

HOUSING

Gasser Foundation to create affordable housing

Rundown apartments to be upgraded for families and former homeless; escrow closes in July



23 HOURS AGO • [CHANTAL M. LOVELL](#)

The Gasser Foundation is about to embark on a \$3.65 million housing project, one that will turn a dilapidated, market-rate apartment complex into affordable units and transitional housing.

The Napa-based foundation expects escrow to close next month on the Riverside Apartments, at Riverside Drive and Cross Street, facing the Napa River.

Once the property is acquired, Gasser, assisted by loans from the city and county, will begin a massive renovation that will result in 15 up-to-code affordable apartments along with eight rooms for homeless families, said foundation president Joe Peatman.

“The (number of homeless students in Napa County) and the waiting list at the Samaritan Family shelter have alarmed us for some time,” Peatman said Thursday. “The county has a policy that no child will be homeless in Napa County overnight. ... We have come up with this project in order to solve that.”

In a memo, the foundation described the lack of emergency housing for homeless families as “the most serious need facing Napa County.” The need for permanent affordable family housing is “just as serious.”

The Samaritan Family Center on Old Sonoma Road is the only shelter for homeless families in Napa County. It has seven rooms with 28 beds and five cribs. It has a waiting list of about 10 families.

“Right now, the Samaritan Family Center is bursting at the seams and has a waiting list,” city of Napa Housing Manager Lark Ferrell said.

Riverside Apartments is made up of two apartment buildings and a Victorian house. Gasser plans to convert the Victorian into a transitional housing project for homeless families, doubling the number of rooms in Napa County available for homeless families, Peatman said.

“Families from the Samaritan Family Center would be able to go into the Victorian, stay there and then, presumably, as apartments become empty and the families are self-sufficient, they would be able to move into those apartments,” Ferrell said.

Riverside’s apartment units, which are currently rented at market rates, will be fully renovated

and rented at prices affordable to families that earn 60 percent or less than the area's median income.

According to Gasser, rents at the site range from \$1,400 to \$1,650 per month, but could be between \$1,100 and \$1,325 per month with the reduced rate.

When complete, the project would have eight bedrooms for transitional housing, 14 two-bedroom affordable apartments and one four-bedroom affordable apartment, according to the foundation.

Community Action Napa Valley, which will run the transitional housing, will begin interviewing the families currently living at Riverside next week to determine if they qualify for affordable housing, Peatman said. Peatman said he expects all tenants to have incomes low enough to qualify for reduced rent.

It's unclear how long the renovation will take, but Peatman said the foundation's goal is to keep all the families at the complex during the process. One apartment is currently vacant, so the plan is to move families into that unit temporarily as their apartments are being renovated.

If a family is displaced during the work, which may happen with those staying in the Victorian, Peatman said the foundation would house them elsewhere.

The work required on the Victorian is "major," according to Peatman. It will receive a new foundation, which will require the building to be lifted, and it will be made accessible for persons with disabilities.

Rick Tooker, Napa community development director, said he does not expect Gasser to have difficulty complying with historical building standards.

"For all intents and purposes, there may not be other exterior changes to that building, so we don't expect there to be significant concern relative to construction," he told the City Council on Tuesday.

Peatman said that there's plenty of work to be done on the apartments and that the full extent of the project is unknown.

"In the units, we're not sure what we're going to find when we get in there," he said. "There may be electrical problems, mold, asbestos."

Apartments will get new kitchens with appliances, paint, carpet and more. Gas heaters will be replaced.

Gasser has plans to add storage to the property so tricycles and other items are not strewn about the complex as is currently the case. Additionally, landscaping, barbecues and a tot lot will be installed.

In a narrow vote Tuesday, the Napa City Council moved to help the Gasser Foundation by setting aside \$550,000 from the city's Housing Trust Fund that could be loaned to Gasser for the project, assuming conditions are met.

Mayor Jill Techel and Councilwoman Juliana Inman voted to help the project, while Councilman Scott Sedgley voted in opposition.

Councilman Peter Mott was not present for discussion and vote, and Councilman Alfredo Pedroza recused himself because he serves on the board of Community Action Napa Valley.

The city's money, which comes from a housing fee paid by developers, would need to be repaid over 55 years.

Sedgley said he thinks the project is a worthy one but would like it to be funded through a Community Development Block Grant, a federal source that would require Gasser to pay prevailing wages to the construction workers it hires for the renovation.

"It sounds like a great project and a needed project and great for the whole Abajo region of Napa," Sedgley said. "It's just that rehabilitation money seemed to be a more appropriate source."

Paying prevailing wages would add "significant cost" to the \$3.65 million project, Ferrell said. Also, officials said the city does not have enough block grant money for the project.

Peatman said no decision has been made on whether the foundation will pay prevailing wages on the Victorian job, which will require a more specialized workforce than is needed to renovate the apartments. For the apartment work, Gasser intends to employ residents of Serenity Homes, a Gasser project that houses recovering addicts at three homes in Napa.

"A lot of these guys are in construction, they pay their rent by doing work," Peatman said. "We intend to have Serenity do work on the units so we can put them back to work and thereby assist them in overcoming their addictions."

To receive the loan from the city, Gasser will be required to make the project accessible for people with disabilities, comply with historic building requirements and complete the project, among other things.

On Tuesday, the County Board of Supervisors also set aside a \$550,000 loan for the project.

Inman praised Gasser for creating affordable housing, while Techel applauded the public-private partnership being established.

"I'm grateful we have an organization like Gasser in our community who comes forward to provide services we need," Techel said. "Government can't do it on their own, and a nonprofit can use some help from the government from time to time. I think it's an important need that will be addressed."