

CASE STUDY



Arroyo Green Apartments

MidPen Housing
Redwood City, California

Project Open: Spring 2020

Site: 0.7 acre

Building: 139,293 sqft (total);
8,312 sqft daycare

Density: 124 du/ac

Number of Units: 117

*2018 Gold Nugget Merit Award,
Best Senior Housing Community,
On-the-Boards*

*2018 Sage Honoree Award, Best 55+
Affordable Rental Community,
On-the-Boards*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Where you find great need and limited resources, vision and creativity expands what is possible. Arroyo Green Apartments, an affordable senior housing development for very-low to extremely-low income seniors with a childcare center for infants through preschool and public open space, is rising to the challenge of meeting the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders: seniors and children, city and public, and developer.

“DAHLIN’s deep experience in multifamily housing design combined with their excellent project management skills has made them a valued partner to MidPen and ensures that Arroyo Green will be a Downtown Redwood City landmark for generations.”

Mollie Naber, Senior Project Manager, MidPen Housing

CHALLENGES

Located halfway between San Francisco and the Silicon Valley, Redwood City, California is teeming with opportunity even as residents struggle with the high cost of housing. According to online database [AffordableHousingOnline.com](https://affordablehousingonline.com/), while the median gross income is \$84,934 per year (or \$7,078 per month), 52.7 percent of households who rent are overburdened, paying 30 percent or more of their gross income to rent.

The options for very-low to extremely-low income households is extremely limited, with only 12 affordable apartment properties within the city (<https://affordablehousingonline.com/housing-search/California/Redwood-City>). The lack of affordable housing is specifically challenging to seniors, who have fixed incomes and often need access to supportive services to help them age in place.

Seeing how underserved seniors are in the current housing market, MidPen elected to develop Arroyo Green as affordable senior housing. Given the

great needs, maximizing the number of units is an important goal in fulfilling MidPen Housing’s project vision, enabling as many seniors as possible to remain in Redwood City.

For Footsteps, the onsite childcare center, protection and privacy for the children is imperative. Also important is creating an environment that creates opportunities for them, and enhances learning and development opportunities. In choosing to co-locate senior housing with childcare, an additional layer of complexity exists in maximizing the mutual positive impact that seniors and children can have on one another while respecting the ways in which their needs differ.

While the context of the site is urban, the natural creek that runs alongside it provides an opportunity for open space. It was important to both MidPen and the City to integrate the creek into the design of the project in a way that benefits the public as well as the seniors and children.

HOW DAHLIN HELPED

Making Physical Connections in Tune with the Downtown Vision

Completing the last exposed section of Redwood Creek within the parameters of a very detailed Downtown Precise Plan, heavily influenced the design and site plan. The creek runs through the site with a trail connecting to adjacent sites. Preserving that connection, the building orientation, layout, and massing responds by stepping down towards the creek and orienting the podium deck—with its amenities—towards it.

This design leverages the public creek and trail as an amenity for the seniors and the children, providing a connection to the natural environment within urban surroundings. The investment in open space also promotes and supports the collective health and wellness of the community, and Downtown Redwood City as a place.



Points of Interest within Downtown Redwood City

- 1 San Mateo County History Museum
- 2 Courthouse Square
- 3 Fox Theatre
- 4 San Mateo County Superior Court
- 5 U.S. Post Office
- 6 Redwood City Public Library
- 7 Kaiser Permanente Medical Center
- 8 Redwood Creek
- Downtown Parks

- Downtown Precise Plan Area
- Caltrain Station
- Caltrain
- SamTrans Bus Station

Investing in Open Spaces Promotes Community Health and Wellness



As public investment in open space creation has flattened in recent years, public/private partnerships in which developers help fund, create, or otherwise enhance open space near their developments, such as MidPen Housing's partnership with Redwood City to finish the last exposed area of Redwood Creek on the Arroyo Green development, are crucial to helping more people have access to open spaces.

Just as the availability of affordable housing is an essential component to thriving, equitable communities, parks and open spaces are essential to the well-being of community members.

ACCESS TO URBAN GREEN SPACES

The Case for Open Space, a 2018 report published by the ULI Sustainable Development Council, found that people who live within a half-mile of a park tend to exercise more than people who lack park access, and that access to even small green spaces can reduce symptoms of depression in people who live near them.

The benefits of access to urban green spaces is so profound that it is actually amplified in lower-income, urban communities such that when these communities have access to high levels of greenery they have been found to have mortality rates similar to those of higher-income communities.

BENEFITS OF WALKABLE OPEN SPACES TO OLDER ADULTS

While people of all ages benefit from walkable access to open spaces, there are specific benefits to older adults that often face increased mobility issues. A 2016 research brief published by Nature Sacred and the TKF Foundation, *The Benefits of Nearby Nature in Cities for Older Adults*, found that adults 50 and over who live within walking distance of a

park use parks significantly more than individuals not within walking range of a park or other walkable space.

Additionally, adults who take daily outdoor walks report significantly fewer complaints in pain, sleep and other physical ailments, and experience better moods, decreased chances of depression, reduced stress levels and improved cognitive function when compared to adults who do not go outside daily. Many of the mental health benefits are still experienced by older adults just by looking out a window into an open space, park or other green space.

INVESTING IN REDWOOD CREEK

By making the creek an integral component to the design and site plan, DAHLIN was able to ensure that MidPen Housing's project will support their senior residents and the children of Footsteps health and well-being with access to high-quality open space. At the same time, ensuring the creekside trail connects to the adjacent sites makes this open space a benefit to the public as well. The project site is also within a half-mile of over half a dozen small downtown parks.

Problem-solving with Creativity and Flexibility

Architectural Solutions that Respond and Adapt to Site Circumstances

Site Suitability

The initial design intent assumed underground parking; however, the soils report revealed the groundwater conditions were unsuitable for that approach. This necessitated two stories of above-grade parking, adding a story to the building. Integrating liner units around that second level of parking masks the visibility of the additional story of parking from the neighborhood.

Architectural Aesthetics

The City awarded the RFP based upon a contemporary design. However, amidst concerns that so much of the recent development was already contemporary, the City requested the design changed to a traditional architectural style.

Creating an appropriate design character was challenging because the surrounding context was actually quite contemporary, and because MidPen Housing had already invested heavily in the design. In order to address the City's concerns and minimize redesign costs to MidPen Housing, DAHLIN worked to keep the footprint and guts of the building the same, while incorporating large elevation gestures such as changing the windows and the material palette. This approach saved MidPen money and provided the City with a gentle contemporary interpretation of the neoclassical architectural style.



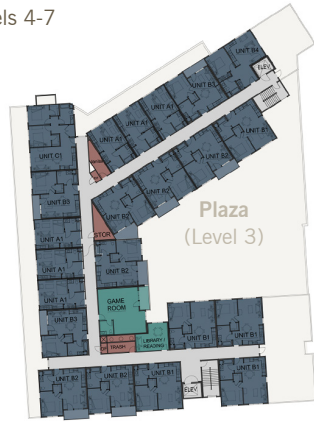
A second level of parking was added to the building, as a result of unsuitable soil conditions for underground parking. The vertically mixed-use building places senior living over Footsteps, a childcare center, combining uses that promote intergenerational programs for mutual benefit.



Large elevation gestures such as changing the windows and the material palette, respond to the City's preference toward a more traditional neoclassical architectural style.

ARROYO GREEN APARTMENTS

Levels 4-7



Level 3 (with Plaza)



Level 2



- Residential (Senior Living)
- Commercial / School (Footsteps)
- Utility
- Commons / Amenity
- Building Circulation
- Parking Garage

Designing for Compatibility Between the Needs of Two Different Uses

Daycare Requirements

Programmatically, the building is shared by senior housing and a daycare facility. The Footsteps daycare provides childcare and education for infants through toddlers, with the maximum age being four to five years old. The daycare is a significant component as it occupies a large portion of the first floor and aligns with the creekside edge of the site. As an accredited daycare/school, there are specific requirements for the size of outdoor spaces and their uses with protection and privacy for the children being a key concern. Meeting the daycare requirements as well as the needs of senior residents dictated the layout of the first floor.

Daycare outdoor spaces are subject to specific square footage requirements for grass, soft surfaces, and play structures. The original intent was to have large play structures, but the available space was limited due to the creekside trail that runs along the site. Instead,

DAHLIN designed two fenced off areas running along the creekside with a combination of synthetic turf, sand boxes, and play decks.

Access and Security

Since property management staff, daycare staff, and senior residents all need access to the parking garage, ensuring only daycare staff has access to daycare spaces required addressing. DAHLIN placed a door in the garage, only accessible by a key FOB, to enable daycare staff to pass through the garage to the daycare while preventing senior residents from doing the same.

Additionally, a code required egress door necessitated an exit path from that door through the daycare play area for senior residents, creating both safety and space issues for the children, as the daycare must have a certain amount of outdoor space. DAHLIN resolved this conflict with an alarmed egress door that is only accessible for emergencies. This addressed the security issue to the daycare in a preferable manner, as the other option was to add fences around the outdoor daycare space, obscuring their creekside views.



Life Lessons and Youthfulness United

Intergenerational Programs: Designing Successfully for Mutual Benefit

According to the *Intergenerational Programming in Senior Housing: From Promise to Practice* report published in 2017, due to the nature of housing to provide economies of scale that can help ensure sustainability, senior housing can be an optimal environment for high-quality intergenerational programs. MidPen Housing and Footsteps are very interested in the potential opportunities for intergenerational programs that their partnership in the Arroyo Green development provides.

The aforementioned report defines intergenerational programs as the practice of bringing people of different generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities that promote greater understanding and respect between generations, contributing to communities that are more cohesive.

Cultivating such opportunities has been a key component to the overall project vision. To that end, the project development team has worked very closely with Footsteps to incorporate the specific infrastructure needs of Footsteps into the design of the community without compromising design solutions for the senior residents.

The report goes on to cite research that engagement in high-quality intergenerational programs can decrease social isolation and increase an older adults' sense of belonging, self-esteem and well-being while preventing ageist attitudes from developing in children and youth. As the project progresses through development to opening, MidPen Housing and Footsteps look forward to planning and collaborating on intergenerational programs. Initial activities under consideration between them include:



Storytime

A program where senior resident volunteers read books to the children.



Gardening

A program utilizing the planter boxes in the courtyard amenity for the children to learn about gardening from senior resident volunteers.



Performance

Occasional short plays or concerts performed by the children for senior residents.

RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS

Arroyo Green has received entitlement approval with a positive response from the community, as well as securing the necessary funding. MidPen will provide onsite support services to senior residents to help them age in place, maintaining their independence. The project is scheduled to open in spring 2020.

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Footsteps anchors the building corner and engages the street edge and creekside trail.



The courtyard amenity on level three is an open plaza with passive activities facing and overlooking Redwood Creek.