



Sacramento council OKs funding for LGBT-friendly senior housing

The Sacramento City Council on Tuesday night approved funding for the first LGBT-friendly senior affordable housing project in the Sacramento region.

The project will consist of 53 units at 16th and F streets in the Washington Park neighborhood. The area is vacant lots now. The project being developed by Mutual Housing is geared toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender residents, but is not exclusively for that community.



Architectural rendering of the Lavender Courtyard by Mutual Housing. Photo courtesy of Mogavero Architects

Opponents said they object to locating more affordable housing in their neighborhood, not the project's focus on attracting LGBT residents.

The council approved the project unanimously, but Councilman Eric Guerra recused himself from deliberations because his sister is the project manager.

The Washington Park Neighborhood Improvement Group submitted a letter opposing the project, along with a petition with signatures from 17 neighborhood residents and 12 businesses in the surrounding area.

Martha Damjanovic, a founder of the neighborhood group, said her organization does not oppose the project because it is LGBT-friendly. The group believes the neighborhood is over-saturated with social services and low-income housing, she said, and it is time for other parts of the city to take on some of the burden.

Councilman Steve Hansen, who represents the neighborhood and is the city's first openly gay council member, said he strongly supports the project. The land has been vacant since 1982, he said, and the proposal is a reinvestment in the area.

"A lot of why I ran (for City Council) was to turn these vacant lots into something," Hansen said. "Here we have a huge, unmet need in the LGBT community that this project has a chance to meet. I hate to say it, but older people have a bigger challenge than younger people in this community."

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Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders, a national advocacy group, estimates that LGBT seniors are half as likely as heterosexual seniors to have close family to lean on in their older years. LGBT seniors also have higher poverty rates and are less likely to seek services out of fear of harassment and hostility, according to the organization.

Rachel Iskow, executive director of project developer Mutual Housing put together a petition thanking Hansen for supporting the project, gathering signatures from 119 people, 72 of whom were listed as Sacramento residents.

Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing's executive director, said the Sacramento LGBT community first proposed the project because LGBT seniors often face discrimination and lower quality of care in assisted and individual housing.

The company tried to find a location in the Lavender Heights neighborhood that caters to LGBT residents, but the small number of vacant lots were too expensive. She thinks the development will be good for the area, an eye-catcher that will attract attention to Washington Park.

"There's potential for extending Lavender Heights and having the LGBT seniors have an influence on what happens on North 16th Street and make it a dynamic place," she said. "I think it's really going to spur development there."

She said Mutual Housing met with the Washington Park Neighborhood Improvement Group and tried to accommodate its request for a mixed-income development and commercial space, but couldn't secure funding for a mixed-income project. The plan includes 863 square feet of commercial space at the corner of 16th and F streets.

The council approved \$2.78 million in funding from the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency, about \$874,000 of which comes from Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS funds. The council also gave the city's Housing Authority approval to issue up to \$13.5 million in tax-exempt mortgage revenue bonds. The overall budget for the project is \$16 million.

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