



Hayward seniors yearn for affordable housing

Sixty low-income apartments opening soon and in high demand

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HAYWARD — After her husband died and she lost part of a leg to diabetes, Comalene Saunders, 70, decided the time had finally come to sell her longtime Sacramento house and move in with a son in Hayward.

She saw the move as temporary. Eventually, she would find a one-bedroom apartment of her own.

"My kids don't want me to move, but I want to try to be independent for as long as I can," said Saunders, a retired community college career adviser.

But comfortable independence comes at a cost that many local seniors can't afford. On Tuesday, Saunders and more than 100 other senior citizens crowded the office of the Salvation Army Hayward Corps to compete for 60 new apartments that will open up for low-income seniors in downtown Hayward this spring.

"It's hard to find housing — senior housing, in particular," said Saunders, who added that most of the inexpensive homes available are not in the best neighborhoods. The sudden and unexpectedly big turnout Tuesday afternoon temporarily caused what Saunders described as an "unruly mob," all of its members rushing at the chance for a home that promised affordable independence.

"We have way, way more people than we were expecting," said Jan Peters, director of property management for Hayward nonprofit developer Eden Housing Inc., as the rush of applicants caused a traffic jam in the Salvation Army parking lot. "They're just desperate for housing."

When completed this May, Eden Housing's 60-unit apartment complex at the corner of C and Grand streets, near the downtown BART station, will be the first new Hayward development since the 1980s to be designed specifically for low-income seniors.

The building, now about 75 percent finished, is the result of a partnership between Eden Housing and Santa Clara-based developer Citation Homes, which is building hundreds of new market-rate homes in the city's old cannery district down the street.

Citation's partnership with Eden allows Citation to comply with Hayward's "inclusionary housing" law, which requires that 15 percent of a development be made affordable to low- or moderate-income households.

Hardev Singh, 75, came to the meeting hoping for a one-bedroom home and some independence. Singh, who lives in Union City and still works at a Hayward gas station, was accompanied by Kashmir Shahi and Jagmeet Kaur of Community Ambassador Program for Seniors, a Fremont area group that pairs aging members of the Sikh and a variety of other cultural communities with needed services.

Kaur said many seniors she works with are living with younger family members or sharing apartments with friends.

"They want their independence. We're trying to help them get their dignity back," she said.

Peters said those eligible for the housing must be 55 or older. Monthly rents at the apartments range from \$471 to \$785. For one-person households, the maximum income of someone who will be accepted into an apartment ranges from \$17,610 and \$29,350, depending on the unit.

For some who arrived at the application meeting Tuesday, the rents were still too high for what they considered affordable. For others, the rates and location seemed suitable, but they now had to compete in a lottery in a place where demand far exceeds available housing.

Eden Housing, which is also building the 78-unit Saklan Family Housing complex for low-income families in west Hayward, said it is already fielding more than 600 requests for the two Hayward projects. For more information on each, call Eden Housing at 510-582-1460

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