

Five-Story Senior Housing Project Rises Quickly in South Santa Maria

160-unit Santa Maria Studios employs modular structures, hastening construction for the affordable apartment building



by Janene Scully | Noozhawk North County Editor

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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)

A five-story-high senior apartment complex has sprouted seemingly overnight in southeast Santa Maria.

Construction continued Monday on the Santa Maria Studios, the first phase of a 160-unit project on the 2600 block of Santa Maria Way, near the intersection with Miller Street.

The apartment building is taking shape after the modular units were constructed in an Idaho factory and assembled on site as if they were building blocks.

Like any traditional project, the building eventually will be covered in stucco and have architectural features.

“By the end of the project, you wouldn’t even be able to tell the method of construction,” Santa Maria **Community Development Director Chuen Ng** said.

As the building has taken shape, the project has attracted criticism and misinformation among social media users.

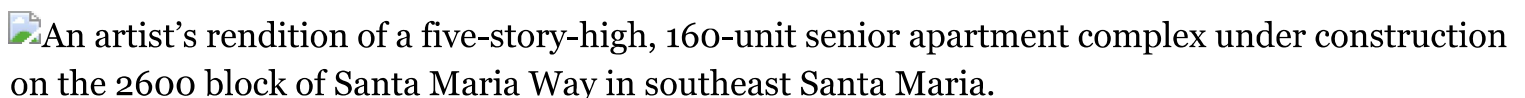
The applicant filed the permit request under Senate Bill 35, which allows a developer proposing affordable housing to bypass the normal reviews, including by the local Planning Commission and City Council.

Last year, the mayor cited the development as **an example of project where the city’s leaders have lost local control** due to state rules.

That doesn’t mean they can avoid typical building codes, including those regarding earthquake safety or Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

“We have to make sure that all new construction, new buildings meet all of the state’s building codes,” Ng said.

He added that the construction for Santa Maria Studios “is a little bit different” because it had used modular structures.

An artist’s rendition of a five-story-high, 160-unit senior apartment complex under construction on the 2600 block of Santa Maria Way in southeast Santa Maria.

An artist's rendition of a five-story-high, 160-unit senior apartment complex under construction on the 2600 block of Santa Maria Way in southeast Santa Maria. (Contributed photo)

Late Monday afternoon, a huge crane lifted one of the rectangular structures into place to continue creating the fifth level.

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

The project involves [**The Pacific Companies**](#) and [**Encino-based AMG Associates**](#) (unrelated to the AMG & Associates that built two new schools and is completing the Allan Hancock College Fine Arts Complex).

“It did kind of spring up overnight, but there’s still some work to do on this project,” Ng said.

The applicant submitted plans to build the first 160 units, with a second phase calling for 218 units of affordable senior housing units, according to the Community Development Department.

“The applicant has not applied for building permits yet to build the second phase,” the city’s Planning Division Manager Dana Eady said.

The 160 studio units will all be located within one building. The project includes onsite parking, bike racks, landscaped outdoor seating areas, community rooms, and a dog park (for resident’s pets to use), Eady said.

Idaho-based PreFab Logic said rental estimates including utilities have been adjusted to between 30 and 60 percent of the area’s median income. This would mean more than half of the proposed rent rates are “at or under \$1,000 per month.”

“While rents on these units will be low, the quality and amenities of these small studio apartments are very high, with quality fixtures and appliances, and ADA-compliant features, making quality housing more attainable for Santa Maria’s aging population,” the PreFab Logic website says.

The modular manufacturer said this was one of the first two senior housing projects built with a new kind of factory automation.

“Prefab Logic partnered with the factory to help produce the unique data set required to simplify the construction process for both robots and people working in the modular factory.”

Santa Maria Studios is one of multiple apartment projects under construction, with several others in the pipeline.

Also under construction are Centennial Gardens on West Battles Road near Depot Street, with 160 affordable units, and Centennial Square Apartments on the southeast corner of Miller Street and Plaza Drive.

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