

Sneak peek of Panoramic Interests' micro apartments in San Francisco

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Panoramic Interests is weeks away from finishing up Smartspace SoMa, the firm's first, 23-unit, micro-apartment building at 38 Harriet St. in San Francisco's South of Market district.

Click on the image to view of the slideshow of 38 Harriet.>>>>>

The firm, headed by [Patrick Kennedy](#), could begin leasing the 300-square-foot units in about two weeks.

The firm has yet to set the rental rates, but Kennedy said last summer he would aim for \$1,500 per month. Five of the units are set aside as below market-rate for \$959 per month. The project is a trailblazer in a few ways. Even in a dense city like San Francisco, these units are on the small side and were built on a 3,750-square-foot lot — a size most developers would never consider for multi-family housing.

The project is also on the cutting edge of modular home building. Zeta Communities, based in San Francisco, produced the units at its factory in Sacramento and contractor Pankow Builders built the foundation and assembled the units onsite.

Just last week, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance that would allow units as small as 220 square feet in San Francisco as a way to quell high demand for housing.

Kennedy hopes to reach a niche group of residents who want their own units, but lead busy, active lives and spend most of their time outside their homes.

As his project nears completion, the concept of compact, sustainable apartment living is closer to becoming a reality.

I had the chance to tour the building and the units. As I stepped in, I noticed the natural light streaming in from the unit's sole window and the rich brown of the hardwood floors.

What struck me more than the size was the narrow feel and layout of the room. It reminded me a cross between a dorm room and a hotel room.

It feels functional — every element of the unit from the high ceilings, closets, fold-out bed and two-burner stove were designed for convenience and easy access. The compactness of the space, however, would discourage dwellers from filling it too much with furniture, stuff or clutter. The building offers parking for bikes, but not cars. It's location on Harriet Street provides a residential feel in the midst of bustling SoMa.

The narrow street features several residential buildings on one side and a park and some businesses on the other.

Directly cross the street from 38 Harriet is an auto repair shop. Economically depressed and often panhandler- and drug-activity-filled 6th Street is just around the corner — there's no hiding that urban reality.

Some people have debated whether or not small units in San Francisco are good thing, and the issue stirred controversy when it went before the Board of Supervisors.

Opponents argued that micro units would deter development of housing for families.

I agree that micro-units don't match the needs of families, but perhaps if there were more units that were affordable for one or two people, then more large apartments would be available for families instead of groups of roommates who can't afford to live alone.

According to a recent report from [Cassidy Turley](#), the average studio unit in San Francisco costs between \$2,137 and \$2,185 per month — well above Kennedy's price estimate for 38 Harriet.

Besides unit size, the project's construction could also serve as a model for future construction projects. The small lot size only allowed for a 10-inch clearance on each side of the building, meaning there was no wiggle room for the contractor.

[Wally Naylor](#) of Pankow Builders said the construction process varied from conventional building in that most of the decisions had to be made upfront verses along the way and the assemblage had to be precise. "Once a unit is set, you can't scooch it over," he said.

[Cara Houser](#) of Panoramic Interests said the hard costs for the building penciled out to about \$240 per square foot. Skipping a parking garage brought down the cost significantly.

And, using pre-fabricated units made the project faster to build, easier to control the quality and produce less waste than a typical construction project.

Panoramic Interests expects to finish the project within the next several weeks and launch a website for the building. While the project has grabbed the attention of the local development community, it will be interesting to see how prospective renters react to it.

I have a feeling that if the final rental price is under \$2,000 per month, the 23 units will lease faster than you can say "micro apartments."

[View photo gallery \(11 photos\)](#)



Each unit features a single window at the back where dwellers can set up a table or seating area.