

## Interfaith group maps campaign for Dominion

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A coalition of religious and charity groups is organizing an effort to support Dominion Apartments' plans to build affordable senior housing in South Chandler.

Valley Interfaith Project (VIP) is meeting with elected officials and asking residents to get involved, telling their stories about how the high price of housing is hurting their families.

"What we kept hearing was housing, affordable housing in particular, and rental housing," said Barb Quijada, of the Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Chandler.

She said VIP has been hosting open house meetings for about two years, where representatives ask people about the real-life problems they are confronting and how could they help. VIP comprises about 30 congregations of different faiths working together to bring positive change.

Susan Davis is one of the people VIP is trying to help. The member of St. Matthew's Episcopal

Church in Chandler said her rent in 2019 was \$1,100 a month. Now, it's \$1,900 a month plus additional fees.

She told Axios Phoenix that she's struggling to survive month-to-month because of the huge increase in housing costs.

Dominium Apartments bought about 24 acres of land on Ocotillo, just east of Arizona Avenue. The developer's first proposal was to build a senior living facility, and multi-housing family units.

All of the over 500 units would be affordable, meaning the rents would be significantly less than market rates.

However, neighbors organized and fought the project, which would be on Maricopa County land and therefore up to the Board of Supervisors to de-

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Dominium Apartments' Sonoran Landings project would be built on Ocotillo Road just east of Arizona Avenue. (Maricopa County Planning and Zoning)



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cide its fate.

There were about 100 residents at a City Council meeting, and close to 150 at a neighborhood meeting in opposition. Opponents also started a Facebook page to share information (Voice of Chandler).

Dominium retreated and pulled their initial plan. Now, it is trying to build just an affordable senior housing complex with 282 units. It would also have two large light industrial buildings built behind the senior housing.

The units will still be affordable. No prices have been determined, but they are based on calculations from the federal government on what is a fair market rate. The example Dominion has given is that an apartment that is usually \$1,800, will cost \$1,100.

Dominium gets tax credits for doing

that, which they sell to banks to get the financing they need to build the project.

VIP has already had one success in helping overcome neighborhood objections to get an affordable housing project built.

"We had a lot of members go to the meeting where the vote was taken, and after discussing it, stood in favor of that," Quijada said. "We're very pleased with the vote that Council took, even though there was a lot of opposition to that project."

The project was to purchase a hotel and turn it into a shelter for seniors, families and domestic violence survivors experiencing homelessness.

Mesa City Council voted 4-3 in early November to buy the 70-room Grand Hotel.

Now VIP's focus is helping Dominion overcome the opposition to the South Chandler project by neighbors.

A request to speak to one of the administrators of the Voice of Chandler page was not returned. In the past, the neighborhood group has said the housing violates the city's General Plan, would increase traffic and would add even more students to Hamilton High, which is the largest high school in the state.

They have consistently rejected the label of being NIMBYs, and have even told Dominion leaders they are offended by that. However, many of their comments in public have had a NIMBY (Not in my backyard) view.

There have been comments such as "We don't want those people here!," "I worked hard to be able to afford to live here, why shouldn't they?," "This will lower the value of my home," and "I have nothing against your project, just don't build it here."

Those remarks were given enthusiastic applause at meetings from the others in

the group.

"We've done individual meetings with city council members to develop relationships with them, see what their positions are," said Larry Dumka, a VIP member who belongs to St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Chandler.

"We're trying to get meetings with some of the board (of supervisors) members to develop relationship with them."

Quijada said they're not big on using labels. When asked what message she would offer those neighbors who still oppose the Dominion project, she said this:

"I loved what our friend Susan Davis ... said. She thought that people were afraid of who they didn't know. She felt like the importance of being near her church and in the community that she loves and the ability to stay here was important. If the people knew her, and knew people like her, then they would be less afraid." 