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This artist's rendering shows a multifamily dwelling in the planned ecologically friendly apartment complex to be built at Fresno Street and Clinton Avenue.

Green apartments coming

Public housing to be torn down to make way for clean-technology units.

By Sanford Nax / The Fresno Bee

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About 200 World War II-era public housing apartments in central Fresno are being torn down to make way for one of the most environmentally efficient projects ever in Fresno.

Parc Grove Commons will consist of 464 apartments -- more than double the number of units there before -- for low-income families on 25 acres at Fresno Street and Clinton Avenue. It replaces a complex that originally housed servicemen during World War II.

The \$88 million development by the Housing Authorities of the city and county of Fresno and Byldan Construction will provide desperately needed affordable housing, make over a large chunk of an inner-city neighborhood that hasn't received much investment in recent years and set a new standard for environmentally friendly or "green" construction, said Henry T. Perea, the City Council member for the area.

The project also will set aside 45 apartments as live/work units where tenants can operate a business or art studio on the bottom floor and live on the upper two stories.

"There have been some good projects, but nothing as innovative as this," Perea said. "The Housing Authorities just raised the bar."

A complicated stew of tax credits, tax-exempt bonds and other sources is financing the ambitious development.

The community, operated by the Housing Authorities and constructed by green builder Byldan, will feature apartments ranging in size from one to four bedrooms, along with a community center, pool, basketball court and an abundance of open space so children have room to run.

"The kids will have some place to be kids," Kathleen Paley, assistant executive director of the Housing Authorities, said of the large expanse of open space.

Tenants will be poor, earning a maximum of 60% of the median income for the neighborhood. But the green technology will be high, which will enable tenants to cut energy costs.

Energy-saving features include structural insulated panels, a solar-powered system for the community buildings, radiant barrier roof sheeting, high-efficiency windows, satellite-controlled irrigation systems and overhangs on the windows.

The company demolishing the buildings will bring a portable crusher to the site and recycle the remaining concrete. The 20,000 tons of recycled concrete will become base for roads and sidewalks at Parc Grove Commons.

That means 1,000 fewer truck trips from the property and less mining of sand and gravel, which form concrete.

"There is a shortage of aggregate in Fresno County, and by recycling we don't have to produce as much," said Jeff Kroeker, a principal of the Kroeker Inc., the company cleaning up the site.

Kroeker also will grind dozens of trees that are being removed and shipped to a cogeneration plant in Fresno.

About 25% of the estimated 350 trees on the site are staying, but the rest have to be recycled because they are too old, too brittle or in the wrong place, said Lowell Ens, housing resource services manager for the Housing Authorities.

"Everything is being recycled except for the insulation and drywall," he said.

The Housing Authorities inherited the apartments after the war.

The center-city location and its proximity to transportation hubs, Manchester Center, Veterans Hospital and Fresno City College provided the catalyst for the makeover, Paley said.

The 180 families who lived in the apartments were either relocated to other public housing or given Section 8 vouchers to find new homes.

They can apply to return to the property if they want when the construction is done, possibly in late 2009.

Parc Grove Commons is a model for future developments in a city that is trying to curb urban sprawl, said Michael Sigala, the city's housing and community development manager.

"As we grow in and up, we'll have to do more of this type of redevelopment," he said.

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