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# Redevelopment

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## Shinsei Gardens

Significant Milestone in the City of Alameda



California Redevelopment Association



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# Shinsei Gardens: From Brownfields to Green and on to Platinum

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The completion of Shinsei Gardens Apartments, a sustainable affordable housing development, is a significant milestone in the City of Alameda's and its redevelopment agency's efforts to transition former military base property to civilian reuse. The Navy's exodus from Alameda left acres of abandoned structures and aging infrastructure, as well as contaminated soil and groundwater.

Shinsei Gardens was conceived by a Vietnam veteran who was determined that the reuse of Navy land include accessible, affordable housing for veterans and their families. On October 26, 2009, thirteen years after the base closure, the City celebrated the grand opening of Shinsei Gardens, showcasing affordability, universal design, and green technology.

Shinsei Gardens had all of the drama and intrigue of the most challenging affordable housing projects—a contaminated site, military base reuse, lawsuits, multiple funding sources—with the most desired outcome—the greenest of green (LEED Platinum) buildings, universally accessible design, and creation of a vibrant community within the newest neighborhood of Alameda.

Today, it is a service-enriched residential development, which provides 39 units of housing affordable to very low- and low-income households. The 2.5-acre project site is comprised of four two-story buildings framing a large central courtyard with passive green space and active children's play areas for two age groups.

The Development Services Department (now Economic Development Department), and staff to the Community Improvement Commission (CIC) (the City's redevelopment agency), took the lead role in the project. CIC faced numerous challenging obstacles, as well as opportunities in the development of Shinsei Gardens.

The first opportunity was in 2000, when CIC and Catellus Development Corporation entered into a Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA), which included the Shinsei Gardens project as part of a larger development. A CEQA lawsuit resulted in a 25-percent inclusionary housing

requirement that, among other things, produced an in-lieu fee, which contributed to the Shinsei Gardens project.

Demolition of existing structures by Catellus pursuant to the DDA then triggered a two-year deadline to complete the 39-unit project. CIC secured a nonprofit housing development partner, Resources for Community Development (RCD), and began to work on the project. However, another agreement affecting the property included constraints which made the project impossible to complete in two years.

After lengthy negotiations to revise the agreement, followed by a second lawsuit and settlement agreement, the project was able to be financed. To complicate matters further, the site is located over a benzene and naphthalene plume that is being remediated by the Navy with the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) having oversight responsibility. To facilitate development, CIC negotiated with the Navy and DTSC to place restrictions on the project site. As a result, construction finally began in the Spring of 2008.

Although the Navy committed to the cleanup, its schedule did not correspond with the construction schedule. CIC worked with DTSC to develop an interim solution: a sub-slab depressurization system, installed below the building foundations to prevent a buildup of indoor gases. When the Navy completes its remediation, the system will no longer be necessary.

The word "Shinsei" in Japanese can be translated as "New Beginning," "Dignity," or "Authentic," which were inspirations for the design. Each apartment's front door opens to an oasis of trees, grasses, and landscaping. The contemporary building style is an interpretation of local Craftsman homes. A central pathway flows like a river meandering through hills and valleys. Sculptural, curving courtyard walls create a sequence of discovery as one leaves the world of streets and cars and emerges into the peace, dignity, and authenticity of nature.

The complex uses innovative universal design principles, which are intended to produce buildings and products that are accessible to persons with or without disabilities. For



Shinsei Gardens photos

example, all electrical outlets and light switches are mounted at heights everyone can reach, lever handles instead of door knobs and windows operate without grasping. Kitchens are designed with features such as open space beneath the sink, pull-out cutting boards, and front controls on the stove. Bathrooms have single lever faucets, grab bars, and adjustable hand-held showers. Community facilities include front-opening washers and dryers, hands-free faucets and soap dispensers.

Energy-efficient design minimizes the carbon footprint and promotes efficient operation. Features include a 54-kilowatt photovoltaic system used for the common area, Energy Star appliances, energy efficient heating, cool roof, natural ventilation and ceiling fans, energy efficient lighting, windows with Low-E coatings, and arbors shading the buildings from direct sun. Natural and sustainable products enhance the sustainability of the buildings and reduce maintenance costs. Residents are provided a green manual with an overview of green features and housekeeping tips. In addition, educational displays throughout the buildings describe the green, sustainability features of the project.

The development cost was approximately \$7.2 million. Funds were provided from a variety of funding sources, including CIC assistance (approximately 14 percent of total funds), tax credit equity, California Multifamily Housing Program, HOME funds, developer equity, private financing, and grants from the Home Depot Foundation, StopWaste, and Bay Friendly Landscaping.

The improvements to make Shinsei Gardens green and sustainable increased the cost by approximately \$490,000. However, the overall savings in gas and electricity costs, reduced replacement costs, and water conservation over the life of the project are expected to offset the additional cost.

The project recently received a LEED Platinum certification (only one of two multi-family residential projects in the state), is the highest scoring Multifamily GreenPoint Rated project in California, and won the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) National Award of Excellence.

Shinsei Gardens has set a high design and sustainability bar for the balance of development on former Navy land and is a major step forward in eliminating physical blight and providing much needed affordable housing. The project would not have been possible without redevelopment agency resources, including its financial contribution. It exemplifies a successful public-private partnership between the City's redevelopment agency and housing authority and the nonprofit developer, RCD, to successfully provide much-needed affordable housing to the community.