

# Project addresses city's lack of housing

● Casco Terrace, with 27 units for mixed-income tenants, will be built on State Street starting in July.

By **KELLEY BOUCHARD**

*Staff Writer*

It began as one of the first parking garages in Portland, at a time when few people owned cars.

Built in 1925, the West End building offered 32 parking spaces nestled in one level of steel-reinforced concrete.

Soon, four stories of mixed-income housing will be stacked on top of the squat, sturdy structure at 41 State St., within a stone's throw of the Casco Bay Bridge.

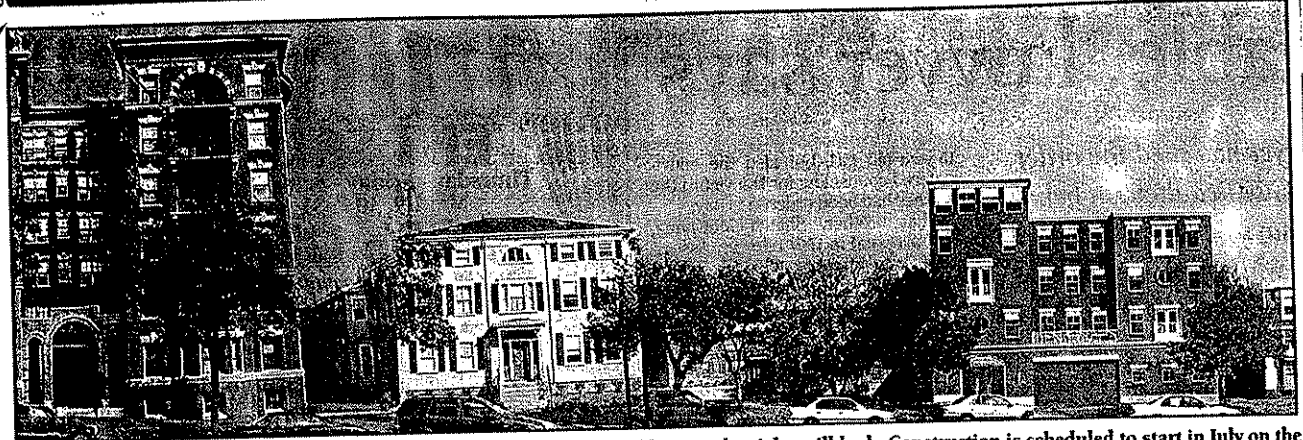
Construction is set to start in July on a 27-unit brick building that will provide subsidized and market-rate apartments in a city where rents are increasingly out of reach for low- and middle-income people. The \$4.4 million Casco Terrace project is the latest effort to satisfy the city's call for developers to create more affordable housing.

City officials say the state-financed project is the kind of development Portland needs to help stem suburban sprawl and provide affordable rental housing for its workforce. They also give it high marks for being attractive and practical, and making the most of an under-used lot with desirable views of the waterfront.

Each apartment will have its own parking space in the existing garage, and several will have balconies, cathedral ceilings and/or bedroom lofts.

"It's a project with a lot going for it," said Mark Adelson, Portland's director of housing and neighborhood services.

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This architect's rendering shows how Casco Terrace, the multi-story building on the right, will look. Construction is scheduled to start in July on the 27-unit brick building, which is the latest effort to satisfy Portland's call for developers to create more affordable housing.

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Thirteen of the apartments will be rented to low-income tenants; 14 will be rented at market rates.

The developers of the project are Nathan Szanton of Portland and Robert C.S. Monks of Cape Elizabeth, partners in Maine Workforce Housing, a limited-liability company. The City Council granted a contract zone for the project in April and the Planning Board approved the site plan this month.

Szanton and Monks are among the developers recruited by the Maine State Housing Authority to try to increase affordable housing for people of all income levels. City officials were impressed with Szanton's efforts to satisfy neighbors' concerns about the project.

Councilor Karen Geraghty, who represents the West End, noted that Szanton reduced the height of the building and dropped the number of units initially proposed by 30 percent. She also was glad to see the project succeed at a location where others had failed.

"That has long been a site that people have wanted to do something with," Geraghty said. "Someone actually came up with an idea that appeared workable."

The general contractor will be

Wright-Ryan Construction Inc., a Portland company that built Island View Apartments, a 70-unit mixed-income project completed last year on Munjoy Hill.

Szanton and Monks bought the parking garage for \$440,000.

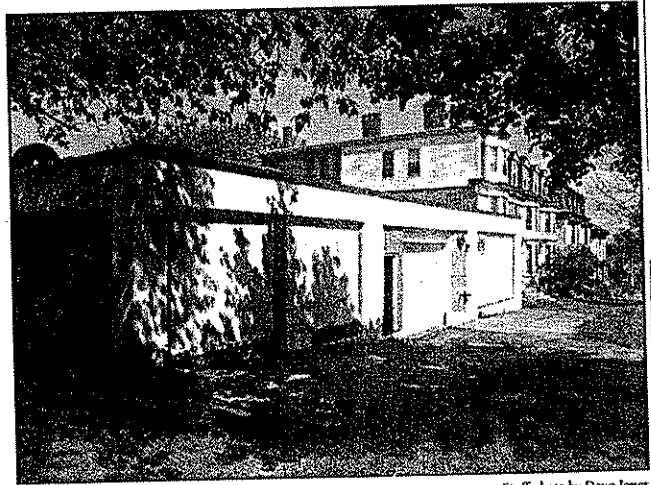
Szanton said construction of Casco Terrace will be financed largely through low-income housing tax credits and tax-exempt bonds. Developers get special financing if they promise to keep a certain percentage of rents affordable. Monks' company, Dirigo Management, will manage the property after it is completed in April.

Rent for the subsidized apartments will be \$672 per month for a one-bedroom apartment and \$880 per month for a two-bedroom unit. To qualify for a subsidized unit, the maximum income per household will be \$22,000 a year for one person, \$25,000 for two people and \$28,000 for three people, Szanton said.

Adelson said it takes a household income of \$33,000 per year to afford the average rent in Portland, which is \$866 per month. As a result, he said, many people end up spending more than half of their income on rent.

The market rates at Casco Terrace will be \$940 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1,220 for a two-bedroom unit. Rents will include the cost of parking, heat and hot water. Laundry rooms will be on each floor.

Fifteen apartments that face the Old Port or the waterfront will have



Staff photo by Doug Jones

The four-story apartment complex will be built on top of what is now a small parking garage at 41 State St., where others projects have failed.

balconies. Seven units on the third floor will have cathedral ceilings in the living rooms and loft bedrooms.

"We tried to give as many tenants as possible some outside space they could enjoy because the property has no land to speak of," Szanton said.

Five parking spaces in the existing garage will be used to create a lobby with an elevator and a trash-disposal area. Locked storage areas will be added to each parking space. The

developers will remove an existing garage door at the back of the building so neighbors on Stetson Court won't have to worry about increased traffic on their small, residential street. The only vehicle access to Casco Terrace will be from State Street.

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