

Good Nabr

Housing startup brings Scandinavian ethos to SoFA

Development startup Nabr has selected downtown San Jose to achieve its goals of building sustainable high-rise housing and providing more people with a path to owning a quality, environmentally friendly home in an urban setting.

Along the path to ownership, Nabr will guide their customers through a people-first technology platform for finding, designing and financing their new homes.

“Owners have a tendency to stay longer and be more connected to their community,” said **Roni Bahar**, Nabr CEO, who helped open the first WeWork office downtown. “It is in an owner’s best interest to contribute to the community because their quality-of-life is rewarded.”

Nabr plans to break ground this winter on its first project, a 140-unit building called SoFA One at 415 S. Third St. that could be ready for owner move-ins by early 2025. After raising an initial \$14 million last year, the Nabr team announced in July an additional \$48 million in equity and debt financing to get the project underway.

On Sept. 22, Nabr plans a pre-sale launch, a new website, and its Virtual Design Studio, on which potential residents can customize their home and select from one of several designer packages. The same day, Nabr will also co-host an event with the Urban Vibrancy Institute to celebrate the launch.

“We’d love to work with anyone who is excited about what we’re doing,” said **Cara Eckholm**, Nabr chief revenue officer (CRO). “Our model is community-minded. We’re open to conversation, taking ideas and partnering with downtown businesses.”

A waiting list of 4,000 subscribers interested in purchasing one of the units – split among previous owners, renters, Millennials and older couples – will start taking serious steps toward ownership agreements when the first project breaks ground.

“We haven’t sourced demographics, but a key audience is Millennials,” Eckholm said. “The cost of living is so high here but it’s difficult for them to accumulate savings. Our lease-to-purchase program is really for this missing middle-class.”

Nabr’s LEAP (lease-to-purchase) financing program allows potential buyers to lock in a purchase price with as low as one percent down, sign an initial two-year lease agreement, and lease for up to five years to amass savings for the down payment. Meanwhile, the tenant makes monthly lease payments and a portion is set aside in credits to use toward the future purchase. During the terms of the lease agreement, the purchase price is already locked in, so the owner retains any appreciation in value.

Nabr home prices will start at \$700,000. The auto industry provided the model for Nabr’s financing options and to prioritize potential buyers on wait lists.

“We’ll start a paid wait list this winter after ground-breaking,” Eckholm said. “The \$1,000 is fully refundable, and will demonstrate who’s most interested, similar to what Tesla introduced before they built their cars. The rights to the next unit will go to the next in line.”

Nabr also has plans to build two more buildings, SoFA Two at 98 E. San Salvador St. and apply the process efficiencies they gleaned from the first two structures to construct SoFA Three at 420 S. Second St. – 500 units in all.

“Downtown has a clean, fairly blank canvas with a lot of room for



SoFA One, center, will be the first of three Nabr-developed condominium buildings.

more housing,” Bahar said.

The Nabr team sees their concept as one solution to help the Bay Area address the housing crisis.

“San Jose is the perfect place to start,” Eckholm added. “There’s no reason to stop when the Bay Area faces a half-million-unit housing shortage. If demand is there, we’ll keep building.”

Eckholm has been all over the South Bay talking to potential buyers.

“It’s an education in progress,” she said. “They’ve never heard of SoFA, but when they come to downtown San Jose, they see how nice it is. The downtown market can bear an introduction to young people.”

Bahar is one of three principals along with renowned architect **Bjarke Ingels**, founder of Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), and **Nick Chim**, co-founder of Flux, a spinoff of Google X.

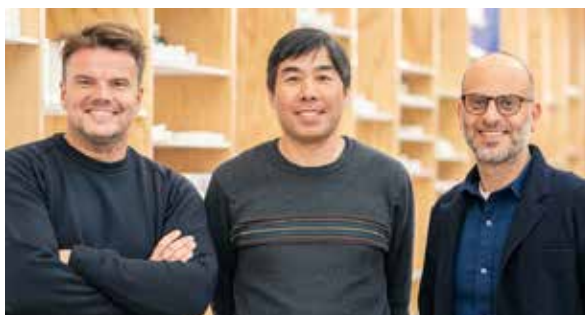
Ingels has made a career out of designing sustainable urban homes, starting in Denmark.

“To really scale what BIG does, we needed to take more of a product-driven approach to every part of the development process,” Ingels said, indicating that Nabr wants to expand their housing model to the mass market.

All three planned SoFA buildings focus on connecting the outdoors with condos featuring 8-foot-deep backyard-sized patios that span the width of the unit and large enough for gardens, trees and picnics.

“Daylight is free,” Ingels said. “In Denmark, every new unit must have a balcony, and California has a better climate for them.”

Take a tour of SoFA One at nabr.com/tour, check their national blog posts on medium.com/nabrliving and visit big.dk/#projects.



Nabr founders, from left, Bjarke Ingels, Nick Chim and Roni Bahar.

Abierto event program returns

San Jose Downtown Association will again join Filco Events, San Jose Jazz and School of Arts and Culture to disperse \$600,000 in Abierto program funds.

San Jose arts-based individuals, groups or organizations who plan to celebrate the city’s re-opening through events and public space activations are eligible. Abierto (Italian for “open”) funding provided by the Mayor’s Budget Office of the City of San Jose will range between \$500 and \$50,000 per applicant.

The four lead agencies will process the requests, disseminate the funds and provide logistical support. Before the end of June, 2023, recipients can take part three different ways:

- ◆ Activate in a one-time program or event;

- ◆ Activate an event or activation series;
- ◆ Activate in Viva Parks/Viva CalleSJ programming.

Start by completing an Intent to Participate form available at sjdowntown.com/abierto/ and send it to **Justin Imamura** at justin.imamura@sanjoseca.gov. Forms are available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese. SJDA plans to accept applications through Sept. 30. A review committee will evaluate applications and recommend grant awards soon thereafter.

In the first season of the program, SJDA allotted funding to Urban Vibrancy Institute; Curatus; SJSU Department of Humanities and the Arts; Stage One; Friends of Hue and School of Visual Philosophy.

SJDA shares vision of BART’s future

The future BART project through downtown San Jose needs to be better designed at both downtown stations – the key gateways to the city, which help define the city and catalyze urban growth, according to a policy report by SPUR.

“This new post by our partners at SPUR hits the right notes for the two downtown BART stations,” said SJDA CEO **Scott Knies**.

SPUR and SJDA have been aligned in their advocacy regarding the BART station designs throughout the design process, and have sent numerous letters to VTA directors the past five years.

The decisions being made now about BART’s design of stations along Santa Clara Street in the core and at Diridon Station will be important for the next 100 years, said **Laura Tolkoff**, SPUR transportation policy director.

The need for an entrance on the south side of Santa Clara Street for the downtown core station is a key factor in both groups’ advocacy for BART. Significant progress on this issue was reported at the VTA / BART board workshop on Aug. 26 with several “innovations” to the single-bore tunnel and stations revealed, with further refinements expected to be shared at VTA board workshop Sept. 16.

“It’s important to deliver the best possible project, not just deliver the project,” Tolkoff said.

The July 28 report is at spur.org/news.

SJDA News

New Community Engagement Manager has local roots: **Juan Carlos Aguirre** believes his new position at the San Jose Downtown Association is literally the job he was made for. As a student of anthropology at SJSU, he learned how to understand and empathize with people of varying backgrounds and cultures, and believes this job is the perfect manifestation of that skill set.



Juan Carlos Aguirre

In his capacity as Community Engagement Manager, Aguirre is responsible for strengthening relationships with members, partners, stakeholder organizations and funders. This entails working with business owners, property owners, arts leaders, non-profits, and government officials on post-pandemic recovery. It's a daunting job in a diverse center city, but Aguirre says he's up for it.

A first-generation Californian, Aguirre is the first in his family to go to college, and he's taking that one step further by pursuing a graduate degree in applied anthropology.

Aguirre and his husband – a high school teacher in the Cupertino School District – are true downtowners. Married earlier this year, they said their vows during a small gathering for friends and family at Farmer's Union in San Pedro Square, and then posed for wedding pictures in the Tabard Theatre courtyard.

"I love that I am working at a job that indirectly benefits my own quality of life," he said in reference to his short commute (on an electric scooter) to his home just off East Santa Clara Street.



Volunteers painted SoFA planters.

SoFA Urban Garden: Property-Based Improvement District (PBID) street life team has created a botanical garden of native California flora along two blocks of the SoFA (South First Area) District.

More than 120 plants representing about 30 species occupy numerous planters along South First street between San Carlos and William streets. Each planter theme includes a QR code from which passersby with Smart Phones can access an interactive online exhibit and get information about vegetation along the route.

The planters evoke the state's redwood forest, wetlands areas, oak woodlands, chaparrals, coastal sage scrub and grasslands. The state flower, the California poppy, is prevalent in the décor, honoring the flowers outlining the classic California Theater sign (best seen at night).

Trees featured include redwood, buckeye, maple, strawberry madrone, desert willow and dogwood. Plants include succulents, fuchsia, sage, ferns, red grapes, and irises. Exhibit information for users in person or online are at: sjdowntown.com/sofa-urban-gardens, from which links to the various plant types can be found.

The street life team led by Street Life Manager **Sarah Billings** got the idea from a webinar two years ago in which Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden teamed with the Lincoln Road Business Improvement District to restore native orchids to southern Florida.

The project was a natural follow up to the opening of the SoFA Pocket Park, said **Dennis Yu**, project coordinator.

The project team included local consultant **Kathy Finley** of Finley Landscaping, who has populated downtown's planters and hanging baskets for more than a decade, plus Allbay Landscaping which helps with plant care. Eleven volunteers joined artist **Ben Henderson** in giving older planters a fresh coat of paint.

Downtown News

Downtown foot patrols to be revived: The City Council in June voted to beef up the number of officers throughout the city, but it may take more than a year to hire and train them before they deploy on active duty. The Council approved four beat cops for four districts around the city, including downtown.

"The walking patrols have been happening for more than a decade, but have been sporadic. I'm glad to see this as a permanent component of the police department, to have a set of officers and a supervisor dedicated to walking a beat," said District 3 Council-member **Raul Peralez**, a reserve officer for SJP.

A number of downtown business people have strongly advocated for the foot patrols over several years.

"Just make this feel a little safer for the folks that live and work down here," said bar owner **Cache Bouren** of Haberdasher and Cash Only.

A review of the practices by the top 10 most populous cities in the nation reveals that police officials agree with the general population that foot patrols give the perception or feeling that an area is safe.

New York City officers still work out of their cars, but are encouraged to perform "neighborhood policing," walking the streets and becoming familiar to businesses and residents.

Houston has an arrangement with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to have officers on horseback in its downtown. Chicago reintroduced a mounted patrol unit downtown in 1974 after a 25-year absence.

How the cities deploy its foot patrols varies. Officers and sheriff's deputies patrol by foot in Hollywood, San Diego's Ocean Beach and the Riverwalk in San Antonio to cover tourism areas.

Phoenix relies on reserve officers to volunteer their time and on neighborhood patrols to serve as the "eyes and ears" of the police department.

In Philadelphia, a team of 15 unarmed patrol members dressed in black and yellow jackets cycle through the Center City on daily deployment.

The sporadic nature of foot patrols may be attributed to a general feeling that police get the best bang for their buck by keeping police in patrol cars.

In a violent crime prevention plan for the City of Dallas, Chief **Eddie Garcia**, a past chief in San Jose, cited a study with intentions to keep more patrols based in vehicles.

"Lighted patrol cars reduced violence in hot spots while foot patrols had the greatest impact on property crime," Garcia wrote.

For several years now, property owners in San Jose have hired SJP Secondary Employment Unit (SEU) officers inside the downtown Property Business Improvement District.

"There's no substitute for seeing officers on ground level," added **Scott Knies**, SJDA CEO. "I'd also like to see more coordination between police from the City, San Jose State and the Sheriff's office to maximize efficiencies in our deployments downtown."

Business News

Art shop: At 136 E. Santa Clara St., among a block mixed with eclectic businesses including a plant store, tattoo artist, video game shop and Holy Cannoli, 1 Culture art store opens for business Friday and Saturday evenings. San Jose-born and -based artists **Andrew S. Espino** and **Scape Martinez** have curated art and clothing adorned with original art with San Jose's culture in mind.

"What San Jose means to us and should continue striving for can be expressed in one word, 'culture,'" Espino and Martinez said. "May San Jose continue to expand, diversify, and innovate but please: don't lose its culture."

Martinez is the artist behind the in-street art at South First and San Salvador streets, who transitioned the original intersection art to crosswalk art in 2019.

Shop for the limited supply of art works in person or at shop1culture.com.

Bike shop: At Donner Lofts at Fourth and St. John streets, the Bike Shop offers used and ready-to-go bikes for sale as well as bicycle repair servicing. The staff will also help teach you how to fix your own two-wheeler. The Shop is open Thursday and Friday.

Groundwerx Employee of the Month — Jesse Velo



Jesse Velo

Jesse Velo has been a Groundwerx employee since 2008, which ranks him as one of the most experienced cleaning ambassadors, and – at 71 – he claims the most life-experience as well. He has lived in San Jose for 25 years, moving here when many Groundwerx employees were young children or not even born.

Starting as a Safety Ambassador, Velo decided after two years that he would be happier on the cleaning team. You can find him most days pushing a broom, weeding tree wells, and wiping down furniture in the area around Saint James Park – his route covers everything on St. James and Devine streets and what's in-between. He is very focused when he is working, but enjoys looking back to see the difference once he has finished cleaning a streetscape.

Prior to joining the Groundwerx team, Velo worked for Mineta San Jose Airport, after a position as a cook at Great America for seven years. He commuted on VTA from his home in East San Jose, and would see Groundwerx employees when passing through the downtown. His sister told him about a job opening around the same time his contract position at SJC ended. He hasn't looked back, and seldom misses a day of work.

Velo is an ardent supporter of mass transit and takes the bus, train, light rail or BART everywhere. He is very excited about the BART extension coming through downtown. All of his five children – who range in age from 5 to 22 – were raised to travel on mass transit, and that's how the family goes visiting other locations in the Bay Area on weekends.

His extensive knowledge of the downtown comes in handy on the job, as he is often stopped by visitors who need directions or restaurant suggestions. For the latter, he always sends them to San Pedro Square, since they're likely to find something they like in the restaurant-rich area. His personal favorite is Angelou's Mexican Grill on Second Street.

Velo's perfect attendance, coupled with his great attitude even when things aren't going well, were the main factors that led his team to nominate him Employee of the Month.

His pride in his work is evident in everything he does, and his patience as a trainer of new hires are some of the attributes that make him a treasured asset to the Groundwerx team.

Use the Groundwerx app or call (408) 287-1520 to report a mess.

sjdowntown.com/groundwerx

DOWNTOWN DIMENSION



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SJDA Public Meeting

City Council District 3 candidates: Hear from City Council District 3 candidates **Irene Smith** and **Omar Torres** how they will lead the city's most complex council district.

SJDA hosts a forum Sept. 9 at 8:15 a.m. to hear the candidates describe their qualifications, vision for the city, and respond to center city issues. The election will be Tuesday, Nov. 8.

Attendees can attend in person at Tabard Theatre or watch from home or office online. To register to attend in person, please go to sjdowntown.com/sjda-public-meeting.

From the Archives

10 years ago – September 2012 – The Gardner Downtown Health Care Center opened, offering urgent medical care services to the downtown community, which had been void of immediate health care service for eight years since the 2004 shuttering of the former San Jose Medical Center by Healthcare Corporation of America.

20 years ago – September 2002 – The tenth and final Brew Ha Ha was held at San Pedro Square, with headliners **Mark Pitta**, **Bill Dwyer** and **Kyle Cease**, plus 35 brewers pouring 80 different beers.

Admission was \$15 and included a sampling glass and six tastes.

25 years ago – September 1997 – San Pedro Square received a fresh look and updated image. Changes to the Redevelopment Agency-funded streetscape included rebuilt street, expanded sidewalks with outdoor cafe seating, a retooled district logo and "hip ad campaign."

30 years ago – September 1992 – The newly dubbed SoFA District -- South First Area -- hosted its first annual SoFA Street Fair, an urban festival complete with vintage fashions and antiques, visual artists and craftspeople, an entertainment stage, multicultural entertainment, and tastes from SoFA restaurants.

Downtown Facts

Valley Transportation Authority ridership

	July 2022	July 2021	Change
Bus	1,402,083	1,039,205	34.9%
Avg. Weekday	51,946	38,173	36.1%
Light Rail	319,341	No light rail	
Avg. weekday	11,570	service	

Source: VTA