

## **Design Considerations for Meeting the Needs of the MHSA Tenants**

MHA staff and board members believe that the most valuable information in program development is that which is received from current and potential users of the service or program. That is the reason that MHA's administrative office has always been accessible to program participants, demonstrated by the fact that their main office building is located on the emergency and transitional housing site.

In an effort to obtain information related to design and on-site program and amenities for housing projects, MHA staff has held focus groups with consumers, staff, and members of the architectural firm of Kodama/Diseno. The consistent theme from all participants was a desire for independent housing, either a studio or one bedroom that was safe and secure, affordable and located close to public transportation. Much conversation was held discussing the kinds and types of things that would make residents feel safe and secure, from different kinds of lighting to security cameras and an on-site manager. The participants all chorused their need for proximity to public transportation.

Belmont Apartment participants had some very tangible recommendations including less parking and more outdoor area and a public restroom accessible outside of the community room. They also strongly supported the idea of using solar energy or other energy saving devices.

When the prospective location for Waverly Place apartments was shared with focus group participants, they were pleased. They commented on the proximity of the Waverly Place site to transportation (SamTrans), restaurants, grocery stores and other conveniences. They also liked the fact that it is close to the Mental Health Association office and Spring St. Shelter. They thought the area was extremely desirable to meet their needs. Others commented on the ability to walk to everything people would need.

When asked what is important re: amenities in housing, in all focus groups agreed that the community room with a full kitchen was very important; windows and light were also identified, and feeling safe through locked doors and some type of security was a must. Affordability was repeated by all who participated and for these individuals affordability is 30% of their income.

The Waverly Place site was selected for all of these reasons, the appropriate location, size and proximity to amenities, necessities, and MHA offices and staff.

Waverly Place Apartments will house 15 persons with chronic mental illness in 15 studio apartments, plus an on-site manager in a 1 one-bedroom unit. The proposed design shows one building around a courtyard. The building will be two-story, wood frame construction. All ground floor units will comply with Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards.

Waverly Place Apartments residents will be capable of independent living with on-site support services. The proposed design includes office space for the provision of support services. Included on the ground floor are a community room with a full kitchen, an office for the manager, offices for the on-site support service coordinator and other service providers and a common laundry area. A second laundry facility will be housed on the

second floor. The community room will be used for group sessions and classes, as well as for social and recreational activities. The community room and the offices will also provide space for case management services.

All units will open onto a central courtyard with landscaping and outdoor furniture. The courtyard will invite casual interaction among residents, provide space for recreational activities, and allow apartments a green view. If possible, planter boxes may be installed for cultivation of vegetables.

All units enter directly from the outside, with no enclosed public corridors. Focus group participants stated that a sense of privacy is especially important to persons with mental illness. In addition, participants requested individual entries.

The entire building will be secure with keyed entries at all exterior doors and a gate at the entrance to the parking lot. Security cameras will be installed at entrances and in the Community Room for safety.

One of the units will be fully handicap accessible for mobility impaired individuals and one unit will be fully accessible for an individual with a vision or hearing impairment. The balance of four units on the first floor will be fully adaptable should the need arise. The entire facility will be meet accessibility requirements.

Three factors will facilitate the integration of Waverly Place Apartments residents into the surrounding community and promote their ability to live as independently as possible:

**1. The proximity of the site to public transportation, community services, and shopping.**

The top factor of importance to mental health consumers as expressed in focus groups is proximity to public transportation, shopping and services. The site is located on a quiet street one and a half block from a major commercial thoroughfare in Redwood City, El Camino Real. The bus stop is one-half block south on El Camino Real and includes routes to San Francisco and major destinations in San Mateo County. The CalTrain Station is less than 1 mile away at El Camino Real and Jefferson.

Middlefield Road is one block from the site with restaurants and retail. Chavez Market is within one block of the site and is a grocery store selling fresh produce. A second grocery store is located on Middlefield Road, Paisanos, and is .1 miles from the site.

Milagros pharmacy is .3 miles NE. The San Mateo Credit Union is within .3 miles and there are a total of four national banks within 1.4 miles. There are two churches within .3 miles, and two large parks within 1 mile. The Atherton and Fair Oaks libraries are each within .7 miles of the site. Samaritan House Clinic is directly across the street from Waverly Place and Sequoia Hospital outpatient clinic is within .2 miles of the site with the Sequoia Hospital 2.7 miles away. The South County Mental Health Clinic serving persons with MediCal is two miles to the northeast on Brewster Avenue, and the Fair

Oaks Health Clinic, serving medically indigent adults and children, is located .7 miles away on Middlefield Road.

- 2. Indoor and outdoor community spaces which facilitate supportive services are crucial to continued successful independent living.**
- 3. Efficient unit plans. The units include everything needed for independent living without burdening residents with the care of a larger, less efficient unit.**

Mental health consumers have expressed the desire to have sufficient space for living without having units that are burdensome to care for because of their size. Consumers agreed that studio apartments are the perfect size for their needs. Studio apartments afford privacy, independence, and are manageable to care for. The architect selected to develop the project has a great deal of experience combining small, efficient spaces with more than usual storage space designed to have almost no lost or unusable space in the structure.

