

Solution Seen for Senior Housing: SENIOR <span ...

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Solution Seen for Senior Housing

Congregate living could be the only viable solution to the nation's **senior housing shortage**, says Samuel Wacht, West Los Angeles architect.

A specialist in multitamily structures, including board and care facilities, Wacht says congregate housing can be effectively designed and produced to offer meals, maintenance and recreational provisions to ambulatory residents for as low as \$300 a month.

"Senior citizens can be splendidly

provided for in congregate housing," Wacht said. "They are given tasty and nutritious meals and whatever services and degree of assistance they may require at much less cost than they could provide for themselves."

Wacht has participated in the design of several residential care structures in the Los Angeles area, which he says is "5 to 10 years ahead of the rest of the country" in providing housing for the elderly. Among the

projects are the 80-room Woodland Park Retirement Hotel in Woodland Hills and the 74-room Olympic Carmel Retirement Hotel at 8717 Olympic Blvd.

Both projects were privately financed through P&K Investment Co. developers. Individual apartments vary from 400 to 600 square feet and have private bedrooms and baths. Some have efficiency kitchens, although central kitchens can furnish

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special dietary provisions, he said.

"Residents are given three healthful meals a day, maid's and linen service, and have access to laundry rooms, therapy pools, card room and beauty salon," said Wacht. "They can have a complete life without ever leaving the front door."

The "roadblock" to providing ample housing for seniors "lies in the difficulty of obtaining long-term financing" and a "needless reluctance by lenders to finance these undertakings after front money has been obtained," he said.

"At the present time, it is difficult to convince lenders that a residential care facility is not a single-purpose building, that there will be sufficient income generated to service the debt and that there is a market for this kind of building," Wacht continued.

"Any form of congregate housing can be designed for rapid and economical conversion into apartments, low-cost condominiums or residential hotels," he said. "These structures are more multiuse in character than apartment buildings or condominiums. These factors make the long-term financing of congregate housing by private lenders a stable and secure investment.

"Although land costs weigh heavily in any decision as to a location for congregate housing, a retirement complex can be designed to effectively fulfill all the functions of a complete living center and maintain a sound balance between location, site cost and revenue making."

Approximately 2 million elderly persons nationally are living in sub-standard housing, Wacht estimates.



Samuel Wacht

This means, he said, that by building 200,000 new units annually for senior citizens, it would take 10 years to fulfill the demand.

Wacht points out that in California 2.4 million people are 62 or older and they are increasing by 160,000 annually. In Los Angeles County alone, there are 812,000 persons past 62 who are being joined every year by 57,000 others.

Out of all of these, 5.3 million are living below poverty level. More than 1 million are living in nursing homes and about 1.5 million are in some other type of special housing.

Wacht says there is a "gap" between demand and supply in senior citizen housing that can only be rectified with public education and government assistance.

Although the Department of Health, Education and Welfare has budgeted \$77 million for "income and maintenance" and "social services" for the elderly, no funds have been earmarked for new housing or rehabilitation of existing structures, he said.

Wacht says the present lack of senior housing could be alleviated and the construction industry fortified if long-term construction loans for senior housing were insured by HUD and HEW.

At the present time, the only HUD program assisting senior housing is Section 8 rent-supplement provisions for persons with below-poverty income.

"This program may assist a number of apartment-house owners and elderly persons, but in areas of short supply, it can have an inflationary effect on apartment rental rates . . . and further compound a vexatious shortage of apartments," Wacht said.

"Nowhere does the program provide any assistance to the sorely pressed construction industry, because under today's interest rates and high construction rates, no one can afford to build apartment buildings."