

# Affordable-housing plan wins council's approval

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Fifty new, relatively affordable houses and apartments will be built on Atkinson Lane where KOMY's broadcast tower used to stand, the Watsonville City Council decided last night.

The plans stray from the city's development standards in some minor ways, but several council members said they could live with that to get some much-needed affordable housing.

The council unanimously approved the plan for 18 single-family homes and 32 apartments on the 4.58-acre site.

The proposal for the Arista Lane Family Housing project was made by the Housing Authority of Santa Cruz County, an independent public agency that administers housing programs for the state.

The Housing Authority was joined in the proposal by the Habitat for Humanity organization, which will coordinate the building of six of the single-family homes.

Housing Authority Director Mary James said the project will be paid for by the Greater Santa Cruz Community Foundation, the American Red Cross, the Farm Bureau, and the city of Watsonville, as well as the state, and federal Housing and Urban Development funds.

James said the Housing Authority hopes to be able to sell the homes for an average of \$100,000, ideally with special programs to

help people buy them. Renters will be charged 30 percent of their income for the apartments.

The Habitat for Humanity units will, no doubt, be less expensive, she said. Under that program, future residents help build their own homes, and eventually pay the money back into a revolving fund.

For all the units, James said, priority will be given to victims of the October 1989 earthquake who also meet other requirements.

For the homes, priority will be given to Watsonville residents, with even higher priority to Watsonville residents who also work within the city limits, she said. In

response to questions from Councilman Tony Campos, however, James said that in her experience, local residents do usually benefit from such programs whether priority is given or not, in part because of where outreach is targeted.

The site was already zoned for high-density housing. The council approved a special overlay zone for the property so the developers can modify some of the requirements for setbacks, lot sizes, covered garages and guest parking.

Although there had been some concern from residents of nearby

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Gardner Avenue about the parking, Planning Director Maureen Owens said the shortfall of seven guest-parking spaces could be absorbed within the project by the 19 available on-street parking places.

A normal project of this size would require two-car covered garages for the single-family homes, but the Arista Lane project will have one-car garages and two apron spaces.

The apartments are required to have one carport space and one open space per unit, which this project does provide; but the apartment complex's guest spaces will total 81 instead of the 88 as would normally be required.

Because of the way the units will be clustered, Owens said, the designers have actually created more open space and less pavement. A 12,000-square-foot park will sit in the center of the project.

At an earlier meeting on the project, the public had expressed some concern with the possible increase in traffic from Atkinson Lane onto Gardner Avenue. Residents said people from the project would detour so they can make a left turn on Freedom Boulevard, as a left turn is prohibited from Atkinson.

Owens said a traffic engineer had studied the area and found that the increased traffic from the project would not be significant.

Larry Tsuyuki, the owner of the nearby River Nursery, said the project would contribute to a long-standing storm-drain problem that floods the area and his nursery every few years. Public works officials said the storm-drain problem that causes the flooding wasn't directly related to the project, which will use a separate drain.

Another speaker, Luisa Naranja, said through a translator that worries about traffic and a few more parking places shouldn't be a priority when so many people lost

their homes in the earthquake.

"Those kinds of concerns make people like us a little mad, a little upset," she said. "There are so many people without houses, and these houses may not be luxurious, but there are people like us with low incomes that just want a home."