetrations in the building envelope, reduced equipment count and lowered maintenance burdens on the residents. These design strategies not only enhanced energy performance but also made long-term operations simpler and more cost-effective.

Ensuring airtightness was among the most challenging yet crucial aspects of the build. The residential building needed to be completely separated from the clinic space below, including complex transitions in stairwells and elevator shafts that connected wood-framed upper floors to the concrete levels.

Construction techniques employed to maintain the air barrier included:

- Platform-framed parapets to simplify air barrier geometry
- Moving ductwork beneath the roof air barrier to reduce penetrations
- Use of fully adhered air barrier membranes on exterior walls
- Detailed construction oversight to ensure high performance

The result was an air leakage rate of 0.073 cfm/ft², exceeding Phius requirements and setting a benchmark for similar projects. This exemplary performance will

and policy makers face is whether recent policies align with market realities, and to strike the right balance between encouraging TOD while also meeting other community goals.

Will height and density incentives encourage a greater supply of housing, or will they discourage development? Although high-rise construction is now allowed in more areas from Overlake to Lynnwood, residential rents cannot support the high construction cost needed to create that development in most areas outside downtown Seattle and Bellevue. Communities need to seek lessons learned and best practices from other jurisdictions and the broader development community. We should be just as proud to repeat the successes of our Puget Sound neighbors as we are to emphasize qualities of what makes each neighborhood unique.

Looking ahead to the completion of ST2, the start of ST3, and the new Stride Bus Rapid Transit

(BRT) Line, the future of TOD in the Puget Sound promises to be even more dynamic. Integrating collective lessons learned to overlay both land-use policy and transit planning, together with acknowledging an ever-evolving market reality are essential to shaping the next chapter of TOD in our region.

From the echoes of the streetcar era to the hum of the light rail, the Puget Sound's journey with TOD demonstrates a continuous striving towards more livable, accessible and environmentally responsible urban environments. As we continue to invest in transit systems, we are building not just transportation networks, but the foundations for thriving communities for generations to come.

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reduce energy demand, benefiting the community for years to come.

LOOKING AHEAD: 125TH & AURORA SENIOR HOUSING

The success of Hobson Place laid the groundwork for a future energy-forward affordable housing project: 125th & Aurora Senior Housing, located at North 125th Street & Aurora Avenue North in North Seattle along the RapidRide E Line route. Designed for the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) and anticipated to break ground this summer, the project will provide 90 units of supportive housing for seniors.

125th & Aurora builds upon Hobson's lessons, with design improvements and code changes helping reduce both cost and complexity. Since the 2018 Seattle Building Codes first required ERVs and incentivized electric domestic hot water systems, what was once cutting-edge at Hobson is now standard practice for multi-family housing construction in Seattle.

This evolution means that while Hobson Place saw a 3.8% increase in total costs for Phius-related improvements, 125th & Aurora is projected to come in at under 1% additional cost.

HYDRONIC HEATING AND COOLING

125th & Aurora is introducing a novel mechanical system to multi-family affordable housing: an air-source heat pump hydronic heating and cooling system. Designed by Ecotope, the system distributes thermal energy through floor-by-floor water loops, eliminating harmful refrigerants from the building interior.

This system promises long-term energy savings and a healthier indoor environment, while ensuring HVAC system longevity via the use of water-based distribution rather than refrigerant, setting the stage for further technical advancement in multi-family housing.

To control costs, the project will use a two-pipe system, meaning

it can operate in either heating or cooling mode seasonally (but not both simultaneously). While less dynamic than a four-pipe system, this approach works well paired with a very high-performing building envelope. It also provides in-unit cooling, adding a new amenity for affordable housing as summers become hotter and wildfires more frequent.

FLIPPING THE PARADIGM

Both Hobson Place and 125th & Aurora demonstrate how affordable housing can be at the forefront of sustainability and building innovation. Traditionally, energy-efficient systems and high-performance design are seen as luxuries affordable only to market-rate developments.

While those projects have more leeway to weigh upfront costs against lifecycle savings, affordable housing is traditionally limited by complex funding streams and strict budget caps on upfront construction costs. By leveraging sustainability-focused funding sources and adopting a systems-based design philosophy, Hobson and 125th & Aurora achieve performance levels that exceed most market-rate housing.

As urban centers grapple with rising housing demand, climate change, and social inequities, projects like Hobson Place and 125th & Aurora are models for how affordable housing can lead in the development of a more sustainable and equitable future. By embracing energy efficiency, reducing reliance on harmful refrigerants, and prioritizing occupant health and comfort, these developments demonstrate a bold path forward — one where everyone, regardless of income, can live in a building that respects both the environment and its residents.

Melissa Wechsler is a principal at Runberg Architecture Group and a part-time lecturer at the University of Washington's Department of Architecture teaching mixed-use, multifamily design in the graduate level housing studio.

Heart

Continued from page 5

able to changing family needs. Independent energy recovery ventilation (ERV) systems in each unit will help ensure fresh indoor air by minimizing allergens and environmental contaminants (like wildfire smoke) for a healthy living environment.

At the heart of the development will be a central courtyard, envisioned as a shared space where neighbors of all ages can connect through intergenerational activities, outdoor play, and community gatherings. Construction on Phase 1 began in early 2025, and the first residents are expected to move in by Spring of 2026.

One of the ways Opportunity Council helps families succeed is by helping children access the building blocks for healthy brain development through quality education. Classrooms across Whatcom County offer a safe place for kids to get the tools they need to be able to learn throughout their lives. Phase 1 of this project will include space for five different classrooms offering quality child care and a welcoming environment for kids to have the best support possible.

The child care crisis in Whatcom County continues to threaten the stability of families in our neighborhoods. As we get closer to the opening of the project, we'll be preparing classroom space according to state guidelines so that we can host kids of different ages (specifics will be guided by community needs at the time).

The addition of approximately 80 child care slots from these classrooms will make a great

impact and bring much-needed space for children to learn.

PHASE 2: WELLNESS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Slated to begin in 2025 and wrap up by spring 2027, Phase 2 of the project is focused on older adults ages 62 and over. Every detail has been considered to foster connection, stability and well-being.

- This second phase will feature:
- Private spaces with calming color schemes designed to be sensory-friendly (for neurodivergent individuals)
 - Enhanced air quality systems for health and comfort
 - Shared community spaces to support intergenerational programs
 - A community wellness room for exercise and movement
 - Health provider flex-space to accommodate visiting service providers on-site

We will also be offering two-bedroom units to help accommodate older adults who need a live-in caregiver — or who would like to have a roommate to help offset housing costs even more.

We're grateful for our community partners who are helping to turn this vision into reality. We look forward to sharing more milestones in the months ahead as we continue working to make housing a reality — not a privilege — for everyone.

Emily Martens is communications coordinator for the Opportunity Council in Bellingham.

eTOD

Continued from page 3

mon amenity windows to frame and celebrate the natural beauty of the region.

This includes sightlines to the sacred Mount Tahoma, the waters of the Salish Sea and the nearby Duwamish River Valley. Residents become aware of the greater regional context, one that is deeply rooted in cultural respect and an understanding of life and livelihood supported by the environment.

The architecture of MCV seeks to honor the identities of those who will live and work here by integrating Indigenous and multicultural motifs into exterior building facades, interior design, wayfinding and an arts program.

Multiculturalism is an all-pervasive and immersive visual message experienced in the ethnobotany of the landscape, and throughout MCV. This is a place where everyone belongs. By weaving cultural symbolism into the physical environment, the project moves beyond mere accommodation to celebrate the richness of community identity.

CENTERING EQUITY, ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY

Elevating cultural identity at MCV makes significant progress toward the principles of Equitable Transit-Oriented Development. Traditional TOD is an economic development approach,

Willow

Continued from page 2

development pressures often collide with community memory, projects like this suggest a path forward — one where architecture serves as a bridge rather than a boundary.

Hui Tian, founder and principal of Studio19 Architects, specializes in community-driven design with a strong emphasis on quality and sustainability in housing developments. Saloni Rege is a design strategist and marketing communications professional at Studio19, shaping architectural narratives.

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