

Marin City public housing revitalization set to take shape

Marin Independent Journal, By Richard Halstead | rhalstead@marinij.com |
PUBLISHED: 3/23/19 | UPDATED: 3/23/19 at 6:31 pm

New Jersey-based Michaels Development Co. is set to begin a draft revitalization plan to rehabilitate Golden Gate Village, Marin's largest public housing project. County supervisors on Tuesday authorized the Marin Housing Authority to enter into an agreement with the New Jersey-based developer, which will spend about nine months on the draft that will serve as the basis for environmental review. Under the agreement, Michaels Development and Marin Housing Authority will share the cost of the pre-development and scoping process equally, each contributing \$100,000. Revitalization of the 296-unit public housing development in Marin City will require both an environmental impact report and an environmental impact statement, which is the federal version of an EIR. John Mimms, a Michaels development officer, said his company would be consulting closely with Golden Gate Village residents. "Preservation and no displacement are two key concerns that we've already heard that we'll be looking to confirm and reinforce as we go through this process," said Mimms, who said hiring residents to help do the renovation work will be a big part of his company's "empowerment" plan. Built in 1960, Golden Gate Village consists of eight high-rise and 20 low-rise buildings on about 32 acres in Marin City.



Golden Gate Village public housing. (Robert Tong/Marin Independent Journal)

Due to decades of insufficient funding from the federal government, it has been estimated the complex requires \$16 million in immediate improvements to bring it up to minimum Department of Housing and Urban Development standards and another \$50 million in work for complete rehabilitation using energy-saving and green building approaches. Some Golden Gate Village residents have expressed concern that the revitalization will result in current tenants being displaced and have opposed the idea of building new market-rate units to help finance the project. They fear that fully-subsidized units will be replaced with market-rate units. The group, led by longtime Golden Gate Village resident Royce McLemore, wants the buildings preserved and rehabilitated. To this end, they scored a minor victory by obtaining national historic status for Golden Gate Village. The complex is the work of Frank Lloyd Wright disciple Aaron Green, nationally known Modernist architect John Carl Warnecke and Marin's own renowned landscape architect Lawrence Halprin. The historical designation will make it more difficult for any developer to secure approvals to substantially alter the complex.

At Tuesday's meeting, Barbara Bogard of Mill Valley questioned whether Michaels Development will really take the wishes of Golden Gate Village into account when developing the revitalization plan. She said she spoke with a Michaels representative when the company was introducing itself to the community several months ago. She said she asked if a decision had been made about including new market-rate units in the development plan. "I was told absolutely not," Bogard said, "that nothing was set in stone and that it would all depend on their conversations with the residents." Bogard pointed out that the Housing Authority's written agreement with Michaels states, "the authority determined that it is in the best interest of the existing community and the authority to redevelop the site with rehabilitated and new units in conjunction with a private developer partner." Bogard also asked the Michaels representative if he had read the residents' plan for revitalization, and he said no but would do so right away. Bogard said another Michaels representative told a member of the Marin City Community Development Corp. they didn't know there was a residents' plan.

A group made up of Golden Gate Village and Marin City residents have formed a new task force to put the Green New Deal into action at Golden Gate Village, Bogard said. "You will be hearing from us," Bogard said. Asked after the meeting if a decision has been made regarding new units, Marin Housing Authority Executive Director Lewis Jordan said, "That formal decision has not been made. There has been no formal decision on anything. We're in the process of exploring options. "We're starting from the premise that there will not be involuntary displacement," Jordan added. "It all goes back to not displacing people." In January 2018, the Board of Supervisors, acting as the Housing Authority's board, accepted a report from Tampa-based CVR Associates assessing possible revitalization scenarios and recommending an approach that would feature a mix of new market rate and subsidized units. In its report, CVR wrote, "The new construction would precede the renovations of the existing buildings, so that the new construction could house the relocated residents during the construction process." The report also noted, "While the Golden Gate Village Resident Council maintained throughout the process that it had a plan, it has not provided any written plan." Jordan said a group of residents submitted a brief document titled, "Golden Gate Village Resident Led Plan for Revitalization/Place Matters a Path to Equity in Development." He said he interpreted the remarks in the CVR report more as a commentary on the quality of the residents' document rather than a literal assertion that no such document exists. The residents' plan states, "There is no reason to doubt that Golden Gate Village can become a 'state-of-the-art local economy' demonstrating the ability to create new science in sustainable design, retrofit and rehab, preserving historic legacy in architecture, place and people."