

Mountain Democrat

PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA



The proposed Center for the Ages would be next door to Fire Station 85 on El Dorado Hills Boulevard. The estimated cost to build the center is around \$13 million. Courtesy graphics

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Parker, January join forces on new EDH senior center

By [Julie Samrick](#) [From page A1](#) | September 07, 2015

EL DORADO HILLS — Local historian and community activist Betty January hopes to work her magic yet again. Just as her perseverance got the El Dorado Hills Library built with the help of Parker Development, January has partnered with the Serrano developer once more to bring a new senior center to fruition.

A Center for the Ages of El Dorado Hills will primarily serve as a senior center, January emphasized, but the name is a reminder there will be facilities all residents might enjoy. The current Moni Gilmore Senior Center does not have adequate space for El Dorado Hills' growing senior population, January said, yet, "The CSD staff has done a wonderful job running a dual purpose facility." The former fire station was transformed into a senior center nearly a decade ago and the county-run senior day care program was added last year.

Parker Development Co. offered January and architect Charlie Downs 11 acres of open space between the archery range and Fire Station 85 for the project. Parker Development's Director of Government Relations Kirk Bone said January and Downs were also given seed money to see if it's a viable project. Next steps are to get the land in January and Downs' names so they may begin filing permits.

An environmental impact report for Parker's plans to rezone the 98-acre former Executive Golf Course to build 763 homes will be released Sept. 16. Bone said the senior center project is part of the same EIR to save paperwork and time. The public will have 60 days to comment on the project.

Bone said for three years the 11-acres was offered to any group in El Dorado Hills.

"We've made it clear if there was a community group interested and they had a plan that helped the community, we'd donate the land," he said.

The El Dorado Hills Community Services District was offered it as part of the Central El Dorado Hills Specific Plan, but the CSD turned it down, Bone added. CSD General Manager Brent Dennis said, "They (Parker Development Co.) prepared a conceptual plan to put two soccer fields there. We would've had to build a 30- to 40-foot high fence so soccer balls wouldn't go onto El Dorado Hills Boulevard. No one thought that was a valid use."

January said at some point it must be decided whether the new senior center will be maintained by the CSD or if it goes private.

"I'd love to bring over Janet Kenneweg and the rest of the (current senior center) staff," January said. She said she acted alone by approaching Parker because she wants to move quickly.

"The CSD wants soccer fields, open space and bike paths," she said. "The seniors' needs remain neglected. The population in El Dorado Hills is more than 50 percent seniors now and growing. I'm 84 years old and don't want to wait."

January will appeal to the CSD Board of Directors at its Sept. 10 board meeting to make seniors as high a priority as parks.

"The CSD would be a logical proponent (and partner for this project)," said Bone. "But they've staked out their position by saying they want that area to remain open space."

As for whether the CSD would support a new senior center at that location, Dennis said, "We can't say. That could be exactly what we need, but we haven't even finished the Master Planning process yet."

A Center for the Ages features a 30,000-square-foot complex with plans to include a pool, tennis court and community room accommodating 500 to 600 people with the option to partition the space into smaller rooms. January envisions events being held for rent there, including crab feeds and wedding receptions. "We sorely need a community room of this size in El Dorado Hills," she said.

For seniors there will be a physical therapy pool, an exercise room and classrooms for cards, crafts, etc. The lobby will have a cluster of chairs and bookcases with a resource room adjacent to it for computers and meetings.

January said they wouldn't need to remove trees in the wooded area because the center would be closer to the street where there are fewer trees. The oak trees behind it would be capitalized upon by creating a shaded, outdoor gathering area. The center's main entry road on Wilson Boulevard would be shared with Fire Station 85.

January said it's all bringing back memories of building the El Dorado Hills Library a decade ago, which architect Charlie Downs designed.

"As soon as I got the OK, I called Charlie and said, 'It's like the old library days!'" she said.

For three hours the two mapped out their vision on a restaurant napkin. They have been studying state-of-the-art senior facilities statewide as well. Parker Development gave the library's final exterior approval

and would do the same for the center's exterior. The only other caveats Parker gave, January said, is that the building must be one level and the architecture must blend in with the surroundings.

The cost to build the center will be \$12 million to \$13 million. Funds would come from a variety of sources, January said. She has already approached Fire Chief Dave Roberts and attended a fire board meeting about a potential joint use partnership in order to receive fire department funds. The large community room could serve as the fire department's disaster area for surrounding communities and fire station staff could store gear in the new center's ample storage room.

She is also thinking about community enhancement funds, which helped get the library built. There are grants too, which January said would be easier to get since so many businesses are looking to have a stake in senior projects.

"When you say seniors all sorts of opportunities come up," January said.

Mello-Roos taxes coming from future El Dorado Hills developments could also be a future source of revenue, she said.

January wants to partner with others, like Oak Ridge High School. She could see staff and students wanting to use the center's commercial kitchen to possibly build a culinary program.

"First we need to find out if there's an interest in a project like this," Bone said. "The library can be a template for what we're moving forward with. That desire for a library was organic. It didn't come from the developer, but the community. We have been working on the Central El Dorado Hills Specific Plan since 2011 and we have heard that there is a need for community/senior facilities and active recreational facilities. We look forward to working with and supporting Betty January's proposal, which she will present to the CSD Board (Sept. 10). This support will include support for site planning and an application to the county to review the proposed project. In addition, we are considering working with youth sport groups in a similar manner to provide active recreational facilities."

"I think A Center for the Ages is a good plan...an excellent plan," January said. "It would be a senior center open to all seniors in El Dorado Hills with additional community needs."

If all goes well she said building could begin within a year.