

Case Study: Turning Crisis into Capacity — Renovating for Memory Care Success

Project Name: Whispering Willows Memory Care Conversion

Client: Confidential Client | Puget Sound Region | Completed 2024

Project Type: Renovation | Independent Living to Licensed Memory Care
82 Beds | 47,000 SF



The Situation: A Stalled Project and a Critical Decision

A long-term care operator was midway through converting an Independent Living facility into a Secured Memory Care residence when their project took a sudden turn. Their original architect had mishandled critical regulatory interactions—disagreeing openly with the Department of Health (DOH) reviewer in a joint meeting. Simultaneously, the city had approved plans hastily prior to a plans reviewer’s retirement. The state flagged discrepancies, and the newly assigned city reviewer backtracked the permit approval to coordinate with DOH.

The project was now in jeopardy:

- State reviewers were frustrated and cautious
- City approvals were under scrutiny

- A contractor was already mobilized
- Delays risked major revenue losses

The Solution: Predictability in the Face of Complexity

The client turned to Arete Architecture on a recommendation for their reputation in navigating regulatory processes without delay.

“The client came to us because they’d heard our process reduces permitting timelines. Their current architect had burned bridges with the state, and they knew that without the reviewer’s support, their timeline—and investment—were at serious risk.”

Arete made a bold promise: 30 days to re-draw, coordinate, and resubmit the entire project to the city and state—without halting progress on site.



Arete’s Strategic Approach:



Rapid Mobilization

- Arete reviewed the existing drawings, identified code compliance issues, and immediately scheduled coordination meetings with the client, contractor, city, and state.

✂ Keep Construction Moving

- Working closely with reviewers, Arete negotiated approval to begin demolition while revising the design. They issued phased plan sets to keep the contractor's team working without disruption.

Design that Delivers More

- While fixing the code issues, Arete identified opportunities to increase operational capacity. The original design had proposed 63 licensed memory care beds. By reworking the layout, Arete delivered 82 fully licensed memory care beds—a 30% increase in revenue-generating units.

Reviewer Collaboration Rebuilt






- Because of Arete's professionalism, clarity, and transparency, both city and state reviewers became active collaborators in keeping the project moving forward. Arete's team didn't just meet the 30-day goal—they restored confidence among all parties.

From the Owner's Perspective:

"Mike's expertise and dedication were instrumental... His deep understanding of the DOH review process and State Fire Marshal inspection was invaluable. His attention to detail, problem-solving skills, and consistent communication made a significant impact on the project's success... I highly recommend Mike at Arete Architecture for any complex architectural project."
— Executive Director, Whispering Willows



Results at a Glance:

-  Re-submitted revised plans to city and state within 30 days
-  Maintained demolition and early construction schedule
-  Increased licensed memory care beds from 63 to 82
-  Project successfully licensed and fully compliant
-  Earned stellar reviews from both regulators and client



Why It Matters to You:

Projects involving DOH, State Fire Marshal, and local permitting agencies are rarely straightforward. Without the right leadership, the approval process can become a major liability. Arete Architecture brings more than just drawings—we bring diplomacy, strategy, and a process that transforms risk into momentum.

Are you facing complexity in a facility upgrade or licensing challenge? Let's talk about how Arete Architecture can help you move forward with confidence.