

Santa Barbara Housing Authority Proposes 103 Apartments on Downtown Parcel

Project at the corner of Castillo and Carrillo streets, near Highway 101, is aimed to serve the needs of the 'missing middle'



An architect's rendering shows a 103-unit apartment complex proposed for the Carrillo-Castillo commuter lot in downtown Santa Barbara by the Housing Authority. (Courtesy of The Cernal Collective)

By Joshua Molina, Noozhawk Staff Writer | [@JECMolina](#)
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One of Santa Barbara's gateways to downtown is about to experience a transformation.

The [Santa Barbara's Housing Authority](#) wants to build 103 apartments on the corner of Carrillo and Castillo streets for Santa Barbara's "missing middle" — people who can't afford market-rate apartments, but earn too much to qualify for housing subsidies.

Officials unveiled the plan at a virtual meeting Monday night. "We have been struggling with how do we meet the needs of the missing middle," said Skip Szymanski, deputy executive director and chief operating officer for the Housing Authority. "We have done an admirable job with providing low-income affordable housing, but we do have a need for that missing middle."

The projected rents for the development are \$1,600 for a studio; \$1,900 for a one-bedroom; and \$2,200 for a two-bedroom. Market rents for those same-sized units would be up to \$3,300, \$4,125 and \$5,175, respectively, without price restrictions.

As of June 2020, a one-bedroom apartment in Santa Barbara rents for an average of \$1,800 a month; two-bedroom apartments rent for an average about \$3,150. Szymanski said a person in Santa Barbara would need to make almost \$50 an hour, or about \$100,000 a year, to afford an average \$2,555 monthly rent.

"One look at craigslist and you will note that there are several listings that are asking much, much higher than this amount," Szymanski said, citing The Marc on upper State Street and the Anatega, on the corner of Anacapa and Ortega streets.



Skip Szymanski, deputy executive director and chief operating officer for the Housing Authority, explains the proposed project to build 103 units on the Carrillo-Castillo commuter lot in downtown Santa Barbara. (Joshua Molina / Noozhawk photo)

The proposal comes nearly two years after the Housing Authority [proposed 40 tiny homes](#) for the homeless at the site — an idea met with revulsion by neighbors, but one that ultimately fell through because state funding collapsed. Now the Housing Authority is back with a decidedly more polished plan. The site currently is used as a commuter parking lot for downtown workers, and a place for people who live in their recreational vehicles to park.

However, Rob Dayton, the city's transportation, parking and planning manager, said the site is underutilized and is the city's "the lowest performing" parking lot. It costs about \$40 per month to

park in the commuter lot. "It's hard to keep occupied," Dayton said. "We have about half the interest that we should expect to have here."

The Housing Authority wants to build 66 studios, 26 one-bedrooms and 11 two-bedrooms. Part of the building would be four stories. The project proposes 52 parking spaces. The "missing middle" refers to people who earned between 80 and 120 percent of the average median income.



An architect's rendering shows a 103-unit apartment complex proposed for the Carrillo-Castillo commuter lot in downtown Santa Barbara by the Housing Authority. (Courtesy of The Cernal Collective)

For a one-person household, that amount is up to \$73,752; for a two-person household, up to \$84,288. For a three-person household the amount is up to \$94,826, and for a four-person household, up to \$105,360. The median home price in Santa Barbara is about \$1.29 million

"The missing middle is the backbone of Santa Barbara's workforce," Szymanski said. "They are our teachers, construction workers, mail carriers, medical assistants, hospitality and service industry employees, and our office workers."

The Housing Authority plans to keep the trees facing the creek and Highway 101. Szymanski said the Housing Authority's goal with the project is to provide affordable housing with the least amount of environmental impacts, and to strengthen downtown.

The agency has a successful track record with projects such as Casa de las Fuentes, El Carrillo and Artisan Court. "The primary population that we will be looking toward would be those who do not depend on owning or leasing a vehicle," Szymanski said. "Our society is just not depending on a vehicle the way they used to."

The Housing Authority did not take direct questions from people who called in to the meeting. Celia Wright, administrative specialist, summarized the questions, which included the number of parking spaces, funding for the project, and potential street parking impacts from the people who live at the new site.

The project is in its early stages, and must still go before the Santa Barbara City Council. Szymanski said the Housing Authority is in talks with a private investor to fund portions of the project.

"The Housing Authority has accomplished something remarkable in this project proposal," said Councilwoman Meagan Harmon, who listened in on the virtual meeting. "They've pulled together every resource — from city land, to private partnerships — all with the goal of building what our city most desperately needs: housing that working folks can afford. This is an outstanding concept."

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