

New Green Affordable Senior Housing Community to Enhance Revitalization of Downtown Martinez

Nonprofit developer Resources for Community Development (RCD) and KTG Y Group, Inc., Architecture and Planning, are proposing an environmentally- and pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented community, which would provide 49 affordable one-bedroom apartments for qualifying active seniors 55 years of age and over.

July 23, 2009 (FPRC) -- MARTINEZ, CALIF. – Nonprofit developer Resources for Community Development (RCD) and KTG Y Group, Inc., Architecture and Planning, are proposing to contribute to the renaissance of Martinez's downtown area. Using the inspiration of the local architecture, the latest in green building technologies and design, and answering the strong demand for high quality affordable housing for seniors, RCD is in negotiations to purchase 1.03 acres at 310 Berrellesa Street in Martinez in order to build Berrellesa Palms. Designed by KTG Y, Berrellesa Palms is a proposed environmentally- and pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented community, which would provide 48 one-bedroom apartments (plus an on-site manager's unit) for active seniors 55 years of age and over, with rents at levels affordable to working as well as retired individuals and couples.

Berrellesa Palms' community amenities will include a large multi-purpose meeting/community room, library, computer center, exercise room, and resident support services such as social gatherings and events, educational workshops and classes. The design also includes a lushly landscaped patio, a courtyard garden and raised planting beds for residents. The development of Berrellesa Palms would provide area seniors with an opportunity to enjoy high quality new homes conveniently located within walking distance of downtown retail and commercial services and mass transit.

"RCD and their team have an excellent track record of providing architecturally superior buildings that bring much added value to the communities they are a part of," says Bob Glover, Executive Director, Eastern Division for Home Builders Association of Northern California and former City of Martinez Planning Commissioner. "I am delighted that RCD is willing to make such a huge financial investment in downtown and, at the same time, provide a much needed housing type for our aging population. There is a significant need for affordable senior housing in the City of Martinez and I look forward to this project providing a catalyst to get others to invest in our downtown."

Ed Keegan, a long-time Martinez resident of 22 years and an experienced commercial and multifamily construction manager and property owner, concurs. "RCD is known for their quality development and this proposed high quality project will motivate others to invest in the area as well," Keegan says.

"We are in the midst of the worst economic crisis in recent history and the housing industry is in a severe depression," Glover explains. "The fact that a developer would come forward during these difficult times, offer to invest millions of dollars in a project that will provide much needed housing and bring world class building to the downtown area, is just astonishing. There are communities throughout the Bay Area that would jump at this opportunity and I sincerely hope that Martinez realizes the opportunity they have before them."

Berrellesa Palms is estimated to represent an \$18.5 million public/private investment in the City of

Martinez's downtown neighborhood, \$13.7 million of which is private equity or conventional debt. In addition, a \$10.2 million conventional construction loan is anticipated.

"Oftentimes, when residents hear the words 'affordable housing,' they immediately envision substandard housing and an owner that doesn't care about the property or its residents or neighbors," says Jill Williams, AIA, principal at KTGy, based in Oakland, Calif. "This is certainly not the case with Berkeley-based RCD, one of the top affordable housing developers in the nation, according to Affordable Housing Finance magazine. RCD is known for their quality and dedication to creating and preserving affordable housing for those with the fewest options."

Earning numerous awards for the development of affordable residential communities, RCD has built over 1,600 units throughout the Bay Area during the last 25 years, providing quality affordable housing to over 2,500 individuals and families. By the end of 2009, RCD will have built 565 affordable units in Contra Costa County.

KTGY has also garnered national accolades for their green, affordable housing community designs as well as their market rate and luxury housing communities. "As a member of Build-It Green as well as the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), KTGy continues to stay at the forefront of this dynamic industry and has LEED accredited and sustainability/green building experts as well as senior housing design specialists," Williams states. "With an emphasis on designing a walkable, pedestrian-friendly senior environment, building green improves the financial feasibility of a development, financially empowers residents by reducing their utility bills, and promotes resident health through reduced pollution."

RCD's Associate Director of Housing Deni Adaniya says, "As with most of RCD's recent developments, Berrellesa Palms will be designed to achieve a GreenPoint Rating or LEED Certification. Environmental responsibility, a healthy indoor environment and sustainability are core values in the design of our properties."

Overall energy performance for Berrellesa Palms is expected to exceed Title 24 by over 15% and will include ENERGY STAR appliances in all units, energy-efficient, low-mercury lighting, double-paned and double glazed low E windows, low-flow restrictors on bathroom and kitchen faucets, recycled content carpet and ground concrete flooring, and low or no-VOC paints; formaldehyde-free cabinet boxes, counter top substrates, and building insulation; implementation of indoor construction air quality management plan, construction waste recycling plan that diverts 75% of construction waste from landfills, a recycling trash chute for residents; and drought tolerant landscaping, bioswale drainage and filtration, and water permeable pavement.

One of RCD's recently completed projects is Villa Vasconellos in Walnut Creek, a green 70-unit affordable housing community for seniors that opened in February 2008. "Located across the street from multi-million dollar homes, Villa Vasconellos' design blends in with the surrounding architecture and has added value to the neighborhood and community," Adaniya states. "From the beginning, neighbors in Walnut Creek supported the development and once it was finished, they were amazed at how happy they were with the results."

Walnut Creek's Mayor Gwen Regalia was quoted in the Contra Costa Times about the opening of Villa Vasconellos saying it was an improvement in the neighborhood. "It's a lovely facility," Regalia said. "I've always felt that communities should be judged by how well they educate their children and how well they treat their elderly."

Currently, the City of Martinez has three affordable housing developments in operation in Martinez but none offer income-adjusted housing specifically for seniors. "With the rising cost of living, many seniors on fixed incomes are vulnerable to becoming homeless. An affordable senior community like Berrellesa Palms can make all the difference in someone's life," says Adaniya.

Prospective residents undergo a rigorous application and screening process to qualify and maintain residency at RCD's communities. RCD conducts an extensive interview of all prospective household members, performs credit and background checks, third-party income verifications, and requires landlord references. "This is to insure that RCD's residents are good neighbors and tenants," Adaniya says. "The company's acceptance rate is 10-15%."

Rents at Berrellesa Palms are expected to range from approximately \$270 to \$770 per month (depending on household size and income). Most households will pay no more than 30% of their income toward rent and utilities leaving the majority of income available for other expenditures, investments and savings.

According to a study that was performed by Emeryville-based Bay Area Economics, the residents at Berrellesa Palms are estimated to generate approximately \$807,000 in annual non-housing-related expenditures, much of which will potentially be spent in downtown Martinez and elsewhere in the City. Adaniya says that the report arrived at the \$807,000 amount based upon the total of the various non-housing-related expenditures obtained from a consumer expenditure survey conducted during 2005-2006 and recent Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Despite the many economic benefits to the community, some local residents have voiced their concerns about the project. "We understand their concerns and want to assure them of the quality and value that this new, senior apartment community will bring to their neighborhood long-term," states Adaniya. Berrellesa Palms will remain an affordable senior development for at least 55 years and, due to the deed restriction on the land, it will remain as a residential community for seniors in perpetuity.

Currently, on the proposed development site there are two dilapidated single-family houses and a commercial operation, Alta Fence Company, occupying the premises. Alta Fence has an office trailer onsite and is storing chain link fencing materials and their trucks. The site, which is bordered by Berrellesa, Buckley, Richardson and Foster streets in downtown Martinez, was previously used for heavy equipment storage and had office space in trailers for several industrial tank cleaning operations.

"Using the historic character of Martinez's architecture as Berrellesa Palms' design inspiration, the proposed senior housing development will provide an iconic design that takes its cues from the neighborhood's many Victorian examples," says Williams. "Designed with a decidedly simple massing, special attention is given to Berrellesa Palms' details. Together with repeating bay windows and a detailed cornice treatment, the generous front porch lends an air of elegance to the simple composition. Particular attention is paid to Berrellesa Palms' entry, with a slight shift in architectural style that still hearkens to days gone by. The introduction of Queen Anne elements such as a wide front porch, steeply pitched roof and octagonal turret, signal the importance of this building and its grand entrance."

In consideration of its environment and the infill site, the design and layout of Berrellesa Palms

breaks down the site into four quadrants and transitions on the most sensitive edges. “Berrellesa Palms’ Buckley Street frontage terminates at Richardson Street with a two-story design and takes advantage of the dropping grade towards Berrellesa Street by tucking in a subterranean parking area. At the intersection of Berrellesa and Buckley, the garage is above grade. But as you walk up the hill, the parking garage appears to ‘sink’ into the ground so that by the time you are at the top of the hill at Richardson, the garage is completely subterranean and there is just a story and a half appearing above grade,” Williams explains.

“The Berrellesa Street edge, which provides the best connection to downtown and transit, addresses the Buckley corner with a double-cantilevered bay window and transitions to the main entry statement that is punctuated by a turret at Foster. By utilizing a strong cornice treatment found throughout the neighborhood, the design team was able to eliminate unnecessary attic space to avoid additional height,” states Williams.

Adaniya adds that the existing industrial uses along Foster Street, the third quadrant, called for a different type of transition, sensitivity for our new residents, but the ability to step the building to three stories, but well under the forty-foot height limitation. “The main fourth quadrant is open space and is positioned along Richardson, across from the only adjacent single-family homes, to create added distance between Berrellesa and the single-family homes, and to take advantage of sunlight,” Adaniya notes.

“Berrellesa Palms is also designed to maintain the public view corridor as much as possible by siting the project’s open space and surface parking on Richardson as well as relocating the existing palm trees,” says Adaniya. The public will continue to have views down Richardson Street, across private property and out to the water.

“Developments designed to cluster homes help preserve open space for recreation, views and natural habitats,” Williams says. “Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods provide residents with opportunities to exercise and get to know their neighbors. Additionally, urban infill developments like Berrellesa Palms allow people to live closer to where they work, shop and dine, which means less time spent driving and more time for family, community and personal activities.”

The proposed development site is located about a 1/4 mile from Main Street and Alhambra Avenue, the gateway to downtown Martinez, and 1/3 mile from the heart of the downtown. There are a wide range of restaurant options and a dinner theater as well as an assortment of retail opportunities such as antique shops, cafes, several banks (local and national), women’s and children’s clothing shops, a florist, gift shops and sundries. At the other end of Main Street are the County’s administrative and district attorney’s offices.

“The combination of affordable housing for seniors and in close proximity to the downtown commercial area and rail and bus service at the nearby Amtrak Intermodal Hub are significant factors that contribute to low car ownership rates amongst seniors,” Adaniya says. The Amtrak station, which serves the Bay Area and the U.S., is just three short blocks away and is served by all three Contra Costa County bus lines connecting Martinez with nearby employment and the commercial hubs of Walnut Creek, Concord, and Richmond as well as all nearby BART stations. Furthermore, most of the buses pass by within a block of Berrellesa Palms.

Berrellesa Palms’ parking ratio, which will be .67 spaces per dwelling unit, is almost double the City’s parking requirement for senior housing. “Even with Berrellesa Palms being designed as a

pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development with plenty of onsite parking, we still want to make sure that the project doesn't contribute to any parking shortage in the neighborhood so we are currently looking into the possibility of providing either a weekly van service or a car that residents can share," adds Adaniya.

"It is our goal to contribute to the renaissance of Martinez's downtown area and be the stepping stone to future market rate development," says Adaniya. "Revitalization and new starts are what we are about at RCD, both for our residents (as many move onto homeownership) and for the communities and neighborhoods we serve."

With approvals, construction could begin on Berrellesa Palms in fall 2010, with completion anticipated for winter 2011, adds Adaniya.

About Resources for Community Development

Resources for Community Development (RCD) is an award-winning non-profit affordable housing development corporation dedicated to creating and preserving affordable housing for people with the fewest options in Northern California. Founded by Berkeley community members in 1984, RCD currently has a portfolio of over 1,600 affordable housing units that it has developed or owns in the cities of Alameda, Albany, Antioch, Bay Point, Berkeley, Castro Valley, Concord, Emeryville, Fairfield, Hayward, Oakland, Pacheco and Walnut Creek, which serves over 2,500 individuals and families. RCD's mission is to create and preserve affordable housing for those with the fewest options, to build community and enrich lives. For more information, visit www.rcdev.org.

About KTG Y Group, Inc.

Established in 1991, KTG Y Group, Inc., Architecture and Planning, provides comprehensive planning and award-winning architectural design services for residential communities, retail, hospitality, mixed-use and related specialty developments. KTG Y delivers innovative solutions that reflect clear understanding of development, marketing and financial performance and takes particular pride in its highly motivated and principal led studios. Serving clients worldwide, KTG Y maintains offices in Irvine, Oakland and Santa Monica, and in Denver. See www.ktgy.com.

Contact Information

For more information contact Anne Monaghan of Monaghan Communications
(<http://www.KTGY.com>)
949-722-2933

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