



## **New affordable housing complex is Salem’s largest yet**

by [Abbey McDonald](#) on October 30, 2024

Hundreds of seniors, farmworkers and people who lost their homes in wildfires are among those building a community in Mahonia Crossing, an affordable housing development in southeast Salem which held a grand opening on Tuesday.

With 313 units, it’s the largest affordable housing project in Salem, according to [state data](#). The project comes amid [a boom in affordable housing](#) spurred by increased state investment.

In a speech, Nicole Utz, housing administrator of the Salem Housing Authority, said the project represents hope for those families. The housing authority was one of several project partners, and will be administering housing vouchers on site.

“Each unit here at Mahonia Crossing stands as a testament to our collective resolve to ensure that everyone in our community has access to a place they can call home. We know that housing is foundational. It affects education, health and overall quality of life,” Utz said. “To the current and future residents of Mahonia Crossing, we welcome you home.”

The apartments are spread across 18 buildings. Residents must earn between 30 and 80% of Marion County’s median income, which is \$27,390 to \$73,040 for a family of four.

People started moving in this summer, and the majority of apartments are already occupied. It’s located on 5120 Salal St. S.E. in the South Gateway neighborhood,

Rents start at \$969 a month for a one-bedroom apartment, \$1,159 for a two-bedroom and \$1,335 for a three-bedroom.

Using federal rent vouchers 51 units limit rent people pay to 30% of their income. Thirty-one of those apartments are reserved for seniors, Utz said in her speech.



John Miller, who owned the property Mahonia Crossing was built on, said during the Oct. 30 grand opening that he wanted to preserve as many trees as possible. (Abbey McDonald/ Salem Reporter)

It's the largest project to date by developer Community Development Partners, which focuses on building, then managing affordable housing alongside community organizations. The Portland-based company has projects in Oregon, California, Arizona, Nevada and Colorado.

CEO Eric Paine said in an interview that the project was completed "lightning fast" for affordable housing. The company began work and applied for funding starting in 2021, and he said both phases were able to be finished in a similar time frame.

"We got the property, the land under contract. We were able to submit the financing, funding from the state and get funded in the first round that the project was submitted," he said. "The timing just seemed to sync up."

Paine said building relationships with the community was key to the planning, and was largely facilitated by John Miller who sold the site.



A major theme of the design, and future management of Mahonia Crossing, will be to promote intergenerational community bonding.



Eric Paine, CEO of Community Development Partners, speaks at the grand opening of Mahonia Crossing, the largest project his company has completed. (Abbey McDonald/ Salem Reporter)

The project has partnered with EngAGE NW, a nonprofit which brings free learning and enrichment classes for residents in affordable housing communities. Options for residents will include the arts, fitness and computer classes.

Laura Spidell, executive director of EngAGE NW, said in an interview that the work at Mahonia Crossing is just getting started. They're planning to start with events that get people out of their homes to meet their neighbors, like an art class or barbeque. EngAGE will work with community partners to offer supportive groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and peer support.

"That's really the heart of what we do, is trying to take the physical spaces developers provide and turn them into communities that are connected, supported and the residents really engage with each other," she said.

The property includes community rooms of various sizes, a fitness room, laundry facilities, playgrounds and plenty of outdoor benches and tables for people to gather. The shared spaces are decorated with art from Pringle Elementary School students.

A skybridge overlooking a central playground will give older residents a place to watch the gatherings from indoors if they'd like, Paine said.

“Being up there, and looking out, watching kids running around and playing can be inspiring,” he said.



A kitchen in the new Mahonia Crossing affordable apartments in southeast Salem. (Abbey McDonald/ Salem Reporter)

Miller, the site owner, had emphasized the importance of maintaining oak trees on the site during development. Several large ones in the heart of the apartment complex stayed put. Other, smaller ones were removed, tended to at Miller’s nursery for over a year, then replanted once the project neared completion.

Miller is president of Wildwood | Mahonia and has developed much of the surrounding land over the past few decades. He said in a Tuesday speech that he was “so happy” about Community Development Partners bringing equity and economic diversity to the project plan.

“People said to me, ‘John, you’ve been working on this community for so long, and it’s so great. Why would you invite a low-income housing developer to be a part of it?’” he said. “I guess my answer is: just look around.”

The full project cost \$114 million, including \$42 million in state grants through Oregon’s Local Innovation and Fast Track program. In February, Thomas Eldridge, development manager for Community Development Partners, said the complex is funded 40% by government grants, 26% by loans, 24% by private funding and 10% by other sources.

Speakers included representatives from the Housing and Urban Development administration, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Congresswoman Andrea Salinas and state Rep. Tom Andersen.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read, who's running for Secretary of State, called the project a good investment for the state and the community.

Many said there was more work to be done to address the state's housing shortage, including Mayor Chris Hoy, who said the goal is to have a home for everyone.

“For too many Salem residents, their home may be a tent on the side of the road, a mattress in a warming shelter, or the cold fear of staring into the darkness of having nowhere to go. People who live on our streets live in fear of being victimized and not knowing where they will sleep. In fear of their belongings being stolen, and of declining health,” he said. “Mahonia Crossing will change that reality for so many people, and I’m so excited for that.”



John Miller, President of Wildwood|Mahonia speaks at a grand opening and ribbon cutting on Oct. 29, 2024. (Abbey McDonald/Salem Reporter)





Film on stairwell windows add neon highlights to the newly finished Mahonia Crossing apartments in south Salem. (Abbey McDonald/ Salem Reporter)



U.S. Rep. Andrea Salinas speaks at the grand opening of Mahonia Crossing. Speakers credited Salinas with securing federal funding to build the affordable apartments. (Abbey McDonald/ Salem Reporter)

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Abbey McDonald joined the Salem Reporter in 2022. She previously worked as the business reporter at The Astorian, where she covered labor issues, health care and social services. A University of Oregon grad, she has also reported for the Malheur Enterprise, The News-Review and Willamette Week.