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Senior housing, office, green building OK'd

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Novato's planning commission met last week at the Novato Unified School District Board Room, approving a 61-unit apartment complex at Diablo Avenue between Novato Boulevard and Center Road, and voting to send the city's prospective commercial "green" building ordinance forward to be considered for approval by the city council Feb. 23. The planning commission also voted to approve a 9,300-square-foot office proposed where an empty fire station stands at 999 South Novato Blvd.

The Diablo project by nonprofit housing developer Eden Housing Inc. will accommodate low- and very low-income senior tenants. According to Linda Mandolini of Eden Housing, Inc., it will go before city council for consideration for approval March 10. The Diablo Avenue project was first presented to the city council in February of last year, and Eden Housing Inc., successfully lobbied the city for a \$350,000 predevelopment loan and \$1.15 million site acquisition loan in May of 2008, the latter of which will be granted if the project is approved by the city council. The loans will be paid partly out of the city's in-lieu fees collected from developers. The city supported the project because it is looking for ways to increase affordable housing in Novato to meet state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation numbers.

The city's commercial green building ordinance, which council will consider approving Monday, will require the commercial developers incorporate "green" features into their buildings. The city currently has a residential green building ordinance, but no green ordinance for commercial buildings. The proposed ordinance partially mirrors voluntary standards approved July of 2008 by the California Building Standards Commission, most of which will be made mandatory July of 2010, according to executive director for the state commission Dave Walls. The city of Novato hopes to get a head start on implementing those practices with its ordinance, according to planning manager for Novato Dave Wallace.

"Basically what (the commercial green building ordinance) does is adopt a green 'point system' similar to what we've used for single- and multiple-family residential projects," Wallace said. "There's a whole catalog of green building measures with points applied to it. This ordinance would say, 'You need to get so many points to get a building permit, which gives the developer a lot of choices. (However) some (green features) are mandatory, they're grouped into categories, and you have to get so many points from each.'"

Ron Averiette, chief building official for Novato, wrote the ordinance. He said some of the ways builders could get green points involved installing energy-efficiency devices, such as preprogrammed devices that budget energy usage more efficiently. Also, low-use water devices, and the design of buildings themselves could count toward a projects' "green" points.

"(Developers could use) efficient framing systems ...#045; they can get points for that," said Averiette. "They could get points for using certain renewable materials. For example, bamboo is a rapidly renewable source of material, and (also, if they use) post or pre-consumer recycled content, like concrete.