

S.F. faces silver tsunami

Wave of aged collides with shortage of housing, care

BY SARAH DUXBURY

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A storm of the aged is moving into the Bay Area.

With almost 18 percent of its population over 60, San Francisco is already the grayest major metropolis in the country. By 2020, it is expected that more than 21 percent of the population will be over 60 as Baby Boomers age and lifespans increase.

Statewide, the population over 65 is expected to double in the next 25 years. Factor in San Francisco's famously low number of families with school-aged children, and the City by the Bay is facing a silver tsunami.

The good news is that city officials and private developers have seen the storm coming. Hundreds of millions of dollars are going into creating thousands of units of new senior housing, improving access to senior services, and coordinating the agencies, nonprofits and housing developers on whom the city and its seniors will rely.

The bad news is that all these efforts might not be enough. San Francisco's high property costs restrict how much senior housing can be developed, the region's high cost of doing business frustrates efforts to expand services, and its low pool of unskilled labor threatens to leave service programs understaffed.

David Werdegar, executive director of San Francisco's Institute on Aging, believes the mismatch between supply and demand is a looming public crisis, and his fears are echoed by many people familiar with the challenges of this changing demographic.

"We're expanding our senior housing development all the time because we are facing (what) I would call a crisis in services and housing for seniors going forward over the next 10 to 15 years," said Jane Graf of Mercy Housing.

The goal is to help the elderly "age in place" — designing homes that will allow seniors to live on their own for as long as possible, perhaps until death. It's what most want, and it is less expensive than institutionalization. San Francisco has been grappling with how to help



Looming crisis: Werdegar foresees "a line around the block" when the Institute on Aging builds new housing.

its residents do that as the Golden Gate reaches its golden years.

Nonprofits on board

Affordable senior housing is a crucial piece of the preparation.

Today, more than 600 affordable senior units funded by the Mayor's Office of Housing and the Redevelopment Agency are under construction or approved, with many of those reserved for homeless seniors. Hundreds of completed units have already hit the market. Still other projects await funding and approval, including 75 units planned by St. Anthony's Foundation and Mercy Housing.

All counted, about 30 percent of the subsidized affordable housing being built or in the pipeline in San Francisco is for seniors. All of the nonprofit housing developers have gotten in on the game, even though none of them was originally founded to build senior housing.

Senior housing is a growing share of what Bridge Housing does, said CEO Carol Galante. It has two San Francisco projects and two in

the suburbs. And five of six current Citizens Housing projects contain some senior component because those are the kinds of developments for which state and federal money were available, said Scott Falcone, development director at Citizens Housing.

Demand for these units is extraordinary. Mercy Housing had almost 3,000 applicants for the 93 units in its recently-completed Presentation development on Ellis Street. Werdegar predicts "there will be a line around the block" for Bridge Housing's 150 units at the new Institute on Aging headquarters on Geary Boulevard.

Most of these developments are designed for independent living; they have design features, like showers instead of baths and certain kinds of doorknobs, that make them suited to seniors, and most are allied with supportive services like care management, laundry or transportation. Higher levels of care come with "assisted living," which has 24-hour supervision and services, and even more with "skilled nursing," where the development has licensed nurses on staff.

"One of the biggest challenges is creating affordable senior housing that also has access to services," Galante said, noting that both pieces are incredibly expensive in California. "(It) is



Galante

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one of the most difficult kinds of product you can put together, and there's growing need for it."

Of course, seniors also occupy regular affordable housing units. Don Falk, executive director of Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp., said that while TNDC has some 850 senior units built or in development, much of its other affordable housing is senior-occupied.



Falk

Help at the high end

While many retirees must live on a fixed income, plenty of San Franciscans retire with ample assets — often based on homes they have owned for decades. For them, there's new construction at the high end, too.

Sunrise Senior Living will break ground late this year on the Sterling, a condo development that is a new model for the Virginia-based assisted-living specialist. Condos will start at over \$1 million, and will allow older San Franciscans to keep an equity stake in this real estate market. Residents can benefit from pay-as-you-go services, including an on-site geriatric care manager and a restaurant. Monthly resident fees start at \$4,000, \$500 of which goes to food, much like a country club.

Sunrise is also renovating the Carlyle on Post Street to make it upper-middle-level condos, a step down from the Sterling.

Another 88-unit market-rate project is being jointly developed by Openhouse and A.F. Evans. It will be the city's first lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-friendly senior living project, and is part of A.F. Evans' plan for 55 Laguna.

Openhouse is a nonprofit dedicated to helping LGBT seniors access senior services. Despite San Francisco's reputation as a gay city, LGBT seniors are particularly isolated and often live alone. Openhouse is also in negotiations for a second site where it hopes to build up to 200 units of low-income LGBT-friendly senior housing.

Rental subsidies are crucial to these nonprofit developers being able to build low-income senior units, and are one reason why none of the senior living units in construction or development targets middle-income seniors. Developers don't yet see a way to make money there, though middle-income seniors are getting priced out of San Francisco, too.

"San Francisco has the fastest-growing aging population in the country," said Victoria Stone, general manager of the Sterling. "We're doing the affordable to some degree and we're doing the high end to some degree. There's a huge gap in the middle."

Mind the service gap

There's also a gap on the services side,

though that has less to do with economics than with information.

"San Francisco is a relatively service-rich community, but many people don't know how to access those services," said Bill Haskell, director of the San Francisco Partnership for Community Based Care and Support, within the city's Department of Aging and Adult Services.

There are health care and services networks; there are meal delivery programs and meal-serving sites; there are nonprofits like the Institute on Aging, On Lok and Self-Help for the Elderly, all of which provide a different piece of the service puzzle. Yet, even people

AGE WAVE

Population over 65 by largest U.S. and California cities:

City	Total Population	Percentage over 65
New York	7,956,113	11.9%
Los Angeles	3,731,437	9.3%
Chicago	2,701,926	10.2%
San Jose	887,330	8.8%
San Francisco	719,077	14.6%
Sacramento	445,287	10.8%
Oakland	373,910	11.1%

SOURCE: U.S. Census



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David Werdegar, executive director of San Francisco's Institute on Aging.

who work in the field don't know where to go when their own mothers or spouses need help, Haskell said.

That's where the partnership, which was formed in 2004, comes in.

Early signs suggest it has had some effect. In 2006, the Department of Aging began advertising the 211 telephone information line as a resource for senior issues. It placed ads in ethnic newspapers and the Examiner. Within two months, call volume increased 24 percent with senior-specific questions.

San Francisco's senior-servicing nonprofits are also looking ahead, with the Institute on Aging preparing to start construction on an \$80 million headquarters on Geary Boulevard. It will contain three floors of senior housing built by Bridge atop two floors of senior-oriented service space, including a Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly or PACE program (essentially an HMO for very frail, low-income seniors), patient care offices, an auditorium and classrooms.

"We hope this new building will be a model for how communities can approach housing, health care and keeping people in a community," Werdegar said. "I think there will be quite a bit of interest generated in the field of

older adult services to see how the business is done."

The institute would not be the first San Francisco nonprofit to set a national standard for how to care for the elderly.

In the 1970s, On Lok Senior Health created the first PACE program, which has become a national standard for how to care for low-income frail seniors who would otherwise be institutionalized.

PACE programs end up costing less money than traditional health-care programs because they have a holistic, preventative bent, said Peter Szutu, president and CEO of Center for Elders Independence in Oakland. CEI runs three PACE centers and is about to add a fourth.

Indeed, it's not a lack of clients that is a problem, it's the shortage of workers that could end up the biggest challenge as San Francisco fades to gray.

"We don't have enough licensed vocational nurses, enough qualified geriatric aids, we don't have enough physical therapists. There are very few geriatricians in medical schools," Szutu said. "Labor is huge."

sduxbury@bizjournals.com / (415) 288-4963.