

After over 15 years, affordable housing being built in North Richmond

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It may have taken over 15 years, but affordable housing is at last being built in North Richmond.

In a well-attended ground-breaking ceremony at 1540 Fred Jackson Way on Thursday, Supervisor John Gioia, community leaders and project officials praised the community partnerships that formed the Heritage House, a 42-unit multifamily affordable housing development that is being constructed on several parcels between Grove and Chesley avenues.

The development is expected to be a catalyst for revitalization in North Richmond, inviting commercial options to the area, possibly a grocery store or

dining options. It is slated to serve families receiving rental assistance from Section 8 vouchers and to include groundfloor space for commercial and retail.

The \$27 million project was realized through public, private and nonprofit partnerships, with financing sources that include Citibank, the Community Development Block Grant program, Successor Agency and Livable Community Fund. Identifying and assembling the varied funding sources was challenging, with project developer Community Housing Development Corporation facing numerous roadblocks along the way that took about a decade to overcome.

“Discussions on bringing development to North Richmond’s downtown area has been going on for 20 years,” Gioia said. “Everyone who has been involved in this project knows that it takes way too long to get affordable housing projects built. And if we want to solve the Bay Area’s housing crisis and improve communities like North Richmond, we are going have to figure a way out so projects don’t take this long.”

Even with the obstacles, “We made this happen, with the community behind this,” Gioia said.

CHDC Executive Director Donald Gilmore acknowledged “one hurdle after another and another and another.”

“CHDC just kept after it, kept banging their head against it, pounding on it. Finally about six months ago, we got everything in place,” Gilmore said.

With Heritage Point, community leaders hope to provide housing both for current North Richmond residents, and to add vibrancy to the neighborhood with newcomers.

Prior to the Heritage Point groundbreaking, the neighborhood benefited from a number of community improvement projects along Fred Jackson Way, where the street median was transformed into a public space, and where electrical

power was made available to the median for public events. A true downtown is forming, as well. Across the street from Heritage Point are the Contra Costa Health Services' North Richmond Center for Health, the CHDC, the Community Heritage Senior Apartments and the county's Family Service Center.

"There is really many reasons that I'm pleased to see this development take place here," said Dr. Henry Clark, a longtime community leader. "To be here and see this beautification taking place: to me, this is the new North Richmond."