

Pioneering Minds

Eden Housing celebrates 40th anniversary and shows no signs of slowing down

BY DANA ENFINGER

Eden Housing has never forgotten its roots. “We started Eden as a result of what happened with Proposition 14,” said Bill Vandenburg, a board member at the Hayward, Calif.-based nonprofit housing developer. “We were fighting then for fair and affordable housing, and today we’re still fighting.”

Vandenburg was one of the six mavericks who started Eden Housing in 1968.

Almost 96 percent of California voters approved Proposition 14 in 1964, which was placed on the ballot by real estate and property management interests to prevent the state or any locality within it from adopting any fair housing legislation. The measure was considered retaliation for the Rumford Act, which the California Legislature passed in the summer of 1963 to prohibit racial discrimination by Realtors and owners of public housing. In May 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court declared Proposition 14 unconstitutional. A year later, a half-dozen activists in Alameda County, Calif., decided that more needed to be done to help people secure more affordable housing. The group’s first project was rehabilitating six homes in Oakland for first-time homebuyers.

Forty years later, Eden has built more than 5,000 units of affordable housing. The project that puts Eden over that milestone is the soon-to-be-renamed Hayward Senior Office Complex, a 60-unit apartment community for seniors whose incomes max out at 50 percent of the area median income. More than 300 seniors have applied to live at the complex, which is located right across the street from Hayward’s Bay Area Rapid Transit station. The project will wrap up con-

struction in August, with some units finished earlier. Move-ins will start in June, and Eden Housing will be setting up shop in office space at the \$20 million complex in July.

“Our current office site is not so glamorous,” said Eden’s Executive Director Linda Mandolini. “We had a joke that the only way



Eden Housing board members (from left) Jesus Armas and Bill Vandenburg, Executive Director Linda Mandolini, and board member Sheila Burks check out construction at its 60-unit affordable complex for seniors in Hayward, Calif. (Photo by Robert Bengtson)

we were ever going to get a new office is if somebody gave us free land.”

It was a self-fulfilling prophecy: Turns out they received that free land. It actually cost Eden one whole dollar.

The nonprofit partnered with homebuilder Citation Homes, which sold them the land to meet its inclusionary zoning requirement to build affordable units for those with low and very low incomes. The land had been the site of a potato processing plant, and city officials wanted that land to be the site of a mixed-use property, said Mandolini.

“I tried to buy that site for three years before we partnered with Citation,” said

Mandolini. “In one week, we had that site all tied up for development. Citation’s ability to move so fast, and the flexibility of this inclusionary ordinance—how it was written—really made this easy. All of the stars aligned perfectly for this one.”

Union Bank of California, Wells Fargo Bank, and the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco provided additional funding.

Eden is working on another affordable multifamily development in Hayward with the DeSilva Group that also makes use of inclusionary zoning. With these two sites alone, the

city of Hayward has met 78 percent of its housing element requirement (California mandates that each city in the state set goals for affordable housing under its “housing element” law). The city used none of its own housing subsidies toward the two projects.

Mandolini said Eden’s main goal is preserving the affordable housing it already owns and partnering with homebuilders to build more affordable housing.

“We figure we’ve helped to house 58,000 people. That’s more people than live in the city of Palo Alto,” said Mandolini. “It’s amazing that what started out as an experiment, really, has become part of a solution.” ■

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