

Magoffin project: Apartments positive for Downtown

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City Council's approval of a high-end apartment complex in South El Paso is socio-economic progress for the ongoing Downtown plan, and a plus for El Pasoans.

Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe and real-estate partner TVO Development will build the 91-unit Magoffin Park Villas.

Here's the impact:

- Twenty percent of the units will be for low-income families with a rent of about \$250 a month. Low-rent has been guaranteed for at least 40 years, officials said.
- The remaining units would go for market value, about \$800 a month.
- The project is also a positive because it's considered infill -- using existing in-city space.

Here is a two-way positive. Some families now residing in the Downtown area have poor living conditions. On the social side of this endeavor, some families will get a better lifestyle, without the extra cost. On the economic side, Downtown will have more permanent residents, who will help the Downtown revitalization plan by patronizing Downtown businesses for daily needs.

When the Downtown plan was unveiled in March 2006, proponents said building new housing first means fewer families will be displaced when developers buy up properties for uses other than housing. It's good to see that part of the plan taking shape.

It's also good that the Magoffin Project includes retail space on the ground floors of what will be two three-story buildings.

There was opposition. Some residents of the neighborhood said the project, to be built on vacant land, would mean too much congestion. The Historic Landmark Commission said that parking, the buildings' heights and some other aspects did not meet city standards for the historic district. Architects did make some changes to the buildings for "historic district" purposes.

And as La Fe's Carlos Galinar said, the same area now has buildings that are " ... 10, 20, 30 years out of date ... a neighborhood that is basically a collection of trash and unwanted furniture."

Mayor John Cook has it right. He said the bottom line is that all successful downtown redevelopments need a good housing component. This is a good step toward revitalization of El Paso's Downtown.