

Answering the Need: 10 New Homes on Kidder Way

There are currently more than 40 Orcas families who are pre-approved to purchase an OPAL home. You know these islanders. They are our construction workers, landscapers, housekeepers, teachers, customer service, automotive, hospitality, office and retail staff.

In answer to this need for housing, OPAL is seeking \$1.9 million from the County's Home Fund to build 10 new permanently affordable homes in Eastsound.

The Kidder Way neighborhood is being designed collaboratively by a team of professionals with guidance from a volunteer planning committee, OPAL staff and trustees, neighbors and prospective homeowners.

The design features five new duplex buildings with a common walkway connecting each home to the parking area. There will be six one-bedroom homes with lofts and four two-bedroom homes. Each home will include



10 accessible townhomes are in the planning stage.

a ground-floor bedroom and bath for accessibility, porches and enclosed outdoor storage areas.

Like all OPAL projects, there is a strong focus on low-impact development and sustainability. The parking areas and pathways will be pervious pavement, and there will be rain gardens to absorb and filter stormwater run-off. In addition, a shared two-sided electric vehicle (EV) charging station will be installed, with conduit for more EV chargers if needed in the future.

There were more than \$6 million in requests for the \$3.3 million in grant funding that San Juan County announced this spring. County staff evaluated and ranked OPAL's Kidder Way as the highest scoring project and proposed full funding to the County Council. The County Council awarded a grant of \$1.7 million, which is about \$200,000 less than OPAL requested. OPAL will increase requests for other grants, and the first-in commitment from the County bodes well for securing more grants.

Total estimated cost for 10 new residences is \$5.6 million:

- Homebuyers' mortgages will cover 35% of costs
- OPAL is applying for nearly \$3 million in grants
- \$1 million in funding is needed from individual donors and private foundations

Your Support for OPAL Ripples Beyond Orcas Island

The welcome mat is always out when other Community Land Trusts (CLTs) want to visit Orcas. They come to see OPAL neighborhoods, ask questions and share insights. OPAL staff and trustees appreciate the opportunity and the exchange.

As one of the Northwest's first CLTs, OPAL has developed many different types of housing, successfully adapted to changing community needs and managed countless challenges with each new project. Many of the staff have now worked together for decades, amassing a wealth of knowledge and experience.

"We're adamantly open-source when it comes to sharing information," explained Executive Director Lisa Byers.



Lisa Byers and Julie Brunner presenting at the Northwest Community Land Trust Coalition conference.

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In the spring CLT staffers came from San Juan, Lopez and Whidbey islands to tour OPAL neighborhoods and talk about how the organizations can do more together.

During the summer, the staff of Kulshan CLT in Bellingham came to visit. Discussion topics included construction methods and energy efficiency, new office systems and how to work more efficiently.

Then in September, the Methow Housing Trust made Orcas part of its annual staff retreat. The new CLT has properties in Twisp, Mazama and Winthrop. On their agenda: interacting with owners and their communities, and growth strategies for the next 10 years.

OPAL staff also regularly makes presentations at the regional gathering of the Northwest Community Land Trust Coalition and participates in the Grounded Solutions Network national housing conference.

This fall Lisa spoke on Bainbridge Island at the annual fundraiser for Housing Resources Bainbridge. Next year OPAL Housing Director Julie Brunner will once again co-lead the Capacity Building Institute for the Northwest CLT Coalition.

None of this would happen without you. Thank you!

Working in the Moment for the Long Haul

Your Gifts Are Creating Healthier Housing

The last two years have provided OPAL with the opportunity to conserve long-term rental housing on the island.

Nineteen affordable rentals, at Northern Heights across from the library and on Mt. Baker Road near the airport, came on the market in 2021. With some timely help from you and other supporters, OPAL purchased the properties so they would continue to provide affordable housing.

Now your gifts are working hard to produce healthier, more energy-efficient spaces for people to live. OPAL is in the process of renovating these apartments, unit by unit, with an already-completed “loaner” apartment at each location where current tenants can reside while their apartment is renovated. The updating of these rental homes aims for decades of continuous sustainable and affordable comfort.

These upgrades go beyond the building code and set a higher standard. This includes adding such things as heat pumps, all-electric kitchens with new appliances, new flooring, new insulated windows, cabinets and interior doors where needed, and providing aging-in-place features such as bathroom safety grab bars.

In the process, some challenges have emerged, none alien to older



A look at some of the upgrades in process at the Northern Heights Apartments.

housing, but all requiring immediate attention. That means taking on tasks like installing an entirely new septic system at the Mt. Baker property.

In addition, there has been work to mitigate hazardous conditions. This includes such things as asbestos tucked away under a kitchen sink, hazardous substance detection that required complete removal of wall and ceiling surfaces in one unit, and the presence of black mold (more than could be seen on inspection for purchase) that was revealed as floors and wall surfaces were upgraded.

None of this will surprise you if you've been through your own renovations. It just requires everyone to be flexible, and sometimes creative. As OPAL remains dedicated to the goal of getting it right for the long haul, we appreciate your support in providing permanently affordable, ecologically sustainable, comfortable and healthy homes for residents.

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– Executive Director Lisa Byers*

OPAL and PSCCU Explore Joint Venture

Puget Sound Cooperative Credit Union (PSCCU) recently purchased the building at 221 A Street in Eastsound, where the post office is located. The credit union wants the current business tenants to remain in the building and plans to establish a retail branch for the credit union on the same property.

PSCCU also wants to help the community with a critical need, which is housing. There may be the potential to provide rental housing on the property for individuals who could live and work in town; perhaps reducing or eliminating the need for a car.



The A Street building that PSCCU purchased.

If housing could be included as part of the project without using government grants, then the rentals could serve any income level. This would create housing for anyone who needs a place to live but can’t afford what is available in the traditional market.

OPAL and PSCCU have agreed to work together on a feasibility study for the property. Can the site be redesigned to accommodate the existing activities with housing on an upper story? To explore options, PSCCU and OPAL will collaborate with an architectural firm to evaluate the possibilities. **Stay tuned for updates!**

Founded in 1934, PSCCU is a not-for-profit member-owned financial cooperative that offers traditional banking services and has been a leader in making loans for energy efficiency projects.

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