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[Home](#) > [Work Begins on Housing for Special Needs People](#)



- [View Article Gallery](#) ^[1]
- [Print This Page](#) ^[2]

Work Begins on Housing for Special Needs People

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The Independent - Thursday, May 23, 2019

A groundbreaking ceremony for Sunflower Hill at Irby Ranch, a residential community specifically designed for individuals with special needs, took place last Thursday in Pleasanton.

The City of Pleasanton, Sunflower Hill, Alameda County and Satellite Affordable Housing

Associates (SAHA) have worked in partnership to make the project a reality.

Scheduled for completion in spring 2020, the 1.64 acre innovative residential community will offer 31 one and two-bedroom units for developmentally disabled residents. The environment will be similar to senior living. All units will provide an affordable and independent living opportunity with monthly rents 20 to 60 percent of the area median income.

Residents will have access to community amenities, such as multi-use sports facilities, fitness room, makerspace rooms, community gathering areas, therapeutic spa and caretaker respite areas. In addition, residents will have the option to elect a meal plan service. On-site property management, tenant services and activities will be provided by SAHA, Housing Consortium of the East Bay and Sunflower Hill.

Edie Nehls, Sunflower Hill's executive director, commented, "There are more than 331,000 individuals in California and more than 20,000 in Alameda County who identify as developmentally disabled. Our community will provide affordable living to a population that's often forgotten in the housing crisis discussions."

Funding for the estimated \$19 million cost of the development was made possible through a public/private partnership. The City of Pleasanton provided more than \$2.2 million and Alameda County allocated \$7.1 million from the 2016 A-1 housing bond. The project was ranked as the #1 special needs project in the State of California in the July 2018 Tax Credit Allocation cycle. Additional funding was provided by National Equity Fund and Silicon Valley Bank. Project partners include Dahlin Architects, BKF Engineers, and Huff Construction, as the general contractor.

"Pleasanton has been committed to providing affordable housing solutions for our residents with special needs," said Nelson Fialho, Pleasanton city manager. "When completed, Sunflower Hill at Irby Ranch will be the first of its kind in northern California, and I hope this can be a model for other communities to replicate across the State."

Susan Houghton, founder of Sunflower Hill, added, "We are so very grateful to our partners, vendors, community, city and county leaders who have made this day a reality. Sunflower Hill is dedicated to providing innovative residential options and vocational programs to those with special needs. Pleasanton, a city that's truly a community of character, has embraced our exceptional individuals and those with differing abilities."

Houghton spoke about Sunflower Hill's goals. "For the last seven years, Sunflower Hill has sought to change the paradigm of residential living options for individuals with special needs and to create vocational and social opportunities for a full and rewarding life.

"Our garden at Hagemann Ranch is thriving. Our program at Stable Café is offering important hospitality skills. Now, thanks to so many of you here today, we're breaking ground on our first residential community. While the 31 units that will be constructed here will only make a small dent in the need for affordable housing for people with special needs, I have a dream that this is just the beginning."

She added, "Thanks to all of you and your wonderful support of Sunflower Hill at Irby Ranch, a vibrant dream is becoming a reality."

Susan Friedland, executive director of SAHA, stated, "Affordable housing is a building block for transforming lives. It is an honor and pleasure to be working with Sunflower Hill to help

make their unique vision a reality. Breaking ground today is an important milestone, and we are looking forward to the day new residents move into their beautiful new homes.?

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[4]

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[5]

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[2] <https://www.sahahomes.org/printpdf/984>

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[5] <https://www.sahahomes.org/properties/sunflower-hill-irby-ranch>