

Design Concept Narrative. 1/21/21
425 Humboldt Street Apartments

Overview/Description

This project is on an approximately half-acre downtown site between Humboldt and Riley Streets, just south of buildings that front 7th Street. Currently the site is occupied by parking, and a one and two-story office building.

Along with other proposed infill housing projects of a similar scale and size in the area, including one immediately across Riley Street, this project represents the beginnings of a long-anticipated housing renaissance in the heart of downtown Santa Rosa. This 8-story mixed-use project will cover the majority of the site and will have 6 stories of dwelling units (94) over 2 levels of parking.

The main building entry will be on Humboldt Street. Along the entire length of the Humboldt Street frontage will be ground level resident amenity spaces (lobby, leasing office, and recreational areas), as well as an office space for a separate tenant with its own entry. Both of these spaces will have high ceilings and a partial second floor. There will be a landscaped open courtyard at the 3rd level, and an 8th floor clubhouse with exterior deck at the top floor directly above the main building entry.

Building Form

The design team initially explored a “U-shaped” building that backed up to the apartment building to the north, but instead developed a scheme with two separate buildings above the podium, connected by bridges. This approach affords the greatest access to light and views for both projects and provides an open communal space on the 3rd floor between the two apartment wings.

This configuration in turn greatly defines the appearance of the project, allowing two slender building elevations which are prominently visible from the south. These elevations are designed to distinguish the units from the stair towers, which along with a recessed slot of vertical windows at the corridor ends greatly diminishes the mass of the building. Pitched roofs are visible at the south elevation define the skyline of the project. The streetscapes along both Humboldt and Riley Streets will most often be seen from street level obliquely, not in elevation (other than at street level), a condition that has helped guide the design of these two elevations.

The design approach envisions a single building that has been pulled apart to reveal a podium level courtyard connected by pedestrian bridges on each residential floor. This courtyard is a quiet, landscaped amenity space, with a character of its own including walls of a material and

color different from the public facing facades. This landscaped open space is for all tenants and their guests. The courtyard is envisioned as an organic space with raised planters that undulate in height and width, providing seating and low screening opportunities. Spaces are arranged to create more intimate seating arrangements with space for groups at either end of the courtyard. Large trees will be spaced to provide screening from above as well as seasonal interest, shading and sound dampening. Plantings will be low water using and will provide seasonal and textural interest.

Another unique outdoor space is the 8th floor terrace which provides wonderful south views. A partial height planter with cascading plantings at the terrace perimeter will provide visual interest from the terrace as well as the from the street.

The two street-facing elevations are of different lengths, and while consistent architecturally are expressed slightly differently. The longer Riley Street façade features two full height recesses, sun shading strategies, and less glass given its western exposure. The Humboldt Street façade has a strongly expressed main building entry facing the downtown core, and substantial glazing along the sidewalk.

Design Expression

Building colors and material selects were chosen to provide the building with regional and contextual connections. Wall cladding at the street and side elevations are randomly spaced vertical standing seam metal panels in a warm reddish-brown color. At the stair towers and various other accent areas diamond shaped metal shingles reference the nearby Cherry Street neighborhood. Most units in the building feature private balconies.

Whereas most “podium” buildings express this lower concrete construction, this project wraps the podium to various degrees to create a warmer pedestrian level streetscape. The interplay of the metal cladding and concrete structure at the lower two levels provides a unique level of interest. Along the Humboldt streetscape, the building windows and interior planters provide an inviting view to passersby. Special pavement denotes entries and provides a visual clue to pedestrians that they have arrived. Street trees will be spaced to provide shading and will meet the Fire Department’s requirements for aerial access. The trees will be positioned to allow movement from parked cars to the sidewalk and to provide anchorage for visitor bike parking. Along Riley Street, parking is obscured by a metal screen. The garage entries will be demarcated by planted bulb outs. The sidewalk width on Riley street does not support street tree planting.

The building is planned as a mass timber hybrid structure, which will allow the underside surface of the upper roof overhangs and entry soffits to be clear finished wood, which will result in a striking skyline. A pair of columns supporting the overhanging roof at the 8th floor clubhouse will also be clear finished wood.

Sustainable Design

The intent of this project is to display its many sustainable attributes. The use of mass timber – which among other important environmental advantages sequesters carbon – will be key and will be visible at the eaves and other locations. Visible photovoltaic panels mounted to the south facing walls and roof will be another dramatic manifestation of this project's emphasis on sustainability.