

Housing Authority opens its CityView development in downtown Fresno

By BoNhia
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A cyclist passes Fresno Housing Authority's CityView @ Van Ness, center background, located at Inyo Street and Van Ness Avenue on Monday, January 26, 2015 in downtown Fresno, Calif. CityView @ Van Ness offers 45 units including studio, one and two-bedroom apartments with income restrictions tailored for the downtown workforce. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

Josh Martinez looks at the view across Van Ness Avenue from his third-floor apartment at CityView in downtown Fresno and says he might attend some Grizzlies games this year.

The 29-year-old barista at The Little Bean Cafe, on the Fulton Mall, has never been to a ball game.

But there's no excuse now, said Martinez, who lives only yards from Chukchansi Park at the [Fresno Housing Authority's](#) new four-story apartment and commercial building at Van Ness Avenue and Inyo Street.

CityView @ Van Ness opens Wednesday, a little more than a year and a half after the scary Droge Building, with iron props holding its walls, was torn down to make way for the housing project aimed at young professionals who work downtown.

The 45 apartments are nearly full with people mostly in their 20s and 30s who make between \$28,000 to \$35,000 a year. A few older residents attracted to an urban lifestyle at an affordable price snagged some apartments, too.

“While there are outliers, this is really people who are working downtown, who are in that younger, urban professional demographic we’re hoping to serve,” said Preston Prince, the housing authority’s executive director and chief executive officer. “Revitalization of downtown needs all kinds of income levels. This shows we can lease up.”

The Fresno Housing Authority demolished the 91-year-old Droge Building and a small structure next door in May 2013 to build CityView. The \$11 million project includes studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments. There are 24 ground-level parking stalls and 3,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor still available for lease.

CityView is a departure from the norm for the authority, which usually focuses on taking care of the poor or the homeless. Downtown revitalization has become part of the agency’s mission to create vibrant neighborhoods.

“There is a demand for quality affordable, work-force housing,” Preston said.

The authority bought the original building, which sat at a busy gateway at the south end of downtown, in 2010. It was built in 1922 by Peter Droge, a member of a prominent and pioneering local fruit-packing family.

The building housed government programs during the Great Depression, including the Works Progress Administration offices that helped put Valley residents to work in 1938.

It also was the site of the evacuation control station established in 1942 to register Japanese and Japanese-Americans for internment.

The city’s Historic Preservation Committee recommended the building be put on the local register of historic places and tried to save it from being torn down.

But the City Council decided the site is a historic resource and that the building — which was boarded up, had a collapsed roof and gutted interior — no longer held any historical significance.

The authority tried to incorporate the shell of the building into the new design, but it was too expensive, Prince said. It was designed instead to match well with other buildings on the street.

Martinez, the downtown barista, was burning through a tank of gas every three days commuting to work from a house he was living in with friends near Bullard and Polk avenues in northwest Fresno.

When he heard about CityView and the cost to rent a two-bedroom apartment, Martinez rushed over to sign up. He pays about \$650 a month.

“I like it here because I can walk to the cafe,” Martinez said, and “there’s nothing that can beat the price for something that is brand new.”

Charlene Henry, 65, is one of the older residents living in the building. She moved from a 460-square-foot studio in the Lowell neighborhood, about a mile north of CityView on the fringes of downtown, into a 600-square-foot one-bedroom apartment.

“The view out my patio window is beautiful,” Henry said. “I see the palm trees and grass around the spiral parking garage and Vintage Square.”

Henry has seen the evolution of downtown from “how run down it was getting over the years” to its rebirth now, she said. Henry left Fresno in 1997, lived in several states and cities, before returning in 2007 to be closer to her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren who live in Lowell.

“The more people are willing to be part of” helping downtown grow, “the better downtown will be,” Henry said. “I’m tickled to be part of downtown growth.”

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