

TEMECULA: County finds financing for low-income housing project

Summerhouse originally was to be seniors' housing

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TEMECULA — A partially built apartment complex will be completed using federal stimulus funds and city redevelopment money, and, in a partnership with an Orange County nonprofit organization, will be opened as housing for poor and homeless people.

The Summerhouse apartments on the northwest corner of Margarita and Dartola roads, across Temecula Parkway from Home Depot, was conceived as a seniors complex, but late last year the developer fell into foreclosure. Work on the project had stopped several months earlier.

Summerhouse includes 18 one-bedroom units, 52 two-bedroom units and 40 three-bedroom units and a manager's unit. An eight-unit building is complete; one six-unit building and two recreational buildings are 75 percent complete.

After the construction halted, however, the property fell into disrepair.

"It looked bad," said Temecula City Councilman Ron Roberts of the site. "I went to the council and said 'What can we do?'"

What the council did was enlist the county's Economic Development Agency and the Orange County Rescue Mission, which operates an innovative training and transitional housing complex for homeless people called Village of Hope at the old Marine Corps air base in Tustin.

The Rescue Mission will own and operate 20 of the apartment units at Summerhouse. People who come to live there also will get job training designed to help make them self-supporting when they "graduate" from what will be called the Temecula-Murrieta Rescue Mission, which will rise from the center of the Summerhouse complex. The apartments for low-income tenants will surround it.

At Village of Hope, the adults among the 192 people who now live there are enrolled in one- to two-year programs to learn trades that will allow them to be self-sufficient and move into housing in the community. Some of the training is offered at nearby community colleges, some at the village.

"We've been given the gift of success at the Rescue Mission and we want to share it," said Jim Palmer, president. He began working with a Temecula church earlier this year, providing meals for the hungry and homeless in the area.

City officials say the ranks of the homeless have increased sharply as the county's jobless rate has swelled to among the highest in the nation. On Friday, an Employment Development Department report stated that the unemployment rate in the Riverside-San Bernardino County area hit 13.7 percent.

"The need is tremendous," said Patrick Richardson, the city's planning and redevelopment director.

The new developer of the project will be Bridge Housing Corp. of San Francisco, a specialist in projects for low-income people. If all negotiations with the city are complete in coming months, construction work is expected to begin by the end of the year. Some of the units destined to become part of the mission already are complete, and Palmer says he hopes people can begin to move into those apartments as early as October.

Earlier this week, county supervisors approved a recommendation to designate \$2.5 million in federal stimulus money to the project. The city expects to chip in some redevelopment money; Bridge would finance the rest of the project.

Bridge has built low-income housing projects around the state, including projects in Carlsbad and San Diego.

"(Summerhouse) is a great project and will go a very long way to resolve housing needs in Temecula," said Tom Freeman, a spokesman for the county's Economic Development Agency.

The city also is enthusiastic about the county-city-charity partnership. "I like this vision," said Councilman Chuck Washington.

The project is expected to come before the City Council for consideration sometime next month.

Despite its new mission, Summerhouse nonetheless is likely to retain its name. The sign out front already is complete.

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