

Real Estate

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Micro-apartments come to the City

by **John Zipperer**, on March 30, 2013



38 Harriet's micro-apartments get a lot into a small space PHOTO: Panoramic Interests 2011

Micro-apartments. Twitter-aps. Mini-flats. There are many descriptive names one could come up with for the small apartments that we will soon be seeing more of in San Francisco. But judging from the opposition, you would think they were named like the media names disastrous East Coast storms: Apartmageddon, Frankenapt, Apocalyptment.

Scary thoughts aside, in November 2012 the Board of Supervisors passed legislation by Supervisor Scott Weiner — the anti-Peskin — that approved the construction of a limited number of micro-apartments. The units, as small as 220-square-feet of total space, are expected to rent for

around \$1,500 per month, about a quarter less than the average apartment in the City.

"We're at risk of losing our diversity," Wiener told CBS News. "It's harder and harder for people who are working class, who aren't earning high incomes, to be able to stay here."

"Space is at a premium in many big cities, driving up rents," reported CBS News' John Blackstone. "So micro-apartments are seen as one possible answer in cities from San Jose and Seattle to New York, where Mayor Michael Bloomberg backed a competition for best design. But nowhere are apartments more expensive than San Francisco, where an influx of young tech workers keeps demand high."

There's nothing new about tiny apartments in densely populated cities. Plenty of people have lived in tiny spaces in Manhattan, Chicago, Tokyo, and elsewhere. So why do some in San Francisco have such a problem with them? Is it a resistance to more residents, or do some critics just not want the people who are believed to be interested in renting these spaces?

Responding to criticism that micro apartments would mainly serve to house overworked and overpaid Silicon Valley workers, writer Farhad Manjoo suggested on PandoDaily that the message of such critics was, "Welcome to San Francisco! Now what the hell are you doing here?"

There are many types of possible residents to fill the micro-aps. Besides the, yes, tech workers, there are students, 20-somethings working their first jobs, new arrivals to the city waiting for bigger spaces to open up (or waiting for the next real estate crash so they can then buy something), and businesses needing space for visiting staff. Micro-apartments not only could help alleviate that chronic housing shortage but could also help people get their own space in town without needing to play Roommate Roulette.

Developer Patrick Kennedy, who learned a thing or two from his time in a 78-square-foot Airstream trailer, has been pushing the concept for a while. He set up and tested tiny apartments in a Berkeley warehouse, which he showed off to various interested members of the media. He adjusted his plans after that experiment, and he seems pleased with the final design.

At www.panoramic.com, Kennedy's company shows off its plans for SmartSpace Mission, a 160-unit building that will include a rooftop garden, cafe, bike storage, an on-site City Carshare vehicle, and energy-efficient and water-misering building operation. Its 24-unit building at 38 Harriet Street is much smaller, so it has fewer of the shared amenities but still boasts the green benefits of rainwater harvesting, high recycled content, reduced construction waste, and other things that make dense building work as well as turn it into a smart investment.

Micro-apartments and the move to increase density in the City are by no means a done deal. The City has a notoriously complicated approvals and appeals process, and the limit placed on their construction to a few hundred will hamper what could be a flourishing real estate submarket for investors and residents alike. But it's a start, and the continued de-Peskin-ization of San Francisco's approach to growth should continue to spur innovative ideas for handling population and economic growth in the City by the Bay.