



PHOTOS

Micro-Apartments So Nice You'll Wish Your Place Was This Small

ERIC JAFFE NOV 19, 2012 38 COMMENTS



Courtesy of Panoramic Interests

This week the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco will consider amending the city's building code to let micro-apartments become even more micro. At present, dwelling units must be a minimum of 220 square feet of living space plus bathroom, kitchen, and closet — roughly 290 square feet in all. [The amendment](#) [PDF] would reduce that minimum to 150 square feet of livable space, for a total area of 220. If you could trade stock in real estate terms, now would be the time to buy *cozy*.

The proposal has stirred some debate in recent months. Developers say it's the natural response to soaring rents and a growing single population. The average studio in San Francisco now [rents for more than \\$2,100](#), and roughly two in five city residents [live alone](#). Tenant advocates fear the new rule might displace affordable housing and set a dangerously cramped new living standard.

Like it or not, [tiny seems here to stay](#). Several California cities — including San Jose and Santa Barbara — already permit 150-square-foot minimums. Seattle has tested out micro-apartments, and earlier this year New York announced [a pilot project](#) for a micro-unit rental building. Cities outside the United States, like Tokyo and Paris, went snug long ago. A new micro-loft development in Vancouver, with some units as small as 226 square feet, [rented out within a month](#).

Bay Area developer Patrick Kennedy of [Panoramic Interests](#) believes tiny dwellings will "get huge" for a number of social, economic, and planning reasons. Cities benefit from the expanded tax base, neighborhoods benefit from the infusion of people, residents benefit from the social dynamics of density. At a time when public budgets are crunched, says Kennedy, micro-unit buildings are also "a way of civilizing an area without using city or state or federal funds."

Micro-apartments feature prominently in a number of Panoramic projects. [SMARTSPACE SoMa](#) is a 23-unit building at 28 Harriet Street in San Francisco, with most apartments around 300 square feet, that has ample bike storage but no car parking. SMARTSPACE Mission is a larger micro-unit building at 9th and Mission, right across from Twitter, that Kennedy hopes will be done in 2014. If the city approves the new 150-square-foot minimum, he'll build micro-micro units too.

Kennedy believes tiny apartments are particularly well-suited for the active, car-free, single

Millennials already coming to American cities. SMARTSPACE Mission will include spacious common areas that encourage residential camaraderie and balance out the spartan quarters themselves. Elaborate lobbies, a café, and a lounge area — kind of like micro-apartments meet the Ace Hotel, he says.

"You can have a lot of people in a space, but the impacts are all on the plus side of a ledger: you don't have any traffic, you just have people taking transit, riding bikes or walking, and spending money in a new neighborhood," says Kennedy. "I also think a higher concentration in one spot creates an interesting social dynamic that enhances the lives of the people there."



SMARTSPACE SoMa

Kennedy sees four main challenges in designing an attractive micro-apartment. The first is where to put the television, which Panoramic resolves by including a flatscreen with every unit.



SMARTSPACE SoMa - Queen unit

The next two are where to put the bed and dining room table. Panoramic address both problems by installing a modernized, Queen-sized Murphy bed that doubles as a daytime table. The fourth problem is storage. Panoramic units have high ceilings — some nearly 10 feet — which creates plenty of room for loft storage above the closet.



SMARTSPACE Mission - Queen unit (bed down, top; table down, bottom)

Panoramic also invests a great deal of money and effort into sound-proofing its units, says Kennedy. Thicker walls, acoustical mats, additional sheet rock, specially made electrical outlets. He likes to think a person can have a Primal Screaming therapy session without waking their next-door neighbor.

"High-density places need high-density sound-proofing," Kennedy says. "A small place can be quite pleasant provided you don't have to listen to your neighbors."



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SMARTSPACE Mission - Twin unit

Still Kennedy recognizes there are natural limits to human confinement. He says the micro-apartment "sweet spot" is probably about 220 square feet, and that 160 is getting close to the minimum endurable standard. The biggest factor in tenant responses to micros is the type of lifestyle that's lived outside the apartment. "One-sixty is not a good size for a shut-in," he says.

All images courtesy of [Panoramic Interests](#).

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