

Soledad housing market matches dynamic growth

By **SUNITA VIJAYAN**
The Salinas Californian

Soledad is holding onto its reputation as a rapidly growing city, recovering quickly from a moratorium on construction in 2004.

The halt to building had been imposed because sewer capacity wasn't keeping up with the housing boom, which began about a decade ago.

Izzy Rodriguez, the city's economic director, said about 1,000 homes have been built in the past 10 years, and many more are on the way.

"(Construction) has not slowed down over the years, and in fact has been backing up with other developers looking at the unincorporated areas," Rodriguez said. "Most developers find that the city is open to new development."

Some of the developments that will be completed within the next five years include a still unnamed 171-unit subdivision by Matthew Homes located toward the east of Soledad off of Gabilan Drive and Shaw Development's 15-acre shopping center located at Nestle Road and Los Coches Drive, which will include a three-story hotel.

One developer with several projects pending is Pacific Grove's Nader Agha. Besides a 250,000-square-foot mixed residential and commercial project, he plans to build a 323-unit apartment project in the north-east part of the city.

Rodriguez said while the 2004 moratorium brought most developments to a temporary halt, the city performed repairs as quickly as it could to maintain sewage capacity while seeking money to upgrade its system.

Since the moratorium was implemented, he said, 14 residential projects were put on hold.

State money sought

The moratorium was lifted in February, after which Soledad has made changes to its wastewater system to accommodate new developments.

To add sewage capacity, Rodriguez said, the city sought help from the state. It's trying to



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Roger Barrientos walks through the construction sites of five model homes Sept. 12 in Soledad's Orchard Lane Estates tract.

AT A GLANCE

Details about some upcoming developments in Soledad:

n GABILAN APARTMENTS:

Construction on 88 units of affordable housing by Global Premier Developments will start in November.

n ORCHARD LANE ESTATES:

Construction on 163 single-family

buy a disused sewage plant from the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad. Senate Bill 276, authored by Sen. Jeff Denham, R-Merced, would authorize the purchase if Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signs the bill by the end of September.

The city also is party to a joint application by the Monterey County Water Resources Agency for \$40 million from Proposition 50, a water-resources bond approved by California voters in November 2002. If approved, Soledad's share of the bond would be \$8 million.

Meanwhile, Award Homes' Orchard Lane Estates, a subdivi-

homes by Award Homes started in April.

n EDENBRIDGE:

80 units of market-rate, multi-family residential townhomes by Pacific Grove developer Nader Agha have just been approved. Construction date not yet determined.

sion of 163 single-family units at Gabilan Drive and Orchard Lane, has begun sales on five different models. The development is about halfway built.

Charles McKeag, vice president of land acquisition and development for the Santa Clara-based firm, said his company first considered building in the city in the mid 1990s.

City 'proactive,' builder says

"We've had a good run of success working with the city, and we're encouraged by their proactive stance with respect to future growth," McKeag said.

The company's other development, Orchard Lane Villas, is

slated to include 173 single-family homes between Gabilan Drive and Metz Road, has been delayed by the moratorium and a start date has not been established.

"Since the moratorium was lifted, we've been working with the city and other developers to ensure that they successfully complete the necessary upgrades to the wastewater process," he said.

One idea McKeag said he's working through with other developers is a program to prepay the city's sewage impact fees, a required payment normally doled out over time.

By getting the money up front, the city could pay for upgrades to the wastewater treatment system, he said.

"We haven't really encountered any problem to date and don't expect any to occur in the future," McKeag said. "We're moving forward with a good deal of confidence in the city."

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