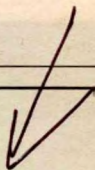


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Upfront



News Digest

Public service now rewarded with housing

Volunteerism has obvious benefits — making the world a better place, getting more ties to community, feeling better about yourself — but residents of East Palo Alto have a new reason to spend time helping others in their city: It will increase their chances of getting a unit in the city's subsidized housing program.

East Palo Alto is believed to be the first local municipality to add volunteering to its list of considered factors for housing programs.

The goal of the city's new guidelines is to reward residents who have made a commitment to building the city's community, according to Housing Services Director Lisa Hamburger.

Before applying, residents have to donate 100 or more hours within six months to get "points" in the city's system. The more hours people donate, the more points they accrue. Donating 200 hours of community service in one year gets two points, and 500 hours over three years wins three.

Although there is some concern that nonprofits could corrupt the system, Hamburger believes the right benefits are in place. Nonprofits will want to reward those that give their time, she said.

Currently, there are 70 affordable housing units being developed by the city. Those units will be finished around 2005, and starting in February of 2003, some spaces in those units will become available. Of the 70, 38 are for sale and 32 are for rent.

Residents of East Palo Alto, emergency personal, single heads of households, senior citizens and people displaced by the city's redevelopment agency will also get preferential status in the low-income housing program, as voted by the City Council last week.

"It's very challenging to come up with something that's perceived as equitable," Mayor Duane Bay said.

— Bill D'Agostino