

Retirement complex to meet demand in Wellington



In response to research showing a strong need for retirement homes in Wellington, property developer Group 3 Properties will next year begin constructing a 53-unit apartment complex offering a host of facilities appropriate for older people. These will include an on-site restaurant, a doctor's surgery, a sick bay, around-the-clock nursing assistance, a lift, wheelchair access, luxury transportation, and shops within walking distance.

According to Adrian Weyer of Van der Wolf Weyer Architects, plans for the building, which will be "contemporary Victorian" in design, have already been passed by the Heritage Aesthetic Committee, which strives to preserve the original architectural style of the area's historic towns, among them picturesque Franschhoek and Paarl. Chris Tapsell of Group 3 Properties says the proposal to build a retirement complex in the town has also been welcomed by the local municipality. La Rive will comprise studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments built on three levels above a ground floor retail area. Basement parking will be provided for residents.

Tenants for seven small ground floor shops, which will range in size from 41 to about 50m², will be carefully chosen with the needs of the residents in mind. "We are seeking investors or operators who will bring useful facilities to older people, such as a laundrette, a hairdressing salon, perhaps a small pharmacy and so on, and have already been approached by some interested parties," says Tapsell.

The restaurant on the ground floor will be separated into two dining areas: one for the public and the other for residents, with a central kitchen serving three meals a day. "Although each apartment will have its own kitchen, many residents may prefer to eat in the restaurant," he says. "Unlike many other retirement complexes that include the costs of meals and medical care in the levies, regardless of how often each resident uses these facilities, La Rive will bill residents on a monthly basis only for the services they use. Our intention is to keep the levies as low as possible – we estimate that these will start from R500 for the smallest unit – and residents can then add on the services they can afford."

A communal entertainment area will be provided on the ground floor, where residents can socialise and enjoy activities like bingo and dancing, and provision will also be made for a small library. In addition, an attractive indoor courtyard area, greened with indigenous plants to create an atrium effect will be created on the first floor, with tables and chairs set out where residents can chat to friends.

The ground floor facilities will include a doctor's surgery, nurse's quarters and sick bay. Tapsell says a full frail care unit will not be provided, as there is a hospital nearby, but a nurse will be on call 24-hours a day to provide medical assistance when required.

The residential section of the complex will include five two-bedroomed units, some situated on the top level with a high-ceilinged, "loft apartment feel", according to Weyers, who also designed the Tyger Waterfront apartment blocks built by Group 3 Properties. The two-bedroomed apartments will have a floor area of about 55m² each. There will also be 14 studio units, ranging from about 20m² to 32m² each, and the remainder of the apartments will be one-bedroomed units of about 41m².

All the units will have generous windows, allowing natural light and sunshine to stream in and maximising the mountain views that will be seen from most of the apartments. About 50% of the units will also face onto a stream on the boundary and well-established trees. Weyers says each lounge will have a 3m x 1.8m sliding window extending across the outer wall, with a railing like a Juliette balcony in front of it. Large windows (1.2m x 1.2m) will also be installed in the bedrooms.

Each apartment will have an open plan kitchen and lounge, separated by a breakfast bar. The kitchen will come equipped with built-in cupboards, with space provided for a fridge; and a stove, sink and water point for a washing machine will also be provided. There will be a full bathroom, with separate shower and bath, in each unit. "The bathrooms will have windows for natural light and ventilation, and the floor space will be generous to facilitate entry of a wheelchair," Weyers says. "Other fixtures will be provided to assist older people, such as handles in the bath and non-slip floor tiles."

Doorways and walkways will be especially wide throughout the building to allow easy wheelchair access, and a lift will serve all floors, including the basement parking area. Entrances to the apartments from the walkways will be separated by five or six metres to create a more private feel, says Weyers.

The site on Church Street is well positioned, just a 50m walk away from a supermarket and other shopping facilities. Tapsell says top security will also be provided at the complex: a remote-controlled sliding gate will be installed at the entrance to the secure underground parking area, and there will be a security guard on duty at all hours in the ground floor foyer.

As the development is being aimed predominantly at 55 to 80-year-olds who still enjoy an active lifestyle, the developers will provide a luxury 10-seater bus with wheelchair access to allow groups of residents to visit major shopping centres, tourist hubs such as Franschhoek, wine farms and other places of interest. "While the developers will purchase the bus, the body corporate will arrange outings and be responsible for its maintenance," he says.

The prices of the apartments range from R349 900 to R999 000, including one basement parking bay per unit. Nineteen additional bays for visitors and shop owners will be provided on the ground floor.

Tapsell says the apartments will be available to buy-to-rent investors as well as owner-occupiers. "We have already had enquiries from people wanting to buy units for their parents, and believe the complex will attract interest from farmers who regularly visit Wellington and would like a safe living environment offering all the necessary facilities for their folks. The units will also appeal to city people who would like a retirement home in the country."

Construction of La Rive will begin in mid-2009 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2010. For more information contact Chris Louwrens of Group 3 Properties on 083 287 5627.