

Senior housing on way/ Units latest in urban redevelopment plan

Gazette, The (Colorado Springs), Dec 30, 2003 by RICH LADEN

Construction has started south of downtown on a 72-unit apartment building for seniors, the latest addition to a 58-acre development project near the former Lowell Elementary School.

The \$8 million Wyndam Apartments are being developed by Wyndam- Colorado Springs Partners, a limited partnership headed by the Colorado Springs Housing Authority and the Farnam Group Resources Inc. of Omaha, Neb.

Scheduled to open in the fall of 2004, Wyndam Apartments joins the completed 21-unit Poet Lofts and the 15-unit Prestwick Townhomes as the first projects in the area around the school. The old school has been remodeled into offices.

For years, downtown housing has been a goal of business and civic leaders who say it promotes a healthy downtown.

"There's a dynamic, or a critical mass that's occurring," Larry Mazzotta, president of the Farnam Group and one of its owners, said of the development area.

Senior citizens whose incomes are 40 percent to 60 percent of the El Paso County median household income can rent a Wyndam apartment, Mazzotta said. Based on the current median income, one-bedroom units will rent from \$350 to \$550 a month, while two-bedroom units will go for \$425 to \$650.

The Colorado Springs City Council designated an area southeast of Rio Grande Street and Nevada Avenue as an urban renewal site in the 1980s. But redevelopment of the area - once populated by rundown homes that were razed - languished for years after a Kansas company abandoned the project more than a decade ago.

Colorado Springs developer Earl Robertson, selected by city officials to redevelop the area after the original developer walked away, said other hopeful signs are on the horizon.

The project is envisioned, at its completion, as a traditional neighborhood that mixes housing, small stores and some office space.

Robertson, who completed the Poet Lofts Building in 2002, has sold his first two residential units. The building has 14 residential lofts of 1,560 to 3,200 square feet and seven commercial storefronts.

The deals haven't closed yet, and Robertson declined to reveal prices. Initially, he planned to ask \$300,000 to \$700,000 for his residential units and later lowered prices because of a slow market.

Meanwhile, Prestwick Townhomes LLC has sold two of its 15 three-level town homes and expects to sell six more during the first two months of 2004, Prestwick developer Dan Bjugstad said.

One of Prestwick's units - 2,600 square feet, three bedrooms, four baths and a two car garage - sold for \$302,685, Bjugstad said. The other unit - larger, and with an elevator and separate apartment above the garage - sold for \$432,085.

"We're a little smaller market," he said. "Not everybody wants to be downtown or in a town home. However, for those people who want to be downtown, this is a good price."

Prestwick Townhomes plans to start another 14 units by April or May.

Also in the works, Atlanta based Beazer Homes wants to build 90 town homes of about 1,100 to 1,800 square feet, with prices ranging from the high \$100,000s to the low \$200,000s. Beazer hasn't completed the purchase of its property from Robertson, although Robertson expects Beazer to start construction Feb. 1.

Robertson, as the area's overall developer, plans to include a sculpture from the collection of the late Colorado Springs artist Starr Kempf into a park-like setting on Las Animas Street, within the 58 acres.