

## CASE STUDY

# Creating Connections in Affordable Senior Housing

## Monteverde Senior Apartments

Eden Housing  
Orinda, CA

**Project Open:** December 2014

**Site:** 1.4 acres

**Density:** 47.9 du/ac

**Number of Units:** 67

**Unit Plans:** 630–700 sqft

*2017 AIA/HUD Secretary's Housing and Community Design Award, Excellence in Affordable Housing Design*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eden Housing—an affordable housing developer and property management non-profit organization, serving very low, low and moderate-income families, seniors, people living with physical, developmental disabilities or mental illness, and the formerly homeless—became aware of a site in Orinda, California that had been vacant for a number of years. If they could just overcome a deed restriction limiting how the site could be used and creatively address its steep grading, Eden Housing felt the centrally located site had strong development potential for meeting the urgent need for more quality, affordable senior housing.

With the collaborative creativity and determination of the project design team that included DAHLIN, the City of Orinda, Union Bank, and the contractor, these challenges were overcome and the site's potential has been realized in Monteverde Senior Apartments, which opened in December 2014 to great success and recognition.

**“Affordable Housing is a key component to building safe, accessible and strong communities. With the grand opening of Monteverde, the City of Orinda adds new, additional senior housing that will help accomplish these goals.”**

Mark DeSaulnier, Congressman (CA-11)

### CHALLENGES

What is now the site of Monteverde Senior Apartments, was once the site of Orinda's public library. Built in 1958 on land donated to the City of Orinda by the East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD), it was deed restricted for uses providing a public benefit. When in October 2001 the unveiling of a new, improved public library made the original library obsolete, the EBMUD deed restriction became a development catch. Consequently, this centrally located site within this small, affluent community sat unused for years, not benefiting anyone.

“We proposed that senior affordable housing was a public benefit. It allows Orinda's older adults to remain close to family, friends, and healthcare providers and stay in their own communities. Orinda agreed, and donated the land.”

Linda Mandolini, President,  
Eden Housing



Eden Housing believed their mission to provide affordable housing was an obvious public benefit for Orinda, a highly desirable community known for its high housing costs. The City of Orinda enthusiastically shared Eden Housing's vision, and supported their efforts in building consensus amongst the stakeholders, resulting in approval to develop the site according to Eden Housing's vision.

Eden now faced two other significant challenges to realizing their vision:

### A Challenging Incline

While the site is centrally located adjacent to the Orinda Community Park, Community Center, the brand new Public Library (featuring an art gallery, community meeting rooms, a plaza, and a café) and across the street from a major grocery store, pharmacy, restaurants, and retail stores in addition to being in walkable proximity to the Orinda BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit)

Station and a local bus stop, Orinda is a city in the hills. Consequently, the site was characterized by a steep incline (17 percent slope/ 40-foot grade increase), which would present design challenges for any project. It was particularly challenging for a project intended to provide housing that will allow seniors to age in place without the need to move to a higher level of care.

### First New Project of Its Kind in 30 Years

Entitlement is often a challenging process even when the benefits of the proposed project are seemingly obvious. Change is often resisted when new housing developments introduce change into neighborhoods and cities. Therefore, when Eden Housing proposed the largest new housing development of its kind in 30 years in Orinda's small, close-knit community, it was natural for residents to be concerned and resistant.

## HOW DAHLIN HELPED

DAHLIN tackled the challenging slope of the site in a number of innovative ways:

**By designing a multi-tiered site,** DAHLIN both mitigated the impact to accessibility the slope presented and created multiple points of intersection to naturally facilitate interpersonal encounters by guaranteeing proximity to a communal space regardless of which level a resident's building is on or the mobility of any particular resident.

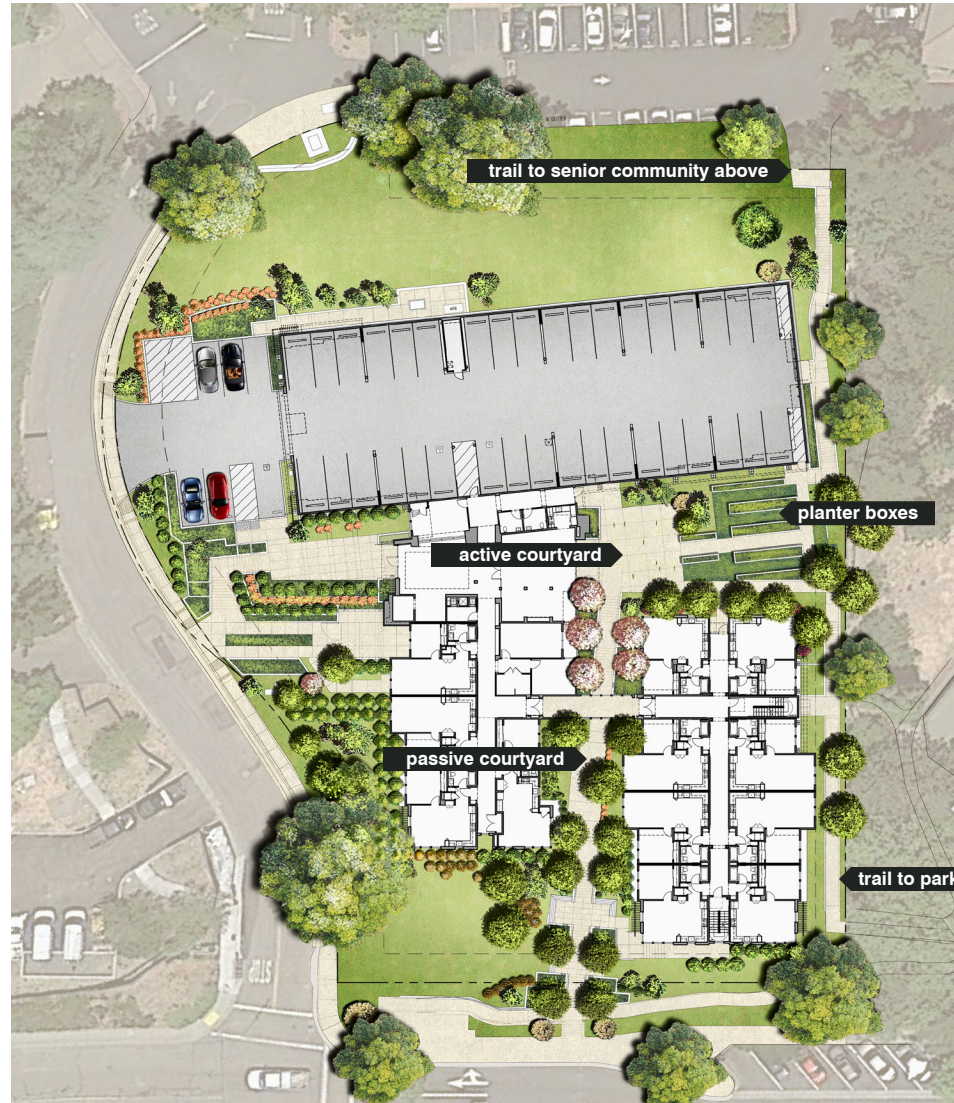
**Leveraging the opportunity presented by the multiple levels,** two courtyards were developed, one active and one passive, to facilitate a variety of outdoor experiences, including extensive community planter boxes.

**There were a number of meandering neighborhood paths** that DAHLIN integrated into the site in order to connect the site with the surrounding community. Each level of the building is connected to one of these paths, providing ease of accessibility throughout the community. These paths not only connect Monteverde residents to the neighboring community center, library, park, bus stop, downtown shops and restaurants, and church, but it also connects students of the neighboring school and residents of a previously existing senior housing community just above Monteverde, to the site and the surrounding community amenities.

The design exudes a community spirit, fostering both chance and planned encounters, ensuring residents are integrated into the larger community with the creation of multiple common spaces, large and small.

The buildings feature a well-executed contemporary elevation that gives the visual perception of a market rate project, allowing it to blend into the surrounding affluent context.

In addition to working closely with Eden Housing to understand their needs



“We’re installing large, raised plant beds for the residents to garden. At every one of our senior properties, it becomes one of our most sought after things. Living in an apartment building that provides services and makes things accessible allows people to live independently longer. We’ve had many people celebrate 100th birthdays at Eden properties.”

**Woody Karp,** Eden Housing

“I was looking for a quiet, peaceful and safe place to live in my senior years and I can say that I have found it.”

**Rupe Christensen,** Monteverde Resident

and objectives for the project and the impact of the funding requirements on the design and project schedule and budget, DAHLIN guided them through the entitlement process.

By working with city residents early in the design process, DAHLIN was able to proactively respond with designs that pre-emptively mitigated concerns, maintaining the forward momentum of the project.

## RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS

As a result of DAHLIN's design and project approach, Monteverde was completed in alignment with Eden Housing's mission to build and maintain high-quality, well-managed, service-enhanced affordable housing communities and was completed on time, satisfying all funding requirements.

It has been extremely well-received by the community and the industry. Both the Rotary Club and the Chamber of Commerce partnered to prepare welcome gift baskets for all of the residents, hand-delivered by their members. Furthermore, the Mayor of the City of Orinda has held several of his monthly forums with business and civic leaders at Monteverde to introduce the community to its newest member.

It has won numerous design awards, including most recently the *2017 AIA/HUD Secretary's Housing and Community Design Award for Excellence in Affordable Housing Design* and *Multifamily Executive's 2016 Project of the Year Award* in the Senior category. However, the most significant indicator of its success is that over 300 applications were received, and within just a few weeks of opening, all units were leased, validating the urgency

of the need for affordable housing and Eden Housing's advocacy to view meeting this need as a public benefit. Approximately one-third of the residents previously lived in Orinda, Moraga, or Lafayette or have family members living in these communities, showing how the development of Monteverde is helping to keep seniors in their community and connected to their families with dignified affordable housing.

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