

# Bill Macfadyen: It Turns Out That Affordable Senior Housing CAN Be Built Affordably

*What else is news in NoozWeek's Top 5? Santa Barbara soul food finds a niche, state housing law puts a brake on parking, and three crashes take a toll on local roadways*



by William M. Macfadyen, Noozhawk Publisher

October 28, 2022 | 8:30 am



Piece by piece, the Santa Maria Studios project is emerging, much of it via pre-fab units intended to make the senior housing complex more affordable. (Janene Scully / Noozhawk photo)

I'm in Austin, Texas, this week for the **Independent News Sustainability Summit**, billed as “a first-of-its-kind conference focused on revenue and sustainability for independent news businesses.”



The only quibble I have with the description is what I always tell my staff: “**Noozhawk** is not in the news business. We're in the business of news.”

Since founding Noozhawk in 2007, the premise of profit has motivated almost every initiative we pursue. The independent, trusted news coverage we provide 24/7 may be indispensable but it's not enough for us to keep our professional journalists covering the community. For that, we must be profitable.

Executive editor Tom Bolton, one of my business partners, and I learned the lesson the hard way when we reversed the order with our late South Coast Beacon, a weekly newspaper that won numerous journalism awards but never made a dime.

**Henry Ford** said that “failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.” And that's what we've done with Noozhawk.

Now 16 years later, we're still pioneering our way in the online local news wilderness, but we've also earned a recognition among our peers that our model is worth emulating.

We'll see if I can live up to that hype on Oct. 28 when I get to speak before several hundred of those peers as part of a panel of “three mature digital newsrooms” discussing how to keep growing after more than a decade in operation.

Our panel is led by my friend, Mary Walter-Brown, founder and CEO of **News Revenue Hub**, one of Noozhawk's most important partnerships, and features two other close allies of mine: Tracey Taylor, a co-founder of **Berkeleyside** and now Cityside, and Angie Mock, publisher and CEO of the **San Antonio Report**.

So far, this conference — organized by News Revenue Hub, **RevLab at the Texas Tribune** and **LION Publishers**, which Noozhawk co-founded a dozen or so years ago — has been both educational and inspirational. I've already picked up several exciting ideas to propel Noozhawk in 2023, with the expectation that they'll pay off, for us and for you.

If you'd like to help us continue to grow, please [click here to join our Hawks Club](#) with a financial donation. Almost every dollar we make goes right back into the news you're reading. We can't do this without you.

Thank you.

Noozhawk had an audience of 86,553 readers this past week, according to our [Google Analytics](#). What follows is my recap of the Top 5 stories you were reading.

As a reminder, this recap is not a news story. It's my opinion column, which I write in my civic capacity as Noozhawk's publisher.

## **1. Five-Story Senior Housing Project Rises Quickly in South Santa Maria**

That didn't take long.

Fast-tracked by state law instead of the often-glacial local approval process, a new affordable housing project for seniors is rising fast in Santa Maria.

As our Janene Scully was first to report, the five-story, 160-unit Santa Maria Studios project is under construction at 2712 Santa Maria Way, near the intersection of South Miller Street to the east of Highway 135/Orcutt Expressway.

One of the reasons for the brisk building schedule is the project's use of modular units constructed by [PreFab Logic](#) in Nampa, Idaho, and trucked to Santa Maria, where they're stacked and assembled on site.

Once the blocks are completed, architectural features will be added and the building will be coated in stucco.

The project development group — [The Pacific Companies](#) of Eagle, Idaho, and [AMG & Associates LLC](#) of Encino — filed a permit request under state [Senate Bill 35](#), which allows developers of affordable housing to bypass typical local reviews, including by municipal planning commissions and city councils.

The law is intended to streamline the construction process to help ease California's chronic housing shortage, but controversy has erupted throughout the state over the loss of local oversight and input.

Chuen Ng, director of the **Santa Maria Community Development Department**, told Janene that the modular units “meet all of the state’s building codes,” as well as **Americans with Disabilities Act** requirements.

“The interiors are actually almost done — there are kitchen cabinets inside, even appliances inside,” he said. “By the time they stack there, it just allows for faster construction.”

The 160 units are just the first phase of the project. Officials say a 218-unit second phase has not yet started the permitting process.

PreFab Logic said rent estimates, including utilities, have been adjusted to between 30% and 60% of the area’s median income. The result is that more than half of the units would go for “at or under \$1,000 per month,” company officials say.

What a novel concept: When the process and timeline of building housing is more affordable to the developer, the housing is ... more affordable?

## **2. BizHawk: Soul Bites Brings Comfort Food to Downtown Santa Barbara**

 Stirling Nix-Bradley

Stirling Nix-Bradley is following a real comfort food tradition at Soul Bites, the downtown Santa Barbara restaurant he owns with his wife, Rose. (Joshua Molina / Noozhawk photo)

---

Authentic soul food has finally arrived in Santa Barbara, thanks to Stirling Nix-Bradley, an Oxnard native who opened **Soul Bites** downtown with his wife, Rose.

The two hospitality industry veterans took the former home of the Velvet Jones nightclub at 423 State St. and turned it into a homestyle restaurant.

I haven’t been there yet but the menu practically screams #bestofbillrecommendation. The comfort food includes shrimp and grits with crab gravy, maple brined fried chicken, fish and chips, fish po’ boys, collard greens and fried green tomatoes.

There’s even banana pudding with **Nilla** wafers — which is the only way to eat bananas, if you ask me.