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Work set to begin on 'workforce' housing in San Clemente

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Around August 2015, San Clemente expects to open a 19-unit apartment complex offering affordable rent to people who work at downtown businesses.

Construction is set to begin this month at 107 Avenida Serra, within walking distance of downtown's Avenida Del Mar.

The city and a nonprofit developer, National Community Renaissance of Rancho Cucamonga, broke ground Monday to build the \$7.5 million project known as Avenida Serra Workforce Housing.

"So 19 units ... it sounds small," said Lucy Dunn, president and chief executive of the Orange County Business Council. "But the powerful statement of this city approving 19 units cannot be overstated."

Some fast facts, presented Monday:

The apartments: Are to be one-bedroom units suitable for up to three people. Two-thirds of the units are designed to house one or two people.

Expected rents: An average of \$800 per month, officials said. The lowest is \$465, the highest \$954, depending on income.

Goal: Provide affordable housing for people who work and live in San Clemente.

How to inquire: Call Denise Obrero, the city's housing programs planner, at 949-361-6188.

Interest list: The developers expect about 1,000 people to submit their names for apartments.

Top priority: If you work in San Clemente. Second priority is if you live in San Clemente.

Other criteria: Qualifying income, credit record, other background information. It's a lengthy leasing process, said John Seymour, a vice president with the development firm.

History: In 1998, local nonprofit Laura's House proposed transitional housing and offices on the site to help abused women and their children ease back to normal life. The project lost its funding in 2001. The city began reprogramming Redevelopment Agency housing funds for workforce housing.

Amenities: The complex is designed to include a parking garage, a community room, private patios and balconies, an outdoor courtyard, laundry facilities and smoke-free housing.

Local officials said the apartments will offer hope to people who grew up in San Clemente and can't afford to live in their hometown, or to people who work in town and have to commute there because rents on the coast are too high for them.

Seymour said the apartments stand to save the occupants a cumulative \$228,000 per year compared with typical San Clemente rents, freeing up more disposable income to be spent locally.

Obrero said she gets calls daily from people wanting one of the apartments. "They are a lot of young families," she said. "Also a lot of workers along Avenida Del Mar and the downtown core."

Seymour said he expects ongoing demand to be strong. "We own about 8,500 units," he said, "and we have a waiting list right now of 5,000 to 6,000 people ... on the ones that are already 100 percent leased."

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