

Project Title: 719 East Sunset

The 719 East Sunset lot in the Cornwall Park neighborhood is a large, irregularly shaped abandoned lot located between the Interstate 5 south off-ramp and East Sunset Drive. The 33,847 square foot lot has restricted vehicular access with right turn only ingress and egress. The reduced vehicular access and proximity to a busy highway make the site unsuitable for most commercial uses, but the large lot provides an opportunity for affordable infill middle housing for architects and developers willing to provide creative solutions to the site limitations while working to emphasize its unique attributes.

One of these limitations is the site is hemmed in by the adjacent off-ramp and the four-lane Sunset Drive. If unmitigated, these busy roads preclude street parking, restrict deliveries, deny children critical independent outdoor play and inhibit street level neighborhood connection. This design counters those limitations by connecting the homes with a paved plaza that combines delivery zones, a safe area for children to play and limited parking for residents and visitors for whom public transportation may not be practical. The plaza is anchored by a zone of permeable pavers which connects to the communal lawn to the west. The permeable pavers encourage traffic to slow due to the perceptive and textural change as one enters more deeply into the communal space.

One of the attributes that makes the site ideal for this type of housing is pedestrian and biking proximity to Sunnyland Elementary, St. Joseph Hospital, and Sunset Square through existing sidewalks and the city's planned Squalicum Parkway Connector Trail. The design serves to accentuate these connections by developing the existing desire path along the narrow strip adjacent to the I-5 off-ramp into a public bike trail with two connections at the north and south ends of the main plaza that allow access from the site, while still preserving the integrity of the inner plaza.

Proximity to a large highway such as I-5 creates negative visual, acoustic and psychological effects. The site plan mitigates these effects through strategic use of space and mass. The central plaza and upgraded connector trail not only serve as community hubs, but provide necessary distancing. The detached garages with their thick, highway-facing CMU walls provide the physical acoustic barrier while the occupiable green roof and solar panels serve as both a visual screen for the highway and as a visual connection point between the semi-public roof patios and the public bike corridor. The garages are oriented to allow for exactly south-facing solar panels angled at 40° for nearly optimum energy production. This optimal orientation was a guiding principle of the site plan design. By separating the garages from the main living units, the design allows for greater use opportunities such as home shops or musical practice spaces that could cause acoustic conflict in a more conventional arrangement.

The housing design approaches sustainability and affordability as a unified problem with a relentless focus on energy efficiency, construction waste minimization, and long-term maintenance reduction. Each triplex is designed to be compact with streamlined geometries, and dimensioned to adhere to whole increments of common construction materials. Each unit is 24' wide. The multi-story units are 36' deep, while the single-story, accessible unit is 56' deep. Standard plate heights are used. Controlling air leakage and planning for additional insulation are low-cost, simple ways to improve the building performance over the entire life of the building. The simpler geometries, with minimal transitions and corners, allow for easier installation of a high performing air barrier and continuous insulation. For the walls, deeper 2x8 framing is used along with continuous exterior insulation. The high performing, low maintenance roof assembly consists of: a metal roof, over 3" of continuous insulation, and a 16" deep roof frame cavity filled with dense pack cellulose. The exterior insulation and insulation-filled cavity preclude the need for roof venting, further simplifying the triplex construction by eliminating conflicts between venting needs, air tightness, and fire barrier requirements. The simple roof shape allows for efficient rainwater harvesting. To reduce construction costs, key elements such as bathrooms and kitchens have been repeated across each unit even as the individual designs adapt to different size and accessibility needs.

719 East Sunset is an underutilized site that offers a unique opportunity to provide highly efficient, affordable housing that offers the density and urban connectedness found in multi-family housing with the space, autonomy, and features attractive in single family homes.