

LGBT senior housing would show love to 16th Street



- First of its kind facility in Sacramento planned for neglected stretch
- Advocates say need is great for LGBT seniors to have safe housing
- Many LGBT seniors abused in traditional facilities, according to study

The city is trying to show a little love to the northern stretch of 16th Street in midtown. And the latest attempt is the kind of project you won't see anywhere else in the Central Valley.

Mutual Housing California last week finalized the purchase of land at the corner of 16th and F streets. The lots are empty now, but the nonprofit plans to build a 50-unit apartment building on the site.

This won't be just another apartment building on a street where hundreds of apartments have already been built. Instead, Lavender Courtyard would be an LGBT-friendly senior affordable housing facility for those 62 and older, a place that fills a vital social need in our city, advocates said.

"Sacramento has a large LGBT population and we all need a place of acceptance and community as we live out our elder years," said Rachel Iskow, CEO of Mutual Housing California.

A 2013 study by the National Center on Elder Abuse found many LGBT seniors are physically abused because of their sexual orientation. It said "prejudice and hostility encountered by LGBT elder persons in institutional care facilities create difficult environments" and discovered cases in which senior care facilities didn't allow same-sex couples to share rooms or transgender seniors to live in facilities that matched their gender identity.

"As you grow older, there's a tendency to get more depressed and isolated, especially for LGBT seniors," Iskow said. "What we found in research is that LGBT seniors feel that when they get into senior housing or assisted care, they have to go back into the closet because the older generation is still pretty homophobic."

Jim Joseph was one of the early advocates for Lavender Courtyard. He's 65 years old and active in a local men's club called the Prime Timers.

"Even with all the laws changing, there's still a mindset that when you go into assisted living, you're suddenly asked, 'Why do you have this male

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companion or this female companion who's always there?" he said.

"You've got baby boomers who went through a whole different process (than younger LGBT individuals). We had to be more discreet, we certainly couldn't talk about marriage. It just wasn't part of our heritage."

And that's the key to Lavender Courtyard. It will form a community without judgment. It will provide independent living, but will also have on-site social services. And it's close to central city amenities.

Steve Hansen, the city's first openly gay City Council member and midtown's representative at City Hall, said Lavender Courtyard is filling "a highly unmet need." He's working on some ideas to improve the pedestrian experience and spruce up that section of 16th Street, which right now is little more than a freeway onramp for commuters trying to get to Roseville.

"(Lavender Courtyard) is a cool project that will help catalyze the next phase of 16th," he said. "This project is going to carry some energy and vitality to a part of the street that is in need of some love."