

Outreach is priority for firm on SE Division project

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Urban Development Partners hopes to break ground this month on a 28-unit multifamily project at the corner of Southeast Division Street and 33rd Place. (Rendering courtesy of Works Partnership Architecture)s

Southeast Division Street has seen a lot of changes in the past two years. With approximately 10 new apartment buildings featuring 250 units under construction or in the works, development is reshaping the street between Southeast 30th and 50th avenues.

For instance, Urban Development Partners this month is hoping to break ground on a 28-unit multifamily project at Southeast Division Street and 33rd Place. It's the second phase of a three-building development that is bringing 95 new units to the intersection.

Portland-based UDP has emphasized collaboration with neighboring residents as it has tackled the project.

"I would just say that our work with the neighbors is of primary importance, because we're in it for the long run," said Neeley Wells, who coordinates UDP's neighborhood and community outreach program. "We own our buildings after we build them. It's about being there throughout for whatever conversations come up."

Judah Gold-Markel, a representative of Richmond Neighbors for Responsible Growth, said the approach hit the right note for the community.

"I will tell you in general they've worked a lot closer with the community (than other parties)," he said. "They've modified and made changes to future plans ... They try to incorporate green space; they use innovative features; they don't just try and pack the skin of the building with units ... Their vision of the Division Street corridor is much closer to what many people along the corridor saw it as being."

UDP envisions a four-story building dissected by light and landscaping. Carrie Strickland, a principal with Works Partnership Architecture, the project's designer, said the idea was to perforate the streetscape - like punching breathing holes in a box.

"You're providing relief to that street wall," Strickland said. "Like a sheet of paper that you can cut holes and allow green space to ventilate it."

Rather than build a consistent mass of apartments, UDP plans to include three open-air courtyards on the second, third and fourth levels. Units will open onto these spaces like they're backyards.

UDP is already constructing a 37-unit apartment complex across the street, and just submitted for pre-permit review of a 30-unit building due west of the 28-unit one. David Keltner, a lead designer at THA Architecture, which is designing those buildings, said their appearances vary architecturally, but they all answer the same riddle. Specifically, they break down mass and weave into existing infrastructure.

"These buildings understand that you need to engage the street," Keltner said. "It's not OK to pull back all the way, but at the same time it's providing these little cuts into the buildings that expand on the public realm, while staying urban."

Both of the buildings THA is working on have modern facades with ample deck space, but they also commit a significant amount of square footage to open areas. A courtyard bisects the 37-unit building, while the 30-unit apartment will wrap around an interior courtyard; both will be open to the public.

Another unique aspect of all the buildings is their use of metal framing instead of wood. Keltner said that's a more expensive option, but over the long term saves the building from problems that arise as wood expands and contracts.

The 30-unit complex will also provide 10 parking spaces to residents of any of the three buildings, and UDP is reclaiming approximately 17 street parking spaces for use by the public. Wells said providing those spaces was necessary.

“What we really want to encourage - not just our tenants - is to drive fewer cars and to own fewer cars,” she said. “So what’s important to us, what’s critical to us, is that there is housing close to where people work. (We’re) really looking for 20-minute neighborhoods. But we also know that people have cars and people will park.”

Parking has been a hot-button issue on Southeast Division Street. City commissioners last week adopted new minimum parking requirements for certain multifamily projects in response to neighborhood complaints.

Wells has invested a significant amount of time listening to those complaints firsthand. Keltner said it has made a difference.

“Neeley goes out before they’re even thinking about doing anything on properties,” he said. “She is literally going door to door to talk to people. They have one of the most genuine, forthright and authentic engagement processes of any developer in Portland.”

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