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Napa planners support 51 affordable apartments on Soscol Avenue

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Howard Yune, Napa Valley Register
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For the second time this year, land-use authorities in Napa are trying to funnel dozens of lower-priced rental apartments into one of California's costliest, tightest housing markets.

The nonprofit developer of the Manzanita Family Apartments is nearing the go-ahead to build

51 rental dwellings at 2951 Soscol Ave., after winning the city Planning Commission's endorsement Thursday night. The unanimous vote sends the proposal toward an expected City Council decision this fall, which could clear the way for a groundbreaking in the spring of 2019 and completion late the following year.

Estimated to cost \$25 million and marked for a 1.85-acre parcel on the west side of the fork of Soscol Avenue and Old Soscol Way, Manzanita is the second project consisting entirely of affordable housing to come before Napa officials in recent months. Its creator, Satellite Affordable Housing Associates of Berkeley, seeks to offer its units at rents within reach of families earning less than 60 percent of the county's median income.

SAHA is following a path similar to that taken by Burbank Housing, which in June gained permits for its own 50-apartment Stoddard West complex near the South Napa Marketplace. Burbank and the site owner, the Gasser Foundation, plan to start work next spring.

"This is for your favorite barista, your favorite teacher, your nurse," said Katie Fisher, project manager for SAHA. "We want to make sure they're able to live in Napa."

The city selected SAHA to develop an affordable housing complex at the Soscol-Old Soscol fork in the fall of 2015, and the builder returned with plans for a pair of three-story buildings bracketing a central courtyard. Sketches filed by the builder show a façade made with stucco and wood and featuring open balconies, with staircases integrated into the buildings away from view.

Twenty-five apartments would contain one bedroom, with 13 units containing two bedrooms and 13 others containing three. One apartment will be reserved for a property manager.

Monthly rents at Manzanita are expected to range from \$523 to \$1,047 for one bedroom, \$628 to \$1,257 for two bedrooms and \$726 to \$1,452 for three, according to Fisher. SAHA plans to take applications on apartments about six months before the opening, then choose tenants by lottery.

Despite such below-market rates, Napa planners complimented builders for offering a project with enough amenities and design sophistication to avoid a low-cost stigma. The complex is to include play and picnic areas in its courtyard, along with a community room and kitchen, bicycle storage and a shared laundry. SAHA, which will manage the development as well as own it for at least 55 years, also shared plans to organize life skills classes, educational workshops and other community events for residents.

"Visually, it seems like an upscale, market-rate project," said Commissioner Paul Kelley, a local architect. "If I were moving into Napa for the first time, I would feel lucky to get a place there."

The project will have two entrances from Soscol Avenue. The south entry — which will face Old Soscol Way — will prompt a traffic signal to be installed at Soscol and Old Soscol Way.

The north entry will be restricted to right turns in and out of the 85-vehicle parking area.

For planners as well as area residents, the main concern over the apartment complex stemmed from its location beside Soscol Avenue. Although the site would give tenants easy access to a shopping center, Queen of the Valley Medical Center and other services, some neighbors warned of possible dangers to children or seniors on foot on four-lane Soscol — and

said that speeding and a traffic increase from a nearby detour have raised the hazard further.

?If kids should run out into the street? ? chasing after a stray ball, for example ? ?I shudder to think what will happen if (parents) take their eyes off them for one nanosecond,? said May Shueh.

An 8-foot-high redwood wall topped by latticework will surround three sides of the apartment property, with half-walls on the Soscol Avenue side, according to the project architect John Thatch.

The Manzanita complex is SAHA?s second project in Napa County, joining Valley View, a cluster of 70 cottages and apartments that broke ground last month in American Canyon. Dwellings at Valley View will be offered to lower-income seniors, including military veterans and the formerly homeless.

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