Long waiting lists and a dire need for affordable housing prompted city officials to sign off on rezoning required for a new affordable housing structure near Diridon Station, despite strong objections from neighbors.

The new building is projected to house 82 low-income families and 100 seniors, according to the plans.

Kathy Espinoza-Howard, vice chair of the Santa Clara County Housing Authority, urged council officials to approve the rezoning at a Sept. 30 council meeting so that the project for 777 Park Ave. could move forward.

There had been controversy surrounding the project, in part, because the building will generate little to no tax revenue for the city. Officials questioned if that was the best use of land near the busy train and bus station.

"We will see less of these projects," she said, adding that the demise of redevelopment agency money makes the projects they can do all that much more important.

Tina West, a retiree who lives in Council District 6, said she has learned firsthand that wait lists for the affordable housing units already in place within San Jose can be years long or require very low income. West worked for the city of San Jose for 30 years.

West, 58, said she has been renting in San Jose since she was 18 years old.

"Because I have been a single mother, I have not been able to put away money to purchase my own home yet," she said. "I have always been blessed to living in duplexes for quite a long time. Because I have been a faithful and good tenant, my rent was always kept low."

Recently her aging landlord decided to hire a property manager, and her luck with rentals changed, she said.

"This property manager came in and took over; his demeanor was very cold," West said. "He raised my rent immediately by $300. He also began to inform me that I could be charged up to $2,400 for my two-bedroom duplex. Suddenly, the home I have been in for 12 years no longer felt like my home."

West then began the effort to look for somewhere she and her adult son could move, first looking into a complex for renters ages 55 and up.

"I stood in line," she said. "When I looked at the agreement with excitement, I found out that I did not qualify because I made too much money. The sad part is with my retirement finances and the constant cost of rental rising in a few years here, I am going to be pushed out of the area to move somewhere else."

The average rent in San Jose has increased 39 percent since 2010, according to Real Facts, the data service used by the Housing Department.

"Rent is climbing at such a fast speed that in no time I will not be able to call San Jose my home," she said of the rates she had seen, some as much as $3,000 for two bedrooms downtown. "What do seniors do? There is no medium for people such as myself. In this city you must be homeless or low income or have a high-paying job to keep up or qualify for any type of housing here."

The proposed 777 Park Ave. affordable housing complex would alleviate some strain for people who don't typically qualify for low-income housing as it is aimed at people earning between $21,000 and $63,000 per year.

West said this would be helpful for someone in her situation, as most of the housing developments she has looked into have an income cap of $40,000 for a family.

The Housing Department of San Jose lists 58 family developments and 38 senior developments.
within city limits though a quick search on the Santa Clara Housing Authority site shows that many have waiting lists.

Residents of the Cahill Park neighborhood, in close proximity to the proposed site near Diridon, expressed concerns about congestion, parking and an underutilization of the prime two-acre lot near San Jose's public transportation hub.

One after another they addressed city council with various reasons that the development should be nixed or rethought.

"Residents familiar with the current traffic can easily provide the evaluation: A bad situation is going to get much worse if high-density development is approved for the proposed site," wrote resident Jim Wilhelm to the council earlier in the year. "The proposed development is dramatically out of character for the neighborhood."

Construction will not begin for at least another year due to the permit and funding process.