

# RAINIER VISTA

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

### Summary

The Seattle Housing Authority’s redevelopment of its Rainier Vista property transformed the community, replacing 481 deteriorating public housing units built in the 1940s with new mixed-income housing for renters and home owners. The mixed-use, multifamily development features rental apartments, for-sale condominiums and single-family homes. Funding totaling more than \$240 million was used to produce the transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly environment and build a total of 1,092 public housing, affordable and market-rate housing units. It includes outdoor and indoor recreational facilities, parks, playgrounds, facilities for social service providers, and retail and office spaces. The Sound Transit’s light rail line station is just to the south and provides convenient access to downtown.

### Dealmakers

- Housing authority served as master planner for a comprehensive redevelopment
- City of Seattle’s collaborative commitment to coordinate on infrastructure development
- Rainier Vista design book for consistent design standards throughout the project
- Active Citizen Review Committee for stakeholder engagement
- One-to-one replacement policy for public housing units
- Transit-oriented design to prepare for the new light rail line
- Doubled density from the original project to create a mixed-income community
- Infrastructure redesign to integrate with the existing street grid

### Overview

Location	4570 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way S, Seattle, Washington
Project Type	Mixed-income
Developers	Seattle Housing Authority Phases I and II: Martha Rose, The Riley Group, Bennett Sherman and Habitat for Humanity, Bellwether Housing, Providence and Mercy Housing Phase III: Dwell Development, BDR Homes
Contributing Partners	City of Seattle
Housing Types	Multifamily, single-family attached and detached; rental and owner-occupied
Site Size	67 acres
Units	<b>1,092 units:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 411 onsite public housing rental units</li> <li>• 70 off-site replacement public housing rental units</li> <li>• 154 affordable rental units (&lt;80 percent AMI)</li> <li>• 58 affordable for-sale housing units (&lt;80 percent AMI)</li> <li>• 216 market-rate, for-sale housing units</li> <li>• 183 market-rate rental (forthcoming)</li> </ul>
Development Costs	\$240,000,000

<b>Development Timeline</b>	<p>1999: HOPE VI grant awarded.</p> <p>2000: First phase of relocation counseling begins.</p> <p>2003: City Council approves the Rainier Vista Master Plan; demolition begins.</p> <p>2004: Construction begins for rental housing.</p> <p>2005: Second phase of relocation completed; for-sale home construction begins.</p> <p>2005: Phase I public housing completed; demolition of Phase II units begins.</p> <p>2007: Phase II infrastructure development begins.</p> <p>2008: New Rainier Vista Boys &amp; Girls Club opens. Construction on Phase II infrastructure completed.</p> <p>2009: LINK light rail service begins, with stops at Rainier Vista and downtown Seattle.</p> <p>2010: Phase III infrastructure development begins.</p> <p>2012: Construction completion of Phase II, mixed-use Tamarack Place, and replacement of public housing units.</p> <p>2015: Market-rate, for-sale units completed.</p> <p>2016: Market-rate rental units under development.</p>
<b>Funding Sources</b>	<p>HUD HOPE VI grant program</p> <p>Low Income Housing Tax Credits</p> <p>Washington State Housing Trust Fund (except SHA units)</p> <p>Seattle Housing Levy (except SHA units)</p> <p>Tax Exempt Bond proceeds</p> <p>Proceeds from sale of land</p> <p>HUD American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds</p> <p>HUD Move to Work Block Grant funds</p>
<b>Website</b>	<p><a href="http://www.seattlehousing.org/redevelopment/rainier-vista/">http://www.seattlehousing.org/redevelopment/rainier-vista/</a></p>

## Development Partners

### Seattle Housing Authority

Established in 1939, the Seattle Housing Authority provides long-term rental housing and rental assistance to more than 30,000 people in the city of Seattle. The agency owns and operates buildings of all shapes and sizes on nearly 400 sites throughout the city. The Low Income Public Housing program provides more than 6,040 public housing units in large and small apartment buildings; multiplex and single-family housing; and in four communities at Rainier Vista, NewHolly, High Point, and Yesler Terrace.

### Dwell Development

Dwell Development is a full-service, Seattle-based, design-build firm specializing in green residential development. Dwell produced 42 ultra-sustainable, single-family detached, market-rate homes in Rainier Vista.



## BDR Homes

BDR Homes is a home builder serving the Seattle area. Over the course of their careers, the principals of the firm have been involved in creating over 2,000 homes in more than 60 neighborhoods throughout the Seattle area. BDR produced 69 single-family detached units and townhomes for Rainier Vista. Of these, five were market rate but sold at price points that were affordable for families earning 80 percent of the Area Median Income. In 2016, BDR Homes is also developing market-rate rental units on the two remaining vacant lots on the site.



## Planning and Policy

In 2001, after an extensive process of community engagement and input led by the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA), the Seattle City Council unanimously approved a Memorandum of Agreement with SHA. The agreement governed Rainier Vista redevelopment and provided assurance to neighborhood groups and advocates about replacement housing and related issues. The provisions committed to 100 percent replacement of the 481 existing public housing units at Rainier Vista, with units available to households with incomes at or below 30 percent of the Area Median Income and a maximum density of 1,010 units.<sup>1</sup> The agreement also made a commitment to sustainable building practices. Redevelopment at Rainier Vista has resulted in a mixed-income community with low-income rentals, market-rate rentals, and market-rate, owner-occupied homes.

The redeveloped Rainier Vista now includes market-rate, for-sale and rental housing in addition to units for residents with extremely low incomes (30 percent of area median income or below) and low incomes (80 percent or below):

Housing type	Affordability	Units
SHA onsite public rental housing	Extremely low income (0 to 30 percent AMI)	251
Senior housing – Section 202	Extremely low income (0 to 30 percent AMI)	78
Rental housing for people with disabilities – Section 811	Extremely low income (0 to 30 percent AMI)	22
Onsite project based Section 8	Extremely low income (0 to 30 percent AMI)	43
Onsite partnership units	Extremely low income (0 to 30 percent AMI)	17
Affordable rental housing	Extremely low and low income (up to 80 percent AMI)	154
Rental housing	Market rate	183
Affordable for-sale housing	Low income (up to 80 percent AMI)	58
For-sale housing	Market rate	216
<b>Total On-Site Units</b>		<b>1,022</b>
SHA off-site public housing replacement units	Extremely low income (0 to 30 percent AMI)	70

<sup>1</sup> Not all of the land that the market-rate units are on now were in the original plat, since some land was acquired later. Thus, the actual total number of units built (1022) is slightly higher than this maximum permitted density (1010).



## Site Development

Located in the heart of the Rainier Valley, Rainier Vista was one of three SHA communities originally built to house defense workers during World War II. By the early 1950s, the wood frame buildings were designated as public housing. Today, Rainier Vista is a culturally diverse community, with many immigrants from Southeast Asia, East Africa and elsewhere.

The redevelopment of Rainier Vista was divided into three phases organized geographically and completed roughly chronologically:

- Phase I, the west side of Martin Luther King Jr. Way South (MLK);
- Phase II, the area east of MLK and south of South Oregon Street; and
- Phase III, the area east of MLK and north of South Oregon Street.

The project replaced 481 rundown public housing units from the 1940s with a new mixed-income, mixed-use community of residential units with office, retail, services and recreational space. It transformed a curvilinear street system to an entirely new street grid with improved connection to the overall city streets. Of the original 481 low-income units from the old Rainier Vista, 411 were replaced onsite. The remaining 70 units were located off-site in buildings owned by SHA, or in partnership with another housing provider.

In preparation for the new light-rail service planned to come through the area, the SHA sought to improve the community by turning it into a denser, light-rail friendly community. The SHA rezoned the 67 acres in coordination with the City and Sound Transit, the agencies that were preparing to create transit-oriented development around the new Sound Transit Light Rail stations. The SHA also worked on the redevelopment of Rainier Vista in coordination with the Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities and the Department of Planning and Design.

The LINK Light Rail service opened in the summer of 2009 and serves Rainier Vista at the Columbia City station just to the south. This transportation option gives residents more convenient access to the Rainier Valley, downtown Seattle, and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Rainier Vista is located close to a number of large and small parks, playgrounds, and community gardens that create open space for residents to get outside, meet their neighbors, and play with their children. It is also within walking distance of the amenities of the Columbia City business district, featuring a mix of retail shops, restaurants, and entertainment options.

Residents have access to Neighborhood House's Rainier Vista Center and its job programs, computer lab, case management services, Head Start program, and community gathering spaces, including a new Boys and Girls Club that opened in 2008.

The SHA was the master developer for the project, hiring architects and engineers to design public housing and also the public realm, in close coordination with relevant city departments. The SHA hired and oversaw the construction of these elements. The SHA built duplexes and up to three-story apartments, but mostly three- to five-unit properties. Habitat for Humanity provided 16 low-income homeownership units, while other nonprofit developers produced 39 rental units for low-wage workers and low-income seniors.

“The City of Seattle was committed to really good planning along the new light rail corridor, and creating a good public realm along the alignment.”

**Stephanie Van Dyke**  
Director of Development,  
Seattle Housing Authority

The low-income units include multiple energy-efficient features, including ENERGY STAR appliances and interior lighting as well as water-conserving bath and kitchen fixtures. The common spaces feature a drip irrigation system in planting areas and high-efficiency exterior lighting fixtures with timers or light sensors. SHA selected nonprofit partners, such as the Boys and Girls Club and Neighborhood House, who developed community facilities on the site to serve the neighborhood.

To redevelop Rainier Vista as a mixed-income community, the SHA selected private development partners to purchase and develop market-rate and affordable single-family homes and duplexes. Before the recession, Rainier Vista had a dozen different private builders. Post-recession, there were only two private builders: Dwell Development and BDR Homes. Dwell Development is a design-build firm based in Seattle specializing in innovative, energy-efficient design. “New Rainier Vista” began as a partnership with the SHA and Dwell Development, LLC in 2010. BDR Homes, LLC, a homebuilder in Seattle and Kirkland and an affiliate of BDR Companies, was the other private developer producing for-sale housing. BDR is also producing market-rate rental housing on the last two remaining lots through 2017.

## Public Outreach

Public outreach for the redevelopment of Rainier Vista, particularly with current residents, was conducted throughout the process.

In December 2002, the SHA established a Citizen Review Committee to review and make recommendations on significant changes requested by the SHA or any contractor to development or project plans, such as land sales, development plans, construction impacts and community notification. There were several public meetings to obtain information from residents as to design of the units, as well as public meetings on the rezoning. Those meetings continued through completion of the public housing units in Phase II in 2012.

The community sought to ensure that low-income residents were well served and that the large trees on the site were preserved to the maximum extent possible, while also improving the residential units. Environmental concerns included lead paint, soil remediation, asbestos abatement, and underground storage tank remediation.

The SHA Community Building program also accompanied the redevelopment of Rainier Vista, offering important opportunities for increasing resident self-sufficiency, improving quality of life, strengthening social bonds in the community, and helping better integrate public housing residents with the greater Seattle community. The program fosters the capacity of SHA residents to shape programs and policies for their communities. By forging partnerships and encouraging broad participation, the program supports families, children, and seniors, and values cultural diversity and racial equity. SHA Community Builder staff also works closely with residents, homeowners, community service organizations and others to actively build programs and activities that bring people together. Staff and residents work together in resident community councils, affinity groups, health programs, and more.



## Design

The urban design and planning for Rainier Vista centered on creating a transit-oriented and pedestrian-oriented community that would be fully integrated into the existing surrounding neighborhood.

The public housing, located in townhomes and apartment buildings, is mixed throughout the site and is virtually indistinguishable from the market-rate rental and for-sale housing. Built prior to the market-rate units, the public housing set high design standards, with covered entry porches, steeply pitched roofs and a colorful mixture of siding patterns. Private off-street parking is adjacent to each housing unit. The design complements the surrounding older historic neighborhood of Columbia City.

The design of buildings and the project's design guidelines created for later infill development of market-rate housing reflect the new transit-oriented zoning. The rail station is ringed by concentric zones of buildings, with denser mixed-use residential/commercial buildings at the center,

“There was a lot of thought put into the design of the project. The design guidelines are the same for Seattle Housing Authority units and the private sector. The design review process tried to keep it simple by asking: ‘How do you achieve diversity?’ We wanted them to vary frontages, minimize garages and setback, and add alleys.”

**Stephanie Van Dyke**  
Director of Development,  
Seattle Housing Authority

surrounded by dense apartment buildings, followed by a zone of townhouses and duplexes. At the outer reaches of the site, farthest from the light rail site, are the single-family houses. Outdoor recreational uses are fully integrated into the site to serve the community. Trees that were preserved from the original site serve as focal points for various portions of the site. Parking is kept out of public view of the streets, accessed by alleys in the rear of each block, under buildings in garages, or behind street-facing building facades.

As a condition of purchase of the property on which the market-rate homes were built, private builders were required to follow design guidelines outlined in the SHA's Design Book in order to make the new neighborhood seamless with the surrounding community. The Rainier Vista Design Book is comparable to earlier editions created for the SHA sites NewHolly and High Point to guide development in those communities. Each Design Book emphasizes unique neighborhood qualities and responds to local design preferences. Issued in 2004, the Rainier Vista edition was revised and edited with input from the Rainier Vista Homeowners Association to help ensure that the new homes would complement the rental housing and community facilities that the SHA and other partners were building. The SHA reviewed all the plans to ensure compliance and to help the builders with consistent solutions to design problems.

The book illustrates design choices ranging from placement of houses along the street to details such as rooflines, porches, fences or color. The Design Book helped guide builders to create a safe, mixed-income, mixed-use, transit-oriented community integrated into the surrounding neighborhood.

The Rainier Vista Design Book was prepared by Mithun, with contributions from the Rainier Vista design team, Tonkin Hoyne Lokan, GGLO, SvR, and Nakano Associates, City of Seattle and SHA staff. The contributing market studies were conducted by RealVision Research, Hebert Research, and Heartland.











Photo Courtesy of Dwell Development

Public art is also a notable feature at Rainier Vista. Sculptures along Columbia Way Boulevard connect the neighborhood artistically with nearby Columbia City. Custom-designed benches and other park furniture are placed throughout the neighborhood, some embedded with mosaics designed by The Children's Museum. Murals created by students in the local ArtWorks program are featured throughout the neighborhood.

New Urbanist planning and design principles are active at Rainier Vista, with housing designed to bring together the neighborhood's diverse mixture of residents. Narrow streets slow traffic, while front porches located close to the street encourage residents' interaction. Low fences around private backyards give households a sense of security and ownership of their own space, but still allow for visibility and conversation with neighbors.

By June 2012, all 481 units of public housing were replaced.

Name	Photo	Manager	Units	Types
Rainier Vista		SHA	294	38 1-bedroom 112 2-bedroom 100 3-bedroom 38 4-bedroom 6 5-bedroom
Gamelin House		Providence Health & Services	78	77 1-bedroom 1 2-bedroom
Genesee House		Bellwether	39	25 1-bedroom 14 2-bedroom
Lake Washington Apartments		SouthEast Effective Development	37	37 2-bedroom
Fir Street Townhomes		SHA	7	7 3-bedroom
Mary Avenue Townhomes		SHA	8	8 3-bedroom

Name	Photo	Manager	Units	Types
Samaki Commons		Interim Community Development	12	4 2-bedroom 6 3-bedroom 2 4-bedroom
Shirley Bridge Bungalows		Sound Mental Health	6	4 1-bedroom 2 2-bedroom
Westwood Heights East		Quantum Management	6	6 2-bedroom

In Phase III at Rainier Vista, Dwell Development's New Rainier Vista neighborhood consists of 42 high energy-efficiency, single-family detached homes. Every home in the community is 5-Star Built Green certified (a voluntary certification program developed by the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties) to meet environmental standards for energy efficiency, water use, and indoor air quality. All the homes also include solar-ready rooftop configurations, advanced framing, high impact insulation, triple-glazed windows, and other features that allow the homes to reach net zero energy usage in the future. New Rainier Vista includes Dwell's first Passive House and two houses that are clad in cork. One of the cork-covered houses is the first spec house in Seattle to be certified "net energy positive," meaning it will create more energy through solar panels than it uses.

**“We doubled the density, which was a very bold move at the time. Seattle has had quite a struggle with density: it has traditionally been a pro-growth management, low-density city. The struggle was how to increase density in a way that works for Seattle’s identity.”**

**Stephanie Van Dyke**  
Director of Development,  
Seattle Housing Authority

The Dwell homes are arranged in clusters of four units centered around a community garden and informal outdoor gathering spaces. The early units in Phase III were 3-bedroom, two-bath, 1,500 to 1,900 square feet, and sold for \$425,000. By the time the last home was completed and sold in 2014, the units have increased in size to 2,100 square feet, and the market had boosted the sales price to \$700,000.

BDR Homes produced 58 single-family homes in three developments: Adagio, with 3- and 4-bedroom detached homes priced in the high \$400,000s; Allegro Townhomes, 2- and 3-bedroom units in the low \$300,000s, and Vivo, 2- and 3-bedroom affordable townhomes priced in the low \$200,000s. The affordable townhomes, for first-time home buyers earning up to 80 percent AMI, were produced to look comparable to market-rate units on the outside, with simpler finishes on the inside.

## Financing

Rainier Vista is one of the SHA's three major public housing redevelopments, funded in part by the federal government's HOPE VI grant program. The project was financed using public and private funds.



The financing consisted of tax-exempt private activity bonds, four percent tax credit equity, HUD HOPE VI, HUD Moving To Work (MTW) Block Grant Fund and HUD American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, and the proceeds from the sale of land not used for replacement housing purposes.

In August 1999, a \$35 million HOPE VI grant was committed by the federal government for the redevelopment of Rainier Vista. An additional \$14.4 million in stimulus dollars—from a total of over \$45 million awarded to the agency in 2009—helped fund and complete construction for Phases II and Phase III.

Sources for SHA Public Housing	
HOPE VI funds	\$ 35,000,000
ARRA funds	\$ 23,569,888
MTW Block Grant Funds	\$ 14,136,793
Land Sales Proceeds	\$ 28,504,341
LIHTC Equity	\$ 21,870,028
Tax Exempt Bond Proceeds	\$ 8,975,000
Commercial Mortgage	\$ 1,930,000
Developer fee loans	\$ 3,544,523
Positive Bond Arbitrage	\$ 377,221
Energy Company Rebates	\$ 93,339
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$138,001,133</b>

“The city’s support was a very big piece of this project, including contributing funding, expediting permitting, and rezoning to allow denser development closer to the light rail.”

**Stephanie Van Dyke**  
 Director of Development,  
 Seattle Housing Authority

The table above represents the sources that the SHA used to build 385 low-income rental units, about 9,500 square feet of commercial space, new streets and public utilities, and several parks.

With additional investments of \$102 million made by private market builders, low-income nonprofit housing developers, and the service providers Neighborhood House and the Boys and Girls Club, the total project development cost came to \$240 million.

## Marketing and Management

While the public housing units are quick to fill up and do not require special marketing efforts, the for-profit developers hired a company called Fusion, a firm with experience with other master planned communities, to develop a marketing plan for the private development. While a general marketing plan and website for overall development helped create a sense of the community, each developer also had an additional platform to establish a distinct identity for their homes. Fusion’s contributions included branding, active marketing and advertising, signage and Internet. Fusion also developed community marketing partnerships and local marketing campaigns, partnering with local businesses and restaurants to spread the word about the new community.

To create a sense of community and an outlet to discuss potential issues, the SHA and the Homeowners’ Association (HOA) Phase I established a “Good Neighbor Agreement Committee.” The development of the meeting agenda rotates between the SHA and the HOA, and the committee meets quarterly to identify neighborhood needs, concerns and solutions. This dialogue has been key to the health of the community. Several community solutions have been addressed through this committee, which has improved the spirit and quality of the relationship among neighbors. In the decade since Phase I was developed, neighbors have matured together as a community over time and learned from community experiences.

The HOA from Phase III (Rainier Vista East), which was completed in 2013–2016, does not participate in a comparable “Good Neighbor” agreement. During Phase III redevelopment, the SHA initially held seats on the Rainier Vista HOA. But once properties in Phase III were at 80 percent occupancy by homeowners, the SHA stepped off the HOA board. During the tenure of that HOA board, a Good Neighbor Agreement was introduced and the homeowners of that Phase chose not to move forward with one. They can at any time engage in conversations with the Rainier Vista east board to create one. Thus, the relationship of these homeowners with the SHA is less established.



Photo Courtesy of Dwell Development

## Observations and Lessons Learned

**New transit creates new opportunities.** The creation of the Sound Transit line stimulated an opportunity for the redevelopment of Rainier Vista, with an emphasis on transit-oriented design to prepare for the nearby transit stop.

**One-to-one replacement of public housing units demonstrates a commitment to the housing needs of low-income households.** The redevelopment of public housing projects to mixed-income often reduces the number of public housing units. Doubling the density of the site was an essential threshold to meet Seattle’s commitment to one-for-one replacement.

**Presales can make the difference in a down market.** Despite the challenging market conditions during and immediately post-recession, Dwell Development was able to keep building by strategically leveraging presales to develop its new market-rate homes.

**Expect the unexpected, particularly for a multiphase project.** Rainier Vista faced challenges with development conditions that increased construction costs. Zoning interpretations and the discovery of wetland areas on both the west and east phases resulted in fewer for-sale home sites.

**A large-scale project is susceptible to market trends.** This is particularly the case with public-private partnerships, because there are unpredictable cycles in private development. With the Great Recession slicing through the middle of the project timeline, the participation of the private sector stalled until the market started to recover. This delay held up the project proceeds that the public housing was depending on, which made for a longer completion of the project.

**Establish a regular and formal communication channel for residents.** The “Good Neighbor Agreement” between the SHA and the homeowners association (HOA) in Phase I keeps both parties accountable. The committee that implements the agreement has representatives from the SHA and the HOA and has been an invaluable resource to discuss community issues and identify solutions.

**Avoid creating a separate real estate marketing name for a subdivision within a mixed-income community.** The Phase III HOA is known as “New Rainier Vista,” which has resulted in some residents on the east side of Rainier Vista considering their neighborhood as a separate community. In Phases I and II, residents consider all of Rainier Vista to be one community.

**Ensure that community services, organizations, and businesses in a mixed-use, mixed-income development are accessible to all.** The geographic spread of community services and local businesses throughout Rainier Vista supports the positive integration of income levels.

**Plan for strategic and intentional community development.** The SHA’s Community Building program has been key to income integration and highly popular among tenants, homeowners and community partners.

This document is a portion of NAHB's report  
*How Did They Do It? Discovering New Opportunities for Affordable Housing.*

[Click here to view the full report.](#)

# How Did They Do It?

Discovering New Opportunities  
for Affordable Housing

Photo Courtesy of Brynn Grey Partners Ltd.



**NAHB**<sup>®</sup>  
National Association  
of Home Builders