

# New affordable housing project opens in Davis

The first affordable housing community built with redevelopment funds in the past five years opened in Davis this past Wednesday. Apartments at New Harmony Mutual Housing Community target families earning 30 percent to 60 percent of the area median income.

With a two-percent housing vacancy rate, New Harmony's one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments filled up fast. Nearly 200 households filed pre-applications for the 69 rentals that were part of the Davis lottery system.

"With vacancy rates as low – and rents as high – as they are in Davis, the need for affordable housing is especially important, as it is throughout California," said Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing Chief Executive Officer.

Mutual Housing's 18th development has a playground, garden, "half" basketball court and a community center on 3.38 acres.

"New Harmony is a welcome addition to Yolo County and the Davis Community," said Don Saylor, Yolo County Supervisor. "The development adds affordable housing at a time when we need it most."

Both are located near a bus stop and are on the Davis bike path and greenbelt.

"This great project is near a transit stop, park, bike path and greenbelt and is close to elementary schools," said Saylor. "I look forward to years of success in watching the residents thrive as part of the Davis community."

As part of the construction along Cowell Boulevard near Drummond Road, Mutual Housing's general contractor, Chico-based Sunseri Construction, Inc., developed the bike path between the New Harmony and Owendale Mutual Housing Community nearby. The section has trees, lighting and benches.

As a result of New Harmony's construction, the city also received nearly \$200,000 to renovate the Rainbow City Play Structure, built more than 20 years ago. Any remaining money will go toward other upgrades to Community Park.

In addition to the new bike path section and park upgrades, Mutual Housing staff also noted that affordable housing developments such as New Harmony lower the local carbon footprint by making it possible for Davis residents to live close to their workplace instead of having to live in outlying communities and commute.

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New Harmony construction also preserved more than 200 jobs and created 30 new ones, according to Donny Lieberman, Sunseri Construction, Inc. President.

Mutual Housing CEO Iskow added that in addition to providing below-market rents for people of modest means, affordable housing also helps the local economy by leaving more each month in household budgets that can be spent at local businesses.

The complex, which also is the first to open in Davis since the redevelopment agency's demise, took four years from planning and land acquisition through design and development to apartment leasing.

Since 1987, the city of Davis has developed more than 1,700 units of affordable housing. For New Harmony, the city used federal HOME funds and money from the local redevelopment agency as well as land from local inclusionary requirements.

"The remarkable part, having been in this arena for so long, is that the Davis community has embraced the responsibility for providing an array of housing for our residents," said Saylor. "This extraordinary commitment is a model for our county and region."

The Sacramento-based nonprofit spent two years obtaining local approvals and cobbling together financing, which included such partners as the Bank of America, NeighborWorks America, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, Merritt Community Capital Corporation, the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee and the Home Depot Foundation.

"Because of the number of agencies involved, the complexity of the financing puzzle, and often times neighborhood resistance, developing affordable housing communities takes years," said Iskow.

With the elimination of state redevelopment agencies, New Harmony has the dubious distinction of being the last project in Davis to be completed with the agency's tax increment funding.

"With the demise of redevelopment agencies, the financing challenge becomes even greater," said Iskow.

With the addition of New Harmony, the number of residents living at Mutual Housing Sacramento and Yolo communities rises to nearly 3,000, half of whom are children.

All apartments in the three-story complex are wheelchair accessible or adaptable.

Sacramento-based Kuchman Architects PC was the architect for New Harmony and will be designing the next Mutual Housing community in Yolo County. Mutual Housing also will be contracting with Sunseri Construction later this year for the construction of Spring Lake, located in Woodland.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops and operates well-designed rental housing for people of modest means. The organization's Yolo County arm is known as Mutual Housing Yolo. Davis residents sit on the board of directors of both organizations.

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.

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