

Apartments to have a green touch

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Local varieties of flora and fauna may soon find a new home on the roof of an affordable housing development in Salinas. By spring 2010, 52 "very low income" families and special-needs individuals will be able to move into the Salinas Gateway Apartments at Lincoln Avenue and West Market Street in Oldtown Salinas. The \$13.5 million development, made possible with both state and city financing, will be a mix of studio, and one- and two-bedroom apartments. The first floor of the complex will include 2,700 square feet of retail and office space for sale. Contact John McCormack of the JNM Company at 831 625-1414, for more information on this unit.

"This is the first project through the (Salinas) Redevelopment Agency to introduce green features," said Alan Stumpf, Salinas redevelopment director. "It will set a new standard for future projects."

While the development will not be LEED certified - the benchmark in ecologically friendly design and architecture - it will be built to LEED standards, Stumpf said. First Community Housing, a nonprofit developer based in San Jose that specializes in urban infill and affordable housing, first took interest in Salinas in the fall of 2005. "We approached Salinas because it's a great downtown with tremendous resources, historic buildings, great restaurants, city services, transit, shopping," said Jeff Oberdorfer, executive director of the agency.

For the design, FCH teamed up with the Carmel Valley-based Rana Creek Habitat Restoration - a company that combines the talent of ecologists, architects, scientists and planners - to create a thriving ecosystem on the roof of the planned four-story building. A 'living roof' A mix of native grasses and wildflowers will be planted on the "living roof." The roof will not require irrigation and will attract native species of birds and butterflies, said Amelia Holmes a project manager at Rana Creek.

"We looked at what Salinas was before development," Holmes said. "It was a grassland meadow."

The project will also include underground storm water collection tanks that will provide 77 percent of the water needed for on-site irrigation, Holmes said. FCH and Rana Creek have collaborated on building ecologically friendly affordable housing in past projects in the San Jose area. "It's important for all buildings to be green, as our planet is running out of resources," Oberdorfer said. "We save our tenants money on utility bills and on transportation costs by locating next to transit (centers)."

Construction will begin in September and is expected to wrap up by April 2010, Oberdorfer said. The green features of the development will be made possible with \$12.2 million in California Housing Finance Authority financing. The Salinas Gateway project is one of three in the state to receive money from CalHFA to build ecologically friendly affordable housing.

The Salinas Redevelopment Agency provided FCH a \$910,000 loan to purchase the 0.6 acre lot and will also provide another \$458,200 for construction in the 2008-09 fiscal year. The residential units will be made available to those with special needs, such as a physical disability, or those with incomes at or below 30 percent of Salinas' median income. With hundreds of families displaced by the foreclosure crisis, there is a great need for affordable housing in Salinas, Stumpf said. But even without the difficulties in the housing market, Salinas' low median income and high mean home price, has created a strain on the city's affordable housing resources, he said. "We've never been at a point to say we've even come close to the level of affordable housing needed in the community," Stumpf said.

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WHAT'S NEXT

Construction on the Salinas Gateway Apartments will begin in September. The project is not expected to be completed until April 2010, but First Community Housing will begin accepting applications in late 2009.