



# Indio affordable apartments to be renovated, preserved

Summer Field Apartments, a 268-unit complex in Indio, is home to about 1,000 people and 15 percent of Indio's affordable housing units.

[Rosalie Murphy](#), **The Desert Sun** 9:14 a.m. PDT March 17, 2016



One of the Coachella Valley's largest affordable housing complexes will stay that way for decades to come, its new owners promise.

Renovation work will begin early next year on Summer Field Apartments, a 268-unit complex in Indio that has provided affordable housing since 1970. Industry leaders say building rent-restricted apartments is challenging in itself, but keeping them in good shape and preserving their affordable status can be harder.

"The building of affordable housing is a vital part of providing affordable housing in communities where rents are really spiraling out of control. But there's no point in building all of these products if all of the existing affordable housing stock is rolling out of the affordable housing programs," said Jack Aronson, director of development acquisitions at Community Preservation Partners, the company that recently

bought Summer Field Apartments. "The building is definitely important, but the preservation of existing stock is equally important."

Summer Field Apartments provides more than 15 percent of Indio's affordable apartments, according to city data. The two-story stucco buildings hold everything from one-bedroom apartments to five-bedroom townhouses and are home to about 1,000 people.

The complex was built in 1970 and underwent a minor renovation around 2000. In general, apartment buildings need renovating every 20 years, according to an affordable housing developer not involved with the project, Steve PonTell of National Core.



**Leticia Valencia, a mother of six, stands near the basketball court at Summer Field Apartments where she often watches her kids play. (Photo: Rosalie Murphy/The Desert Sun)**

Community Preservation Partners' Aronson said his company will spend about \$14 million, culled from federal tax credits and bonds for affordable housing, over the next two years to renovate Summer Field Apartments. The remodel will include "substantial exterior upgrades" and interior updates, like flooring, Aronson said.

The owners also plan to augment services the complex already provides, like summer breakfast and lunch for kids, on-site Head Start education and computer literacy training.

For residents, affordable housing can be a life-changing resource. Ramona Maldonado has lived in the complex for more than 20 years. She said that when she moved in, vandalism and gang activity were

March 17, 2016

common in the neighborhood, but "it's like a whole new community now." She boasted that one of the kids she raised here is now in the Navy, and another is a nurse.

"A lot of women say, if you live in apartments, that kids don't grow up well," Maldonado said in Spanish, speaking through a translator. "I live here, I'm a good mom, it's up to the parent."

Leticia Valencia and her husband owned a home before the housing market crashed, but have been renting a ranch in Salton City since then. They moved to Indio to be closer to their jobs as soccer coaches and to schools and amenities for their six kids. Her family applied for a five-bedroom townhouse at Summer Field and moved in about six months ago, after as much time on a waiting list.

"It's a big process, but you know what, it's worth it," said Valencia, adding that her family can now walk to grocery stores, a laundromat, a middle and elementary school and a Head Start preschool. In Salton City, those resources were miles away. "It's very convenient. We're in the middle of everything."

She and her husband put 30 percent of their income toward rent, and are saving to buy a house again someday.

"It's not a forever term, it's a meanwhile," she said.



**Leticia Valencia** outside her unit at Summer Field Apartments on March 16, 2016. (Photo: Rosalie Murphy/The Desert Sun)

Property manager Lucy Salas said the building's applicants generally spend nine months to a year on waiting lists.

A 2015 Desert Sun investigation found that the Coachella Valley has just over 16,000 affordable rental units, and at the very least, 48,000 families that qualify as "low-income." About 1,600 of those units are in Indio, a city of more than 80,000 people.

"There's a dearth of affordable housing pretty much anywhere you go around the country," said Thom Amdur, executive director of the National Housing and Rehabilitation Association, a trade group for affordable housing developers.

Generally, when affordable housing is built using public financing, the developer promises to keep rents affordable for a certain length of time, usually several decades. After those contracts expire, however, developers can — and often do — redevelop properties as market-rate units.

Amdur said that in the last five years, he's seen lots of private investors buying real estate, including affordable rental units. He worries that when affordable covenants expire, those buyers will turn the properties into market-rate rentals or condos — which low-income families won't be able to afford, especially as rents rise across California.

"We're seeing a lot of people buying these properties at prices that... don't make a lot of sense unless they're planning on taking it out of the (affordable) portfolio and making it market-rate," Amdur said about the trend.

### [RISING RENTS: In Palm Springs, rising rents mean reduced savings](#)

But Community Preservation Partners and its parent company, affordable housing developer WNC & Associates, have a reputation for "not just preserving, but turning around assets and making them better," Amdur said. CPP's Aronson said the company hopes to acquire other affordable properties in the Coachella Valley, as well.

Most importantly for residents, Aronson said the property's affordable housing covenant will be extended to 2072.

Of course, advocates hope success on this project will spur others like it.

"The fact of the matter is, the needs are so extreme right now," Amdur said. "You could double or triple the production of affordable housing units and still not meet the need."

*Rosalie Murphy covers real estate and business at The Desert Sun. Reach her at [rosalie.murphy@desertsun.com](mailto:rosalie.murphy@desertsun.com) or on Twitter @rozmurph.*