

# Watsonville OKs low-income housing

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WATSONVILLE — Despite concerns about its location and the lack of guarantees that Watsonville residents will get first crack at it, the Watsonville City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved a 42-unit low-income rental housing project downtown.

The development, known as La Posada, will be built by the Salinas-based Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association Inc., a non-profit, low-income housing development corporation. Work is expected to begin later this year, with completion targeted for mid-1992.

It will be on three acres along the 100 block of Main Street between Main and Rodriguez streets, bordering Front Street and Riverside Drive.

Council members expressed concerns about the downtown location, as well as the less-than-required number of parking spaces that will be built with the 42 units. The site borders River-

side Drive, a state highway and truck route, and is close to neighborhood bars in the lower Main Street area.

Also, CHISPA project manager Hector Burgos told council members that the organization is restricted by law from giving existing Watsonville residents preference for the units.

The city of Santa Cruz recently had problems when it attempted to give its residents preference in an affordable-housing project.

But despite the problems, Watsonville council members said the benefits of the project outweighed everything else.

Watsonville is in need of affordable housing. A city task force has estimated that approximately 2,500 new housing units will be needed in the next five years.

Vice Mayor Oscar Rios, conceding there the problems with the project's location, noted, "We're caught in a big bind. We want affordable housing, but have limited areas in which they can go."

Mayor Todd McFarren spoke to concerns

about lack of parking cited by Councilwoman Betty Murphy. "I don't see where it's a big deal, frankly," he said.

The project will provide 90 off-street parking spaces, which is 33 spaces short of Watsonville's ordinance. But Burgos maintained the 90 spaces would be sufficient, citing CHISPA's 300 other units in the tri-county area (Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties).

"We've studied our other projects and found 1.85 spaces per unit to be sufficient," Burgos said. "La Posada has 2.14 spaces per unit. Actually, we have 12 spaces more than what we feel is needed."

Burgos estimated they will receive between 200 and 300 applications for the 42 rental units. While CHISPA cannot, by law, restrict future tenants to Watsonville residents, he told the council that his organization can limit advertising of the project to Santa Cruz County.

"We have to make sure we don't discriminate against individuals just because they might not live in Watsonville," he said.