

Habitat for Humanity celebrates 25th anniversary with plans for more homes

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Habitat for Humanity plans to build 14 standalone self-help homes along Joyce Drive and Green Mountain Loop in Grass Valley. Applicants for the homes put in 500 hours of sweat equity before being able to purchase their homes with no interest.

The Grass Valley City Council has approved a zoning amendment that will allow Nevada County Habitat for Humanity to build 14 standalone homes as part of the second phase of its Heritage Oaks affordable housing development.

The area — Joyce Drive and Green Mountain Loop — was originally zoned for heavy commercial use, but will now allow the residential project just across the street from the 16 homes built by Habitat for Humanity as part of phase one.

“Now we’ll be able to build there and move forward with our project,” Nevada County Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Lorraine Larson said. “The more the community supports us, the more homes we can build. That’s how it works.”

The development coincides with Nevada County Habitat for Humanity’s 25th anniversary of building homes in the county. It will celebrate with a series of fundraisers this year, including its annual September fundraiser. Some of the money raised will pay for preparing the site for construction, including infrastructure installation.

The development will provide housing for low- and very low-income families who earn between 30% to 80% of the area’s median income and go through a responsible home ownership orientation. According to Larson, the program gets about 40 eligible applicants following the orientation.

Applicants accepted into the home buyer program contribute 500 “sweat equity” hours toward building their home before it’s able to be purchased. Because much of the labor is completed through volunteer work, the organization is able to offer interest free mortgages based on the actual cost of a project, not on making profit.

“I can assure you they work hard for this opportunity,” Larson said of applicants. “They really put a lot into it.”

The development will be built out in phases, with two to four homes being built at a time as applicants are chosen. Habitat for Humanity expects to start selecting applicants for this project by the end of the year. It’s currently focused on a four-unit project in Grass Valley on Kendall and Parks streets while this new site is prepped.

This development will have wider driveways and streets compared to this first phase to accommodate parking, and will include a parking lot for both sites.

“We believe that no matter who a person is or where they come from that everyone deserves a decent place to live. We really want to grow the organization so we can help more families find an permanent affordable housing solution, so the community support is the only way we can do it,” Larson said. “We’re really trying to build as many homes as we can.”

The organization has built 38 homes in Nevada County since its inception.

“Twenty-five years fly by. I remember when Habitat put its first board together,” Grass Valley council member Howard Levine said. “It has over those 25 years proven to be the best affordable housing program we have in Nevada County.”

To find out more information on to the home buyer program, visit <http://www.nchabitat.org>.

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