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Affordable housing project in American Canyon scheduled to open in November

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Noel Brinkerhoff | Napa Valley Register | Sep 19, 2018

Construction of American Canyon's new affordable housing project for seniors and veterans is on schedule to open in November, city officials learned Tuesday during a hard-hat tour of the site.

Mayor Leon Garcia, City Manager Jason Holley, City Council members and residents toured

the 70-unit Valley View Senior Homes for an hour as it continues to undergo interior and exterior work.

Visitors came away impressed for the most part with the design and construction, though a few residents had concerns about how well older tenants will get around Valley View on foot or in wheelchairs, given its location just off Theresa Avenue and sited at the base of a hill, resulting in a sloped driveway and meandering pathways.

"This is an exciting moment," said Garcia. "We have been looking forward to this for a long time," and "I'm just absolutely thrilled about it."

Resident Sande Sutter said the amenities, craftsmanship and services at Valley View are impressive, as well as its low cost to renters.

"If you've had to spend a good portion of your life working fairly hard but not having as much," Sutter said after the tour, "this is a pretty nice way to go into the latter part of your life." Project Manager Carrie Lutjens with Satellite Affordable Housing Associates (SAHA), the project's nonprofit developer, said 36 of the 70 units will rent for \$797-\$969 a month for one bedroom, and \$943-\$1150 for two bedrooms.

For the other 34 units, tenants will generally pay 30 percent of their income for rent, with the remainder covered by housing subsidies.

Most of the units are in small cottages built close together to forge a neighborhood feel, according to SAHA officials. The Berkeley-based developer took over the site after a private developer last decade stopped construction on single family homes originally slated for the location.

The previous project had laid concrete foundations that SAHA chose to keep and work with instead of starting over from scratch.

"We could have cut into the hill and plopped a big building at the bottom" of it, said Eve Stewart, SAHA's director of real estate development. "But this creates a really nice village feel and a sense of neighborhood. That's what we were balancing with" when we started on Valley View.

Working on a site that drops 56 feet in elevation from the top to the bottom proved "super challenging," according to lead architect Charles "Chuck" Durrett with the firm McCamant & Durrett Architects.

"It's not easy to walk around even as a worker," Durrett said.

To make Valley View accessible for seniors, Durrett designed a zig-zagging walkway that will run between the cottages that has less than a 5 percent grade to make it easier for walking or using a wheelchair.

The mayor said the walkway reminded him of the famed Lombard Street in San Francisco.

The project also eliminated the need for any front steps to enter the units. Almost all of the 70 units except eight are ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] accessible.

Still, some visitors like Sutter as well as Karina Servente and Kristin Einberger said they were

worried about the grade on the site.

“The people when they get to be 90 [years old], they’re going to have some trouble possibly,” said Sutter.

Lutjens said Valley View will include on-site service coordinators to help tenants with various needs “as they age in place.”

“That’s really our goal is that people can stay here” as they get older, Lutjens said.

Stewart said Valley View is designed for independent living, not assisted living. “But one of our goals is to help people maintain their independence for as long as possible so they can stay in their unit,” said Stewart.

The service coordinator will help with things like finding transportation services or filling out Medicare forms or locating a local doctor for tenants. They also will plan events for the entire community.

Valley View includes a spacious clubhouse that will feature a large kitchen and dining area for events, a fireplace and lounge, laundry facility, crafts room, patio, and rental office. Two other laundry units will be established at the other end of the site for tenants to use.

Rental units will include kitchens and bathrooms complete with wall-mounted handle bars.

Another project architect, Gary Burke, said Valley View is on schedule for tenants to move in by mid-November. “We’re getting very close” to finishing construction.

SAHA officials said they received 450 applications for the 70 available units, and were still deciding on who will be approved to rent at Valley View.

Burke said the buildings are “definitely” looking like how his firm envisioned things. “There’s been some changes as we go along with construction on the site,” he said, which is not unusual for housing projects.

“For the most part it’s turning out pretty much exactly the way we wanted it to, looking like a little village,” Burke said.

Durrett said they had “to adjust the architecture a little bit here and there” because they went over budget by about \$2 million.

For instance, a two-story apartment building with 12 units was supposed to have an elevator, but that was cut due to the cost overruns, according to Durrett.

The change means the eight upstairs units will not be ADA accessible. The total budget for Valley View when work began last summer was \$26.6 million. SAHA partnered with 15 different entities to raise the money, including nearly \$2.1 million from Napa County and \$1.8 million in funds and property from the city of American Canyon.

Other contributors included the Home Depot Foundation, the Peter A. and Vernice H. Gasser Foundation, Silicon Valley Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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