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Developer setting \$200 million stage for Silver Spring transformation

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It's one of the oldest enclaves in the D.C. region developed exclusively as affordable housing for seniors, and now the Elizabeth House in Silver Spring is being primed for a major overhaul.

Lee Development Group and the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County plan to launch a \$200 million mixed-use project at the site by Second Avenue and Fenwick Lane to include two additional apartment buildings, new non-residential uses like a wellness center and artist workspace, and significant upgrades to the existing affordable housing units.

The Montgomery County Planning Board voted unanimously July 23 to approve the preliminary plan for Elizabeth Square, which calls for 907 market-priced and affordable housing units, a little more than 6,000 square feet of community and other non-residential uses. The partners still need several more rounds of approval before they can break ground on the project, which is at least a year away, but the board's approval appears to be a positive sign after nearly three years in the works. The developers also wanted to open the complex up to the community as a whole, and that included creating a more open connection from Second Street where the current Elizabeth House now sits.

The plan as currently proposed is far more ambitious than what HOC officials first had in mind when they approached Rosslyn-based KGD Architecture with the notion of improving the condition of the seniors complex, which was built in the mid-1960s. KGD Principal [Tom Donaghy](#) said planners were worried about the prospect of displacing the current 160-unit Elizabeth House residents.

Adjacent to the two-building campus, which also includes the more recently built Alexander House, are a pair of two-story office buildings owned by Lee Development. The HOC approached the developer about a joint venture, and out of that emerged the current concept.

"Where are they going to go, and some of those people are 78, 80 years old," Donaghy said. "Because of those things converging, the HOC started a new era of redeveloping their properties."

The idea for the site — bounded by Fenwick Lane, Second Avenue, Apple Avenue, and adjacent railroad tracks — was to infuse a variety of uses, housing types and age groups. Taking advantage of density bonuses under county zoning laws, the partners agreed to set aside the first two floors in each of the new buildings for public use. Concepts include a health and wellness center, a bistro kitchen where residents can learn to cook, a dance studio and even a digital media lab where seniors can attend virtual meetings with their doctors.

The project will also include a rooftop garden, where residents can grow their own vegetables, a therapeutic pool for seniors and a separate pool for small children. It will also include environmentally friendly and energy efficiency concepts including green walls through which plants filter air and distribute it throughout the building.

"The idea is to put a mix of programs in the buildings that allow, or force, people to move throughout the buildings so young and old interact," Donaghy said.

Plans call for four phases of development, starting with the 15-story Elizabeth House III, to include 277 units. Next up will be the 19-story Elizabeth House IV, with 330 units, to be built on the site of the current Elizabeth House once those residents have been moved into Elizabeth House III. The partners also plan to renovate the 300-unit Alexander House, which was built in 1992.

Daniel J. Sernovitz covers commercial real estate.