

AS APPEARED IN THE MARINSCOPE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

TAMALPAIS COMMONS NEARS COMPLETION

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A pioneering new mixed-use housing development at 505 Miller Ave. is nearing its scheduled March completion date and is already drawing considerable interest – nearly five dozen prospective renters turned out for the first open house last Friday.

The green-certified project, known as Tamalpais Commons, includes a dozen two- and three-bedroom homes in the rear of the property along the banks of Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio, while the front mixed-use building features ground-floor commercial space with nine residential units on the second and third floors (live-work lofts, one-bedroom units and below-market studios).

Referring to the mixed-use building's quartet of one-bedroom live-work lofts, project developers Mike House said, "Live-work is a product that has never been done before in Mill Valley, and we're sort of a live-work town."

Below those live-work lofts, three commercial spaces have been combined into one to make room for a new restaurant called the Dish, which will be overseen by Mill Valley resident Peter Schumacher. The Dish will be jointly owned by Schumacher and a group of Mill Valley investors, House said.

"There was a lot of demand in the restaurant," House said. "Peter is just a really good, proven Mill Valley operator."

The ground floor's two other retail spaces will house a new toy shop called Tam Toys and Yolo Frozen Yogurt, owned by Karen Kauh.

While the developer's original plan was to sell all the units, the tanking real estate market has forced House Properties to rethink its approach. The company has instead opted to lease most of the units (three have already been pre-leased), while trying out a limited listing of four condo units with Morgan Lane Real Estate starting March 1. Listing price for a one-bedroom condo would be about \$875,000, House said.

"It's a very high-end mixed-use building," he said.



With the rear units already completed and the front building slated to be finished by March 1, the company held its first open-house event for potential lessees last Friday. One- and two-bedroom condos lease for \$2,800 to \$3,300 a month, while two- and three-bedroom homes are from \$3,500 to \$4,000 a month. The live-work units start at \$3,400.

In some ways, a lot is riding on the project. Depending on how the final product is received by the community, it could either change attitudes toward higher-density mixed-use projects or further galvanize wary residents' opposition to denser infill development.

"I do believe this is a good test case to see what works and what possibly may not be working," House said. "I think we're going to learn a lot from this project."

A large part of the reason 505 Miller survived Mill Valley's marathon planning process was the developer's willingness to do hours and hours of community outreach to neighbors, residents, planners and nearly every Mill Valley organization in existence. It was the only large development in recent memory to be universally lauded by community members and planning commissioners alike when it finally did gain approval.

"We definitely wanted to set an example," House said. "I think you have to go through many different meetings, but with that the project got better."