

Tannery Arts Center moves forward

Soil cleanup nears completion, housing project heads to next phase

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It is out with the old and in with the new at the Tannery Arts Center in Santa Cruz as workers complete a soil cleanup project at the former tannery, which is moving toward its new life as an affordable housing and arts complex.

The \$43 million project will eventually include 100 affordable housing units for artists, 30,000 square feet of art workspace and a theater and creative learning center.

Over the last eight months, a massive effort to clean the soil at the former tannery, which operat-

ed from 1856 until 2001, has also unearthed layers of concrete building pads. Many of those concrete pads have been ground up and can now be used as base rock for the next building phase of the project, said Tannery Arts Center Executive Director George Newell.

With the cleanup done, the project awaits the final go-ahead on the health of the soil from the state, which is expected by the spring, Newell said.

While the wait for final clearance continues, a series of meetings have begun for locals interested in moving to the new housing complex. The 100 units are de-

signed as live/workspace for artists who meet income guidelines of between 30 percent and 60 percent of the county median income.

With meetings planned in Watsonville, Santa Cruz, Ben Lomond and Live Oak from Feb. 15-19, interested artists across the county can find out how to qualify for the units and how to complete the paperwork they can expect as the project gears up.

If residents meet income guidelines, a committee of local artists will then review and interview the applicants.

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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Workers from Inner City Demolition complete the last stages of a soil cleanup project Tuesday at the site of the new Tannery Arts Center on River Street in Santa Cruz.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

The Tannery Arts Center is being built on the site of the old Salz Tannery.

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Artspace, the nonprofit real estate arts developer on the project, expects to break ground in June or July, according to Artspace regional director Cathryn Vandenbrink.

If all goes as planned, construction should continue for the next 18 months on the studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom units, she said. Prices range from \$388 for a studio to \$969 for a three-bedroom.

Vandenbrink added that the idea is to create an inclusive place for a broad range of artists.

"My biggest interest is really in letting families know," she said. "There also may be people who dance in an ethnic dance group who may not think of themselves as artists. It's important for people to understand that this is very broad."

In addition to the new housing complex, five historic buildings on the site, which range from the early 1880s to the 1950s, will have new life as artist workspaces and a creative learning center with office space, rehearsal halls and classrooms. The Santa Cruz Ballet has agreed to move a ballet school to the site and Community Access Television will set up studios in the complex.

Newell and volunteers have met with local artists and cooperatives to discuss plans for the workspaces at the former tannery Beam House. Newell envisions the possibility of a potter living in an affordable unit trading time with art-

ists leasing workspace or a cooperative of book artists sharing one unit.

With additional grant funding, a master plan for the creative learning center may be completed by the summer. The project is expected to cost \$12 million and open in 2010, Newell said.

"We're really trying to build an

arts community right there at the site of the former tannery," Newell said.

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For more information, visit www.tanneryartscenter.org. A housing outreach meeting is planned for Feb. 17, from 2-4 p.m. at the Cabrillo College Watsonville Center, 318 Union St.