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# Developer aims high for 1,000-unit apartment project in West Oakland

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LOWNEY ARCHITECTURE

Panoramic Interests wants to build 1,031 apartments at 500 Kirkham St. in Oakland in a project called the Hub.

Developer Panoramic Interests revised its design for a 3-acre site near the West Oakland BART station to include 1,031 units of "family-size" housing.

The firm originally conceived of more than 1,400 units for 500 Kirkman St., but cut out one-bedrooms and left only two studios to make room for larger two- to five-bedroom units.

"This site will appeal to much larger households because of its proximity in every direction to job centers in the Bay Area," said Patrick Kennedy, head of Panoramic Interests.

Designed by Lowney Architecture, the project, called The Hub, applies the developer's penchant for small, efficient units. The apartments will range from about 450 to 1,000 square feet.

Several other proposals for the site failed to move forward. Panoramic's latest design encompasses three separate structures including two mid-rise buildings and a 240-foot tower.

The apartments make use of every square foot without any empty corridors, Kennedy said.

The result is that the building can accommodate more units at a more affordable cost. Rents are estimated to start around $2,500 for a two-bedroom and around $3,500 for a four-bedroom.

"The driving force behind almost all the design decisions is how to provide affordable unsubsidized housing," Kennedy said. "The greatest unmet need in the Bay Area is entry-level urban housing. There's a lot of luxury housing being built, but not much for the highly touted missing middle."

The developer also stripped the amenities down to the bare minimum. That means no gyms, pet spas or chef's kitchens.

Instead, the complex will feature two parks and two alleys that Kennedy said will function as open-air living rooms with space for eating and gathering. The project will also have about 15,000 square feet of retail and 32,000 square feet of commercial space for small businesses.

Also missing from the design: parking. The site will only have seven spaces for car-sharing and deliveries.

"We think price is the best amenity," Kennedy said. "We want our residents to participate in the civic life in Oakland and just have an affordable place to live so they can stay in Oakland."

Panoramic plans to submit the new design to the city in the next few days and secure approval within a year with a goal of starting construction in 2018.

Even at a lower unit count, the project could become the single largest apartment complex ever built in Oakland. In the meantime, another project, Carmel Partners' 634-unit apartment tower at 1314 Franklin St. is vying for that distinction.

Kennedy will need a zoning change to build a taller building at 500 Kirkham. The city gave Boston Properties the green light for a 240-foot tall, 402-unit tower on a site adjacent to the MacArthur BART Station.

Kennedy said high-density projects make sense close to major transit stops. Other developers are also embracing that idea including the development team working on a 3.7 acre, BART-owned site at the West Oakland station.

That project, also in the conceptual phase, could include a 25-story office tower, 165 apartments and 62,000 square feet of retail.

Across the street from 500 Kirkham, Holliday Development plans to start construction soon on 532 Union St., an approved, 110-unit project.

Up until recently, many developers and investors did not believe West Oakland was suitable for major developments, said Morten Jensen, an architect with JRDV who worked on the city's most recent zoning and development guidelines for West Oakland.

Now, the neighborhood is attracting significant interest on sites close to the BART station.

"It's not all that different than what happened in South of Market," Jensen said, referring to a once-neglected neighborhood in San Francisco, whereas West Oakland's transformation is still taking off.

**Blanca Torres**
Reporter
*San Francisco Business Times*