

from Sacramento Business Journal by Sanford Nax, Staff Writer

Township 9 construction begins next month

First structure on the site will be an affordable-housing apartment complex

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Rendering courtesy of Vrillakas Architects

Construction will begin next month on the first apartment complex in Township 9, which one developer called a signature project of the River District. After years of preparation, developers of Township 9 north of downtown Sacramento expect to break ground next month on their first building: a 180-unit, five-story affordable-housing apartment complex built with tax-exempt financing.

This follows \$30 million worth of infrastructure at the 65-acre site, financed by state infill funds. The work connected roads, sewers and other crucial components on the site near Richards Boulevard and 7th Street. Also in place is the footprint of the 7th Street Promenade, a linear park that ends at the American River — and at the site of a proposed amphitheater.

The apartment complex is the first of what could be 2,500 housing units and 150,000 square feet of commercial uses on the former cannery property.

Township 9, which is the historic designation for the area, is a unique spot. From the river levee, one can scan the skyline of the capital to the south, and future residents will be only steps from the river bike trail. A new light-rail station is in place, and Old Sacramento and Interstate 5 are close.

“I didn’t know what we had,” co-developer Steve Goodwin said, recalling when he first saw the site 13 years ago. But “it was a beautiful piece of property.”

And he’s hoping the community ends up as special as the site. The apartments, being developed by The John Stewart Co. and Urban Core LLC doing business as T9 Affordable Housing Partners, will sit on 1.8 acres on North 7th Street.

The design was influenced by the industrial warehouse and canneries that once littered the area and is one of the first five-story wood-framed buildings in Sacramento built under a new code that allows developers to add one story to a building if it has an additional layer of drywall and fire-treated studs, said Bob Kuchman of Kuchman Architects, the architect of record.

But its most innovative feature will be the parking structure. The site is so small that architects wrapped the apartments around a three-story parking structure. It's called a Texas Donut, although the plan is used in other states. Kuchman joked that he's referring to the Township 9 parking garage design as a "California Cinnamon Roll."

One advantage to that design is that all four sides of the \$25 million apartment house are exposed to the street, creating a higher profile for the planned 12,000 square feet of ground-floor shop space. The top of the garage will be an urban garden, and residents on the upper floors of the apartment complex will be able to look down at this "urban plaza," Kuchman said.

Goodwin said the recession slowed down developer interest in the site but not the overall vision. As the economy and real estate market picks up, so are the inquiries. Goodwin expects to develop some of the property himself, form joint ventures on some of it, and sell some of it.

"We are working on other others, but they are in their infancy," he said. "We are getting renewed interest. People are attracted to infill."

Ron Vrillakas, the design architect on the Township 9 apartment complex and a specialist in infill design, agrees. Development proposals in his office that were dormant during the recession are starting to spring back to life.

"Getting the first one out of the ground there will help too," he said. "Developers will be impressed."

He compares Township 9 to Portland's Pearl District, which was a collection of aging warehouses until Powell's Books opened there in 1971, and the area started to turn, according to the district's website. Artists started moving in, and today it's a thriving center of business and residences.

"This is a signature project," Goodwin says of Township 9. "It was the opportunity of a lifetime and is a labor of love."

Goodwin is in partnership with Ron Mellon, Scott Syphax and Nehemiah Corp.

Township 9 is considered a catalyst project in The River District, which consists of 850 acres bounded by the Sacramento River on the west, Sutter's Landing Park on the east, American River on the north and the Railyard on the south.

"Smart growth, infill, transit oriented-development. It has it all," said Patty Kleinknecht, executive director of The River District.

Sanford Nax covers real estate, planning, development, construction and economic issues for the Sacramento Business Journal.