East Petaluma housing project proposed

(1 of 2) Renderings of homes proposed in fall 2016 for

ERIC GNECKOW

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A Bay Area developer is seeking to build nearly 200 housing units near the intersection of Petaluma's North McDowell Boulevard and Corona Road, including 25 units set aside for sale to lower income home buyers.

Directly north of land long pegged as the site of a future east side station for Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit, the Brody Ranch subdivision would include 59 single-family homes, one duplex and a total of 138 condominiums, according to a city summary of project plans. The 16-acre development would also include a picnic and play area, a network of bicycle and pedestrian paths, wetlands and open space.

The planned development by Concord-based DeNova Homes would be the second in Petaluma to include homes offered at below-market rates through the Housing Land Trust of Sonoma County, adding to the 26 homes offered through the organization as workforce housing in the city's Southgate neighborhood.

"We are housing our first responders, our teachers – people who are here serving our community, but because they chose a particular career that doesn't pay enough to live where they work, they are priced out. But these people are essential. We need these people in our city to make this a functional city," said Dev Goetschius, executive director of the Petaluma-based organization.

The Petaluma Planning Commission signed off on tweaks to land use rules at the site that would allow for smaller lots, as well as subdivision map and a report showing minimal environmental impact, at its meeting Tuesday. The developer held a community meeting to discuss the project in July.

Expected to take around 18 months to build once approved, the Brody Ranch development is one of several housing projects to show activity in Petaluma in recent months. Site work is

underway at the Riverfront project off Hopper Street, which includes 134 homes, and 117 homes are planned for a development including the storied Cedar Grove property near the city's downtown.

The housing trust will own the land on which affordable units are built at Brody Ranch, and will lease the land on a 99-year term to the homeowner. The system allows the organization to require the homes are sold to low-to-moderate income homeowners in the future.

Goetschius said the land was gifted to the trust, and that DeNova agreed to sell the homes themselves at a lower profit. Buyers will spend around half of what it might otherwise cost to purchase the home at a market rate, she said.

She praised DeNova for working with her organization on the approach, including agreeing to spread the units around the subdivision rather than clustering them all in one place.

"It's been almost 10 years since we've had home-ownership housing like this" in Petaluma, she said.

Petaluma requires home developers in the areas near future passenger rail stations to include at least 15 percent of their units as affordable. The city had attempted to hold rental properties to the same requirement, but dropped the rule in late 2015 after concern of possible legal challenges.

City Councilman Mike Healy lauded the developer's cooperation with the housing trust, which has secured dozens of homes throughout the county for sale at below market rates. He noted that several homes purchased through the trust in the Southgate subdivision have sold

to new owners, meaning that the original buyers are able to leave with the equity they have built in the property.