



# STEELHEAD TOWNHOUSES

**Architect: Richard Shugar AIA, LEED AP**  
**Project Manager: Mariko Blessing AIA, LEED AP**  
**General Contractor: Essex General Construction**

Completed 2009  
Eugene, Oregon  
13,346 sf new construction



## The Site

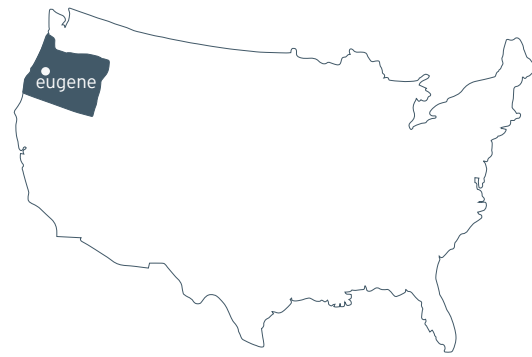
Several years ago, developer Dan Neal saw an opportunity opening up in Eugene, Ore. The student population in the city was growing, but housing options were not. The West University neighborhood, just a couple of blocks from the University of Oregon and within walking distance of services and amenities, all of a sudden became the object of second thoughts.

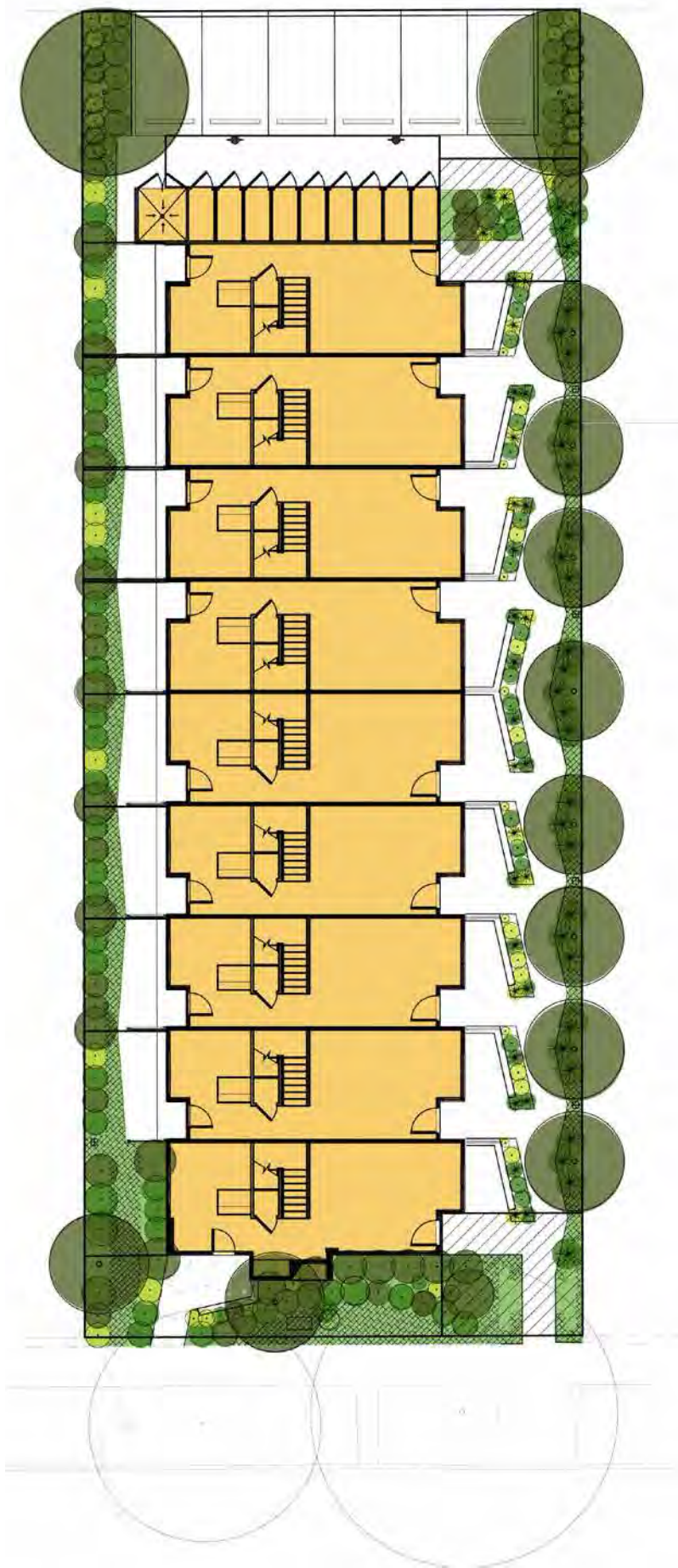
“What you have in the West University area is a common pattern,” says Neal, “old housing stock, a haphazard combination of single family homes and older multifamily structures. Most are not well maintained or have design features that are not memorable.”

Neal owned some properties in the area and decided to turn them into student housing. The project would require replacing an older structure on a rather narrow lot among other houses and apartment complexes. In dealing with an urban infill site, it was especially important to Neal to come up with a solution with a scale in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood.

Following the lead of cities such as Portland and Seattle, and with Eugene becoming denser and more urban, Neal wanted to add an appealing work of Northwest urban architecture to the city. But before he started, he met with the West University neighborhood association to discuss the project. He says the community embraced the opportunity to see old structures replaced with thoughtful design.

Because he was interested in building an energy-efficient structure and a building mindful of the surrounding community, Neal was able to take advantage of a Eugene tax exemption program that rewards sustainable development projects in the downtown area. This helped offset the higher costs of premium design and high-quality, durable materials.





## Designing with Residents in Mind

Neal's first two projects in the West University neighborhood were the Coho Townhouses and a sister property, the Steelhead Townhouses, completed about a year ago. Both projects were built by Eugene-based Essex Construction, and on both projects Neal worked with Richard Shugar, AIA, principal at 2fORM Architecture, also based in Eugene.

Speaking specifically about the Steelhead Townhouses, Shugar explains that the design process began with conversations with recent graduates about what makes a good student apartment. That information helped the architect plan the layout of the units, but first he had to deal with the site.

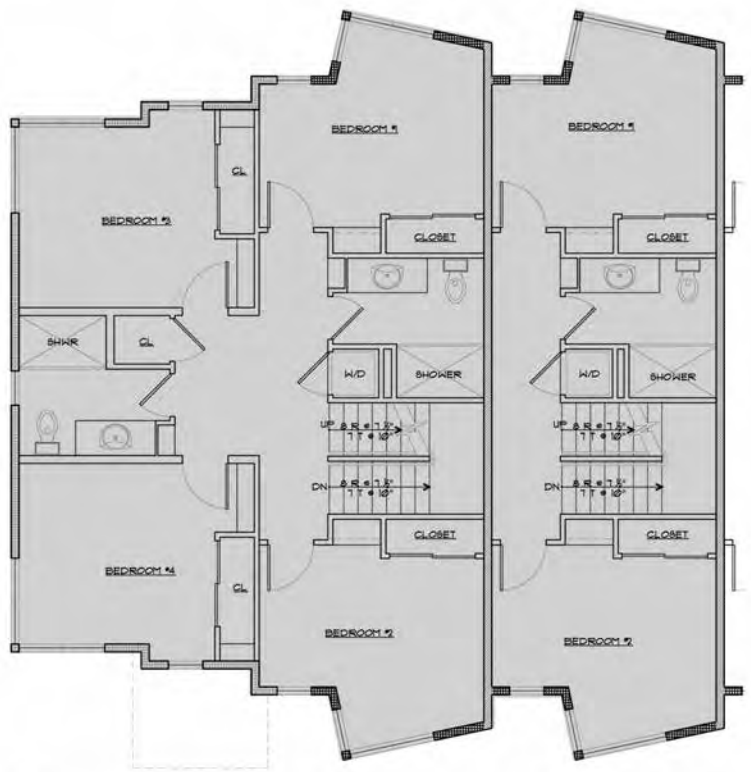
The solution he devised placed the building along one side of the lot. The other side became an open walkway with a low garden wall for seating, which added a communal dimension to the project.

"The path had to be more than just a walkway," says Shugar. "We wanted a community space, regardless of how wide it was, and a place where neighbors could see each other."





Ground Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

Along a shared courtyard, each apartment has a semi-private outdoor area next to the front door, which leads into an open space that can be configured as a dining or living area. Shugar decided to isolate the kitchen and placed it beyond this open space on the first floor, toward the back of the unit, to keep food and smells away from the living area. Between the kitchen and the open area is a stairway leading to the two upper levels, each with two bedrooms on either side of a shared bathroom. The second floor also includes a laundry area.

Neal wanted the units to be flooded with natural light and to have spacious and more interesting bedrooms than those in most student apartments. Spaciousness was achieved through vaulted ceilings, 14 feet high at their highest point and nine at their lowest, but also through an unusual window design that added interest and light.

"We have angled windows that look like pleats," Neal says. "They're visually striking and they let light in from two directions in every single room, so they all seem like corner rooms, even though a small percentage of the bedrooms in the building are, in fact, corner rooms."





The façade of the building is a striking combination: stucco, cement fiberboard shingles, and corrugated metal. The architect chose a cream-colored stucco base because he wanted a robust material with built-in color near to the ground to weather heavier traffic and frequent moves from student tenants. The upper third of the building is lined with dark brown, pre-finished cement fiberboard shingles that resemble wood. Spanning the height of the building, starting on the second floor, are the corrugated-metal-clad bay windows designed to withstand weather conditions with minimal maintenance over time.

In addition to the large angled windows, that afford the tenants greater privacy by diverting straight views into neighbors' units, natural light flows in through a skylight located above the staircase. Shugar designed the units to maximize cross-ventilation, with bedrooms on both the east and west sides of each apartment.

The building has nine units, eight of which are 1,500 square feet and have four bedrooms and two bathrooms. The remaining unit, located on the south end of the building, is what the architect refers to as a "five plus" unit, and it is nearly 2,000 square feet. This larger apartment has five bedrooms and a sixth space that may be used as a studio (this to accommodate a Eugene city ordinance dating back to the 1970's that doesn't allow more than five unrelated people to live together). The larger unit has three bathrooms and a private deck. Each townhouse has a bike storage unit on the south end of the building, and car parking is also available, with access through an adjacent alley.

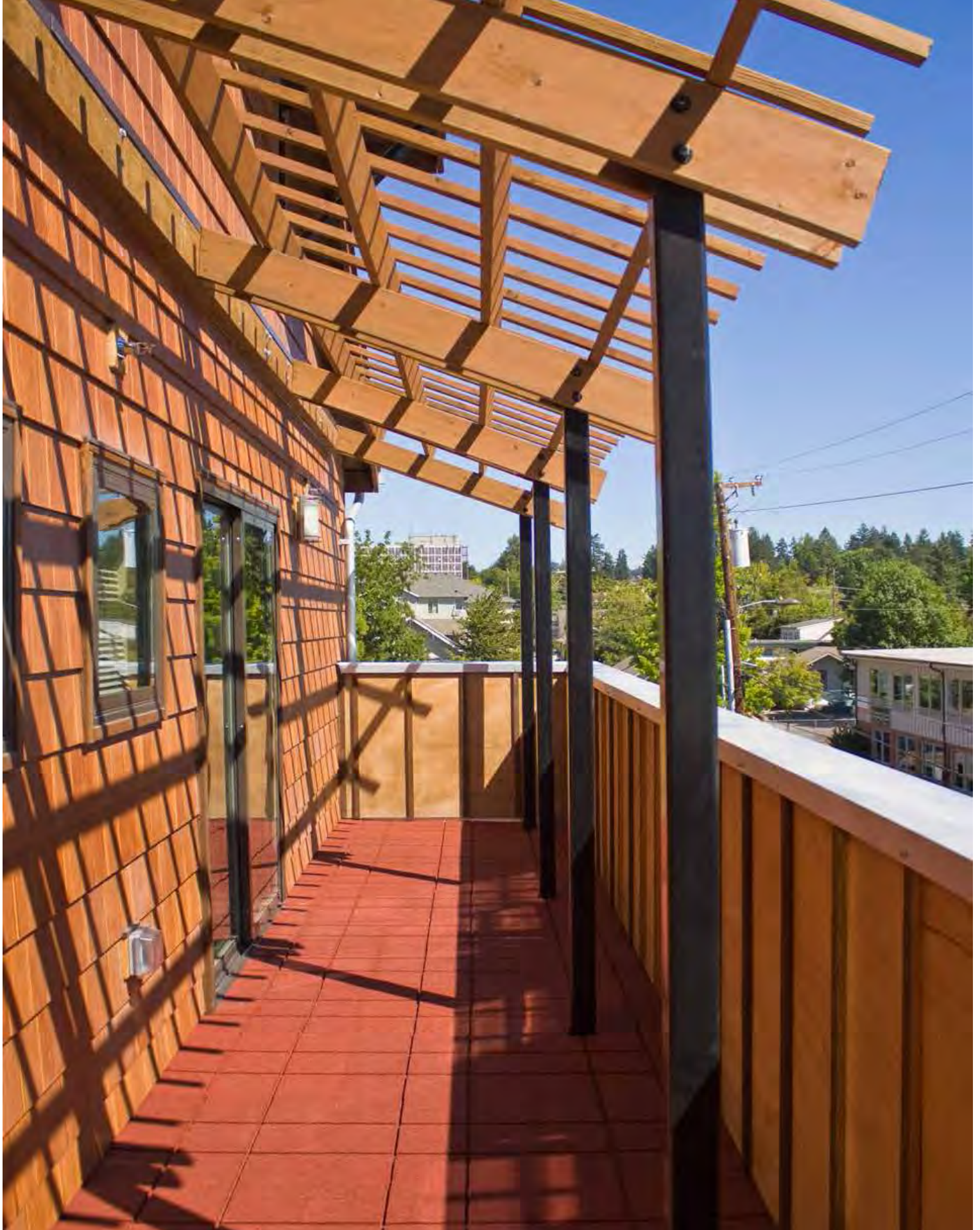




















The Steelhead Townhouses have a density of 48 units per acre, one of the ways in which the project fulfills the developer's sustainability directive by contributing to the economy and vitality of the neighborhood. But beyond the site, sustainability was worked into the design both in spatial ways (large windows, bicycle storage, etc) and in the materials used.

Materials were chosen with an eye toward durability—custom kitchen and bathroom cabinetry made using formaldehyde-free wood products, granite countertops, paints low in volatile organic compounds, and carpets with recycled content.

The exterior of the building was designed with the same principles in mind: long life and low maintenance. Neal estimates the useful life of the corrugated sheet metal chosen for the exterior to be about 50 years. The pre-finished cement fiberboard shingle, a product manufactured by Nichiha, a Japanese firm with U.S. headquarters in Georgia, is also very durable. Shugar chose it because it's a thicker type of cement board shingle than the kind produced by other manufacturers.

The project also includes three window types (fiber glass, aluminum, and aluminum-clad wood), but no vinyl windows. Shugar says he stayed away from vinyl because of the manufacturing processes involved and the longer durability of other products.

Clearly the client, a Eugene native, plans to keep the properties for a long time. Going against a common practice among private developers of student housing, he does not plan to turn the apartments around as soon as major upgrades become necessary, which is why he has invested in durability.



## Publications

"Student Housing Made to Last"

**AIA Architect**

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