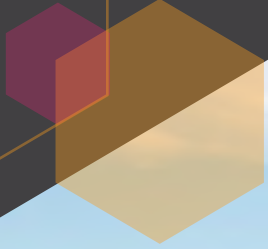


# COMMUNITY PORTRAIT



# Nikky Mohanna

## *Small Is Beautiful*

Nikky Mohanna has always lived in what she calls micro-units. In Sacramento she lived in a 350 square foot studio on top of a hundred-year-old building, the former Levinson's bookstore on 10th Street.

"It showed me that you can totally live in a unit that small because of the amenities the urban core has to offer," said the 29-year-old property developer. When she left Sacramento, she lived in tiny apartments in New York, London, and Tehran and became convinced that small apartments were "the natural progression of a city . . . for the urban core to be successful, you need these types of products."

When she returned to Sacramento in 2015, she set about developing 19J, which has been called Sacramento's first micro-apartment building. But she says that small apartments for urban workers were a key part of the city's housing in a formerly vibrant downtown before people fled for the suburbs in the 1970s.

"Today what we see as single room occupancy buildings, that was the housing that was built for the workforce. So even though today it has a bad connotation because of the way they were abandoned when everyone left for the suburbs, bringing that whole history back that was part of the fabric of the city, the microunits that we're building today are really not new, I see it as just enhancing our history."

The 11-story 19J Midtown project has studios as small as 412 square feet [sf] and one-bedroom units from 522 to 908 sf but what has really grabbed attention are the micro-units that start at 278 sf and \$995 a month. When she spoke just weeks away from opening, she said she had had over a thousand applications for 175 units in a very short time frame "and the majority of those are interested in the micro-units and most of those are leased up."

She credits the interest to people's desire to live closer to where they work and says this is especially important for the people who work in the industries that help make Midtown vibrant, such as chefs, waiters, and bartenders.

"The people who are creating the vibrancy that makes everyone want to be a part of this community are the people who can't afford to live in this community. That's not the way you build a sustainable city. . . . So things like micro-units, co-living, those are some of the opportunities. Even though it is very expensive to live in Downtown and Midtown and do urban infill, there are creative ways that through design we can create efficiency and bring down the price point to make it more affordable."

To make 19J "pencil", Mohanna had to convince the City of Sacramento to allow the building to exceed the six-story height limit and to use a novel construction technique. Some Midtown residents were opposed to the 11-story height of the project but she said that through dialogue and conversation, she was able to win people over to the project's merits and why it needed to be that high to work financially.

The project was built using a construction technique Mohanna had seen used in Portland and Seattle that made a high-rise building more cost-effective. It is the first load-bearing metal-stud structure in Sacramento and the tallest in California. It took a lot of research to convince City engineers it would work but she said the City was very open to pushing the envelope and gave them a lot of credit for their open-mindedness.

It was not easy to be the pioneer but Mohanna said that once 19J was stabilized as a viable project, it would provide an important comparable product in the market and would spur more such apartment projects.