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KAUAI News

Affordable housing projects plod along

by Nathan Eagle - THE GARDEN ISLAND

Dozens of affordable housing units have come online over the past year and hundreds more will be ready for low income residents by 2010, officials said yesterday at the Historic County Building.

"We're making some strides, but there seems to be some stumbling blocks and frustrations along the way," Kauai County Councilwoman Shaylene Iseri-Carvalho said.

County Housing Agency Director Ken Rainforth and Development Coordinator Gary Mackler provided the council a status report of 10 projects assisted by the Affordable Housing Task Force, a group of department heads working to expedite the process.

The director said the task force has been successful, providing numerous units for a variety of community members in need. The projects range from facilities for the homeless to units for residents earning up to 140 percent of the median household income on Kaua'i, which is roughly \$66,000.

Three of the 10 projects identified on the task force's fast-track list have been completed.

One, a 56-unit development in Puhi for residents earning up to 140 percent of the average household income, sold 38 units to the target group, Mackler said. The remaining 18 units were sold to residents earning more than 140 percent median

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income after the restricted selling period ended.

Rainforth said the homes have restrictions to keep them affordable the next time they are sold.

The Kauai Economic Opportunity emergency shelter and transitional housing in Lihu'e was completed in November.

By December, the eight transitional housing units were leased and the emergency shelter has averaged 11 to 19 people nightly since doors opened.

"When the weather's bad, it's full," Mackler said.

The task force completed Kalepa Village phase three in March. The 40 rental units available there to residents earning less than 60 percent of the median household income were leased and occupied by April.

Phase four of the project, which involves building 40 multi-family apartments for community members in the 50 to 100 percent average income group, is slated for completion in February.

Other projects include Kauai Habitat for Humanity's two-phase 'Ele'ele I Luna development that will produce a combined 125 units for the 50 to 80 percent income group and the Department of Hawaiian Homelands 129 units scheduled to be available this summer in Kekaha and Anahola to residents who are half-Hawaiian.

The biggest project on the task force's prioritized list is D.R. Horton-Schuler Division's Kohea Loa development. Slated for completion in December 2009, the project will produce 176 lots for residents earning up to 140 percent of the median household income.

But the two-part project must first resolve water and wastewater infrastructure plans.

Councilman Ron Kouchi said some affordable housing projects have been ensnared by water supply issues. He proposed the council consider a resolution requesting the county Board of Water Supply give priority to affordable housing projects.

When the county tried to move a Kapa'a affordable housing project forward in 2006, he said, the board said water supply was at capacity there.

Kouchi said water had been allocated to two proposed resorts, even though it was unlikely that a unit would be ready there for three to four years.

"This has been a source of frustration," he said.

Aside from the task force's 10 identified projects, the agency updated the council on the potential to develop affordable housing units on state land.

Gov. Linda Lingle signed an act in 2005 that gave the county three years to develop affordable housing projects on state land. As the Dec. 9 deadline nears, the county is scrambling to file for an extension so it can take advantage of the state parcels.

The county Housing Agency is working through the state Department of Land and Natural Resources Kaua'i land agent, Tommy Oi, to submit the request for an extension with the Board of Land and Natural Resources.

The agency in April received a council OK to use part of the \$2 million bond fund for affordable housing allocated in the current county capital improvement programs budget for use in land acquisition to also perform project feasibility, infrastructure needs and environmental assessment.

Housing Agency Director Ken Rainforth said a feasibility study will show what state parcels could become affordable housing developments.

• Nathan Eagle, staff writer, can be reached at 245-3681 (ext. 224) or neagle@kauaipubco.com

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Affordable Housing Task Force projects

For-sale: 708

Rental: 170

Total: 878

Income group: 80 to 140 percent of median household income

*Figures represent inventory of 10 projects the task force identified that have been completed or are in various stages of development.

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