

Cohousing community model targeted toward seniors to break ground in Oakland

By Brittny Mejia Oakland Tribune Contra Costa Times

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OAKLAND -- A cooperative lifestyle community targeted toward seniors, a first in the Bay Area, will break ground this fall.

The project, to be known as Phoenix Commons, is being developed by Alameda Elder Communities, which has been providing assisted living services to seniors for more than 40 years in the city of Alameda.

Phoenix Commons, to be located in the Jingtletown neighborhood of Oakland, is inspired by a cohousing model, that brings older adults into a community so they are not isolated, said Victoria Stone, director of community development for AEC.

Cohousing is s a community model where residents can share resources, leading to a more sustainable lifestyle, Stone said. It also creates more social interaction as people get older.

"This creates a social environment where residents have a close-knit group of peers, and that's a huge benefit to the quality of life," Stone said.

Although cohousing projects exist in Oakland, this is the first and only senior cohousing community in the Bay Area, according to Stone.

When Robby Kiley, 70, moved to California about six years ago after the death of her husband, she began looking at senior housing available in the Bay Area. She found out about AEC and cooperative lifestyle communities like Phoenix Commons at a workshop on aging about a year ago.

Kiley said she got interested in Phoenix Commons because of the community atmosphere, which allows residents to maintain a community of people who can provide social contacts and other support.

"My next move I expect to be my last move, and I'm looking for a place that I will be until my death and such a place that my life can be managed without calling on my children and the like to step in and assist and manage," she said.

Phoenix Commons' residents will volunteer five to eight hours a week toward that community life, which can include cooking or planning social events.

"For me it's great because it's another model of an intentional community in the Bay Area," said Neil Planchon, a founding resident of Swan's Market Cohousing in Oakland. "I love the emphasis on seniors, and I love the fact that it's local."

Swan's Market Cohousing has been a presence in the city since 2000 and includes a diverse group of residents. Planchon said cohousing is not only ecologically sound but also results in a tight-knit community.

"There's a lot of congeniality amongst ourselves as families, by doing stuff together," said Planchon. "The

quality of life is just very high."

The \$21 million Phoenix Commons project will cost residents about \$450 a month in homeowner association fees. There will be 41 units available and about 60 people are expected to reside in the community once it opens in 2015.

Although the core community has not yet solidified, the envelope of the building is designed and waiting for residents who will come in early and have the opportunity to design the community spaces within.

"We want people to join now and build their relationships and community vision together," Stone said.

"You really want to come in early and get to know your neighbors and create the vision for the community you want."