

Mutual Housing properties keep up with changing ADA guidelines

Sacramento/Yolo Mutual Housing Association recently renovated its Davis properties to keep up with changing disability requirements. The nonprofit also worked with city of Davis officials to make sure its latest development, New Harmony in South Davis, is in keeping with the city's more stringent guidelines.

"Our mutual housing association strives to be accessible to individuals of varying physical limitations as well as ethnicities and ages," said Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing's executive director.

More than 50 million Americans are disabled. An estimated 5,577 people with disabilities lived in Davis in 2010, with more than 18,500 in Yolo County, according to the U.S. Census. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act spelled out their rights, as well as the responsibility of government agencies, businesses and nonprofits to meet them.

Since then, the regulations have evolved. Like other multi-family housing developers, Sacramento/Yolo Mutual Housing has worked to keep up with the changes at older properties like Twin Pines.

The \$255,000 renovation of Twin Pines on F Street, across from Northstar Park, was completed recently. The community of 38 apartments and a community center was opened in 1998.

As part of the upgrades, Mutual Housing widened the parking lot and added a handicapped parking place. Contractor La Perle Concrete also rebuilt the curbs and regraded the sidewalks to make it easier for handicapped visitors and residents to navigate the complex.

Mutual Housing also redesigned the gardens with contractors adding a raised bed with a wider-than-usual path for ADA regulations. The community has 12 raised garden beds.



Twin Pines from Anderson Road after renovation. Photo by Bryon Brashear.

To complete the renovations at Twin Pines, contractors also replaced decks and sliding glass doors with more energy-efficient ones and replaced the awnings on the south side of the buildings that protect apartments from the heat. To make the complex more green, it also added a water-saving irrigation system.

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The buildings were painted taupe to modernize the look. The new awnings are turquoise.

The city of Davis contributed \$100,000 to the Twin Pines renovation. NeighborWorks America also gave Mutual Housing a \$155,000 grant.

The city of Davis' accessibility policy was adopted in 2006. Since then, 185 units have been built that are fully accessible and 317 more are at least partially accessible.

"Making housing as accessible as possible is an important goal of the city," said Danielle Foster, housing and human services superintendent. "We try to exceed state and federal regulations on multi-family housing."

One difference in the city's policy — compared to the state or federal regulations — is the push to have one-floor flats instead of two-story townhomes.

According to Iskow, most mutual housing staff and residents prefer townhomes, which suit the needs of families with children, Mutual Housing's main residents.

"There are always trade-offs," Iskow said. "The city of Davis wants to add to its inventory of affordable, accessible housing and we can understand that."

As such, Mutual Housing worked with the city to meet its goals by designing one-story, wheelchair-accessible apartments at New Harmony, a 69-apartment project on Cowell Boulevard in South Davis, rather than the usual townhomes. New Harmony should be finished by the end of the year.

When the city first adopted the policy, stacked flats, as they are called, weren't included in the guidelines. The change "... shows the evolution of the program," Foster said.

The City Council will be evaluating the current policy and deciding whether to make additional changes this fall.

Founded in 1988, Sacramento | Yolo Mutual Housing Association develops and operates rental housing for modest-income households. The communities have 2,750 residents.

Through Mutual Housing's focus on leadership, the nonprofit also provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, community-building activities and services for residents and neighbors. For more information, visit www.mutualhousing.com.