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Long-planned 'Asian village' development in Novi takes big steps forward

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A rendering of the planned Sakura Novi development

The developers behind a long-planned Asian-themed, mixed-use development in Novi have tapped Robertson Homes to build the project's residential component.

A news release this week says that the Bloomfield Hills-based homebuilder has entered into a joint venture agreement with Sakura Novi LLC, an affiliate of Birmingham-based development firm Robert B. Aikens & Associates LLC.

The residential developer plans to build a 117-unit, \$30 million apartment project at the site near Grand River Avenue and Town Center Drive in Novi, south of I-96 and Twelve Oaks Mall. **First proposed** back in 2018, the development has been going through the entitlements process for several years for the 15-acre site, according to Scott Aikens, co-owner of Sakura Novi and vice chair of the Aikens development firm. The cost for the total project — which will also include retail and restaurants, a community pond and public space, as well as potentially a hotel or office space — is estimated at between \$50 million and \$55 million, Aikens told Crain's on Friday.

A groundbreaking is expected for the spring and construction is expected to last through late 2024.

The Asian theme of the overall project was an important component for city and county stakeholders dating back years, and "Novi is really the right place for it," said Aikens.

U.S. census data shows that nearly one-quarter of the more than 66,000 residents that live in Novi are Asian. And the overall region, with the large presence of the auto industry, has a heavily Asian makeup, the project's developers point out.



A rendering of the proposed apartments at the Sakura Novi project.

The residential component being developed by Robertson Homes will be open to anyone, regardless of nationality, said Darian Neubecker, the company's COO. Like Aikens, Neubecker pointed to the heavily Asian makeup of the population around the region as a compelling reason for the theme of the project.

Rents for the apartment development will start in the mid-\$2,000 range, Neubecker said. Many of the prospective tenants, he said, could be "active adults" who have grandkids in Michigan but spend their winters in warmer climates and don't want to own a home in the state.