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Senior housing in works

BY SCOTT BLAKE, FLORIDA TODAY

Developers plan to bring a new, multifaceted retirement community to Viera.

The Watersong project off Wickham Road would have housing options for older residents fitting into a wide range of health conditions and assistance needs. The project's construction cost is estimated at about \$50 million.

Plans call for about 300 or more housing units, including 43 "South Florida-style" cottage homes, 148 apartments, 26 "enhanced-living" apartments, 24 assisted-living units, 24 skilled-nursing beds and a number of Alzheimer's units.

The project -- targeted for people in their mid-60s and older -- would cover 26 acres, and eventually could be expanded to more than 45 acres, according to Senior Living Communities, the Charlotte, N.C., developer.

Watersong will be west of Interstate 95 on the south side of Wickham Road, across the street from the Wyndham gated subdivision, according to the Brevard County Land Development Office, which has received the plans. The site also is west of a hospital project planned by Health First.

The developer expects to receive final zoning approval for the Viera project between early September and late October, with construction starting soon after that.

The first phase of construction is expected to be completed in early 2009. That would include standard apartments, "enhanced-living" apartments, an assisted-living building and an Alzheimer's building.

The second phase would have more apartments, assisted-living units, Alzheimer's units and single-family homes that would be "built as they are contracted," said Stewart Wiley, the company's vice president of marketing and sales.

Prices for the units have not been finalized, but they are expected to range from more than \$100,000 for apartment units, up to more than \$400,000 for single-family homes, Wiley said.

The average age of Watersong residents is expected to be between 75 and 78. Wiley described it as "the next step beyond" a community for residents age 55 and up, such as the Heritage Isle gated community located nearby in Viera.

About one in five Brevard residents is age 65 or older, and about one in 10 is age 75 or older.

"The atmosphere and vision of Viera are what drew us in to this growing community," Senior Living Communities President and Chief Executive Officer Donald Thompson said in a statement announcing the project Wednesday. "We're very excited to begin this project."

Watersong will employ about 120 people when it opens, and about 180 people when it is fully completed, the developers said.

Watersong also will offer a health care clubhouse, a wellness center with indoor and outdoor pools, a putting green, full-time wellness coordinators and a central clubhouse, the company said.

Watersong will be a gated community with 24-hour staff to respond to emergencies. Residents will have a "push-button/pull-cord" transmitter on the wall of every bathroom.

In addition, the community will offer what developers describe as "country-club-style dining," social events and activities, wellness and exercise programs, and on-site maintenance and housekeeping staff.

The company plans to open a sales center at One Senior Place at 8085 Spyglass Hill Road in Viera in early September.