

After backlash, developer tweaks plan for car-free 1,000 units at West Oakland BART

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A \$300 million West Oakland housing development that hoped to be car-free is pushing ahead — but with the addition of some parking places.

[Panoramic Interests](#) plans to build 1,032 units with 44,000 square feet of retail space at 500 Kirkham St., a 3-acre site adjacent to the BART station. The only catch was the grand total of parking spaces that it wanted to build: eight.

Earlier this year, city staff criticized the proposal, writing in a February report that the lack of parking "may be of a concern in the surrounding neighborhood."

Now nearing the third design review meeting in the fall — with hopes of breaking ground in spring 2019 — Panoramic Interests has increased the number of parking spots to 48.

"We still think it's unnecessary, but we're compromising," said [Patrick Kennedy](#), head of Panoramic Interests. The company also finished a 200-unit project at 1321 Mission St. in San Francisco's SoMa neighborhood without parking, and [recently broke ground](#) on a \$100 million apartment building at 12th and Harrison streets in SoMa, also parking-free.

The development would include one 23-story tower, plus two smaller buildings reaching eight and nine floors, respectively. Lowney Architecture designed the project, and Pankow Builders is the general contractor.

Parking is a particularly contentious issue near the West Oakland station, where developers argue that the presence of BART and availability of ride-sharing services like [Uber](#) and [Lyft](#) should be enough to reduce the need for parking. They also argue that parking takes up space that could be used for much-needed housing.

Oakland reduced parking requirements for new projects in 2016, completely removing the minimum number of spaces for downtown developments. The move was a response to research showing less demand for parking at projects near public transport, said [Darin Ranelletti](#), policy director for housing security at the mayor's office.

But at the West Oakland site, the minimum is still .35 spaces per unit. Panoramic would try to avoid that



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Patrick Kennedy, president of Panoramic Interests

requirement with the state public density program.

“We haven’t seen projects outside downtown with this few spaces, so this is a test case in many ways to see if this amount of parking is successful,” Ranelletti said.

On nearby BART property, Oakland-based Strategic Urban Development Alliance LLC (SUDA) and China Harbour Engineering Co. Ltd. are pushing for a proposal that would include 1 million square feet of office space and 185 housing units. The number of parking spaces there has not yet been determined, said Alan Dones, CEO of SUDA.

Dones said nearby residents have a range of opinions about the project. While some residents have pointed to BART’s admitted over-crowding as a sign that parking shouldn’t go away anytime soon, others think parking is an environmental and neighborhood blight that attracts drivers from all over the East Bay.

“Look, there’s a lot of validity to both sides of the dispute,” Dones said. “So all of us are faced with this complex topic that we have to address.”

Panoramic plans to restrict tenants from getting permit parking elsewhere in the neighborhood to show their commitment to car-free tenants, Kennedy said.

In April, the land surrounding the station was included as part of a federal opportunity zone program, which aims to incentivize investment in specific neighborhoods. The developer hopes that the site will function as part of a larger economic revitalization of the area. There’s room for 40 to 60 businesses at the project, which Kennedy said will be an “Oakland-ish affair.” The aim is to draw West Oakland restaurants, bars, hairdressers and manufacturers.

But first, the project has to make it through the planning process. Panoramic aims to get the project approved this fall.

“I’d love it if the mayor could waive her magic wand and move it forward, but land use doesn’t work that way in California,” Kennedy said.

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