

Plan B offered for affordable housing

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Rather than see a Highwood apartment complex converted to pricey condominiums and its low-income residents forced out, housing advocates have proposed an alternative.

North Shore Estates, a 40-year-old rental complex on Sheridan Road, houses many of the area's lowest-paid workers, most of them Mexican immigrants who hold service jobs.

A potential buyer selected from 20 bidders after the property went up for sale in May has outlined plans to convert North Shore Estates' three buildings into condos.

Now the non-profit Hispanic Housing Development Corp. of Chicago has submitted an alternative that calls for preserving one-third of the property's rental units for low-income tenants, officials said. The remaining two-thirds would be turned into condos, with 25 percent of them sold at "affordable prices and marketed to current tenants," according to a written statement issued by the corporation.

"Hopefully, we'll have the opportunity to acquire the property and rehab it to accommodate--instead of replace--the existing tenancy," said Paul Mittleman, the group's director of preservation acquisition.

The Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs, based in Winnetka, has advocated for tenants and held meetings with local school and social service providers. The group asked Hispanic Housing Development to submit an alternative plan.

Lake County United, a membership group of 35 churches and synagogues, also supports the new plan.

"Our hope is they consider a more socially fitting proposal that looks to the needs of families," said Lake County United spokesman Tom Lenz.

Converting the apartments to high-end condominiums would mark significant change in city and school demographics in the suburb of 5,700 people.

North Shore Estates, near the million-dollar homes in Ft. Sheridan, has a history of crowding, with some estimating that 1,500 to 2,000 tenants live in the 252 units to share the rent.

Highwood Mayor Vincent Donofrio, who has seen both proposals, said he is wary of the alternate plan and would prefer to see owner-occupied condos.

"We've been having trouble throughout the whole city--and I'm not just pinpointing North Shore Estates--with out-of-town landlords and overcrowding," Donofrio said. "I feel like if they own the property, they will take care of it."

The property is owned by 88 investors and managed by Inland Real Estate Corp., based in Oak Brook.

Within the next two months, the owners are expected to vote on a contract with the initial bidder, Ross Waxman, said Inland spokesman Darryl Cater. The investors also will review the proposal from Hispanic Housing Development, which is trying to raise money to buy the building, Cater said.

Cater said he was not sure when the vote would be. He would not give details about Waxman's plan or the apartments' likely purchase price.

Donofrio said that during a presentation to the City Council Waxman said he planned to spend \$5 million to \$10 million to improve North Shore Estates.

It likely would take Waxman a few years to complete the project, allowing some tenants to remain on the property during the conversion, Donofrio said.