

South Sacramento affordable housing could include rooftop farms

If Mutual Housing California can carry out a vision for a new project in south Sacramento, the farm-to-fork movement would be right overhead for affordable housing residents.

With \$40,000 from the Maryland nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners, Inc., Mutual Housing is beginning design on a 7-acre project where the rooftops would double as farms.

Mutual Housing executive director Rachel Iskow said there are numerous obstacles, but also several benefits.

Among them are better nutrition for the project's residents, environmental advantages when food is produced close to where it's eaten and even helping children living in such projects get a better understanding and appreciation for fresh food.

Iskow said the last benefit is a way to cross what's known as the green divide: Growing awareness of environmentalism that's often not seen in more urban areas, especially ones with lower incomes.

The idea for rooftop farms for what's expected to be a 120-unit project on Stockton Boulevard came from trying to come up with ways to cross that divide. But the challenges in a rooftop farm are many, she said, including issues of liability, structural soundness and education.

"Safe affordable housing is really needed in south Sacramento," she said. "We're just in the visionary stage now, but we'll see if this stuff is doable."

Planners also believe the community, as-yet unnamed, would be the first zero-net energy apartment complex in the neighborhood, and the farm would also provide jobs for residents in addition to food.

In addition to the apartments, the mixed-use project would have commercial office space, a bike repair and sharing program, a community garden and computer learning center. The project also would be along the planned light-rail transit line from Sacramento to Elk Grove, giving residents easy access.

Because it's in the predevelopment phase, there's no groundbreaking date yet for the site. But Iskow is pretty confident the rooftop farm idea will be part of the project.

"We have a good track record of putting our measures into action," she said. "And Sacramento is a great place to do it."



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Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.