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## Switchyard Apartment plan good for city on two fronts

The Herald-Times Editorial staff

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A plan announced Wednesday to develop city-owned land adjacent to the future Switchyard Park will help address two major issues on Mayor John Hamilton's agenda.

First, it will add to the housing options for residents who have lower incomes. Second, it will create a new place to live on the edge of what will be the city's largest park upon its expected completion in 2020.

The city of Bloomington and its Department of Parks and Recreation will collaborate with the Bloomington Housing Authority and its nonprofit affiliate, the South Central Indiana Housing Opportunities (SCIHO), on the project.

A Community Housing Needs Assessment completed by SCIHO last December noted that housing for low-income renter households is one of the community's "most challenging housing deficits." A study of Monroe County from 2011-13 identified "only 14 rental units affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income renters."

Hamilton has repeatedly identified affordable housing as a critical issue, and, like the SCIHO assessment, has suggested a multi-pronged approach will be needed to address it. This project, which leverages property owned by the city in increasing the local supply of affordable rental units, is but one important piece in that approach.

As for the second point, Hamilton noted the benefit of the new park in the announcement of plan for Switchyard Apartments, calling the project "part of a bigger scheme to activate the Switchyard Park area as a whole and including developing affordable housing to ensure a broad spectrum of housing

opportunities exist around the park.”

The 65-acre Switchyard Park will be behind just east of the development. It will be an easy walk for apartment residents to take advantage of the park and its amenities, which will include a dog park, a large pavilion, pickleball courts, basketball courts, a playground, a splash pad area and a performance stage. A Bloomington Police Department substation also is planned for the park. Residents will also be close to a bus route, the B-Line Trail, and a variety of commercial options.

Another part of that “bigger scheme” will include market-rate housing in similarly close proximity. The city has been buying properties along South Walnut Street on the east side of the future park with the plan of enhancing that area and making it more attractive to private developers.

These are wise investments by the city. If the park is to reach its full potential for city residents, it must be part of a revitalized area that includes housing and commerce rather than a stand-alone oasis.

The Switchyard Apartments can be a promising part of this new area, while at the same time serving to advance the Hamilton administration’s efforts increase the number of affordable housing units in Bloomington.