

# Great demand for Sarasota workforce housing at Lofts on Lemon as applications open

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For much of the last year and a half, Katie Dore has driven a rectangle around Sarasota – commuting more than 100 miles a day.

Her mornings start at 4 a.m., when she wakes ahead of her three daughters in the bedroom they share in her mother’s house in Ellenton – where the family recently moved to escape Sarasota’s skyrocketing housing costs.

A preschool teacher, Dore, 31, leaves the girls in her mom’s care and drives to Sarasota to meet a co-worker friend for an exercise “bootcamp” – something she joined after the stress and toll of her job left her hospitalized with an erupted gall bladder.



Katie Dore, center, plays Jenga with her daughters, from left, Ta-nyia, 10; Mckayla, 8; and Elaya, 4, in the living room of her mother’s home in Ellenton. Dore, has applied for an apartment in Lofts on Lemon in downtown Sarasota. *Mike Lang, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

Afterward, Dore returns home to Ellenton for the girls – then circles back to Sarasota to drop them at school before heading to her job in Lakewood Ranch.

After skipping lunch to fetch the girls, Dore returns to work until about 6:30 p.m., when she finally drives home with the kids.

“I was putting gas in my car every three days,” Dore said, spending up to \$160 a week at the pumps with her Toyota Rav-4 as gas prices soar.

But Dore’s long days behind the wheel and cramped nights in a single bedroom with three kids could soon be over.

Alerted through her daughter’s school about the Lofts on Lemon affordable housing complex going up in downtown Sarasota – with units set aside for teachers and other “hometown heroes” like her – Dore jumped on the chance to get in when the pre-application window opened in mid-May.



Lofts on Lemon, located at 8th St. and Lemon Ave., is a Sarasota Housing Authority project designed to provide 76 affordable and 52 attainable apartments, with easy access to downtown Sarasota. *Mike Lang, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

Two weeks later, 500 people had submitted applications for the new 128-unit multifamily complex soon to open downtown, said Joe Chambers, managing partner with Fortis Development, which is working with the Sarasota Housing Authority on the project.

While more people can still apply – and they expect close to 1,000 to do so before the building is full – managers will consider these 500 applicants first, using a lottery system to invite them in for interviews and the official application process, starting in about a month, Chambers said. Once approved, some residents could possibly start moving in by early August.

The housing authority's \$33 million development project was made possible through a broad public-private collaboration – including grants from the City of Sarasota and Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation; a low-interest loan from the Community Foundation of Sarasota; and financing through state tax credits as well as Bank of America and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

Given Sarasota's spike in rent during the pandemic – some of the highest rates in the nation – and the scarcity of downtown workforce housing, demand is high for a spot in Lofts on Lemon.



The kitchen of a nearly-completed three-bedroom apartment in Lofts on Lemon. Lofts on Lemon is a Sarasota Housing Authority project designed to provide 76 affordable and 52 attainable apartments, with easy access to downtown Sarasota. *Mike Lang, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

“The need is tremendous all across the board,” Chambers said. The five-story building offers 76 affordable workforce units as well as 52 others specifically aimed at “hometown heroes” – including teachers, firefighters, law enforcement and nurses.

Rent for hometown hero households ranges from \$1,539 a month for a one-bedroom unit to \$2,127 for a three-bedroom unit, according to Rick Elwood, senior vice president of operations with NDC Asset Management, the property managers. Hometown heroes who make less than the area median income can also qualify for the affordable units that have lower rents.

Applications poured in from New College professors, public school teachers, city employees, nurses, grocery store cashiers, and members the sheriff's office.

“We got the full gamut,” Chambers said. “When you think about who needs workforce and affordable housing – it's everyone who applied.”

Thanks to federal pandemic relief funds allotted by Sarasota County, the design stage is moving forward for a second phase of Lofts on Lemon – this one likely to include another 100 affordable workforce units, with construction possibly starting by the end of 2023, said William Russell, the housing authority's president and CEO.



William Russell is CEO of the Sarasota Housing Authority. *Mike Lang, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

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Meanwhile, a separate 84-unit affordable workforce development called Cypress Square is under construction on 21st Street, expected to be completed by fall of 2023, he added.

For many families, the need is now.

Dore will be watching her email inbox and her phone in the weeks ahead to see if she gets picked for an interview and official application process.

While she would miss living with her mom, with whom she is close, she relishes the idea of returning to her hometown of Sarasota, where she attended high school after the family left Miami, and where she hoped that her daughters could grow up.

“The goal was always to move back to Sarasota,” she said.

Katie Dore with her daughters, from left, Ta-nyia, 10; Elaya, 4; and Mckayla, 8, at her mother's home in Ellenton. Dore, has applied for an apartment in Lofts on Lemon in downtown Sarasota.

Also, since starting a new job this spring at an early childhood learning center in Sarasota, living downtown would be ideal – putting her close to work as well as the girls’ schools and extracurricular activities, like ballet and soccer.

What’s more, she knows her girls – ages 10, 8 and 4 – need their space. Crammed into a single bedroom in the home they share with her mother and two brothers, it's tough for the girls to practice their soccer, ballet and gymnastics.

“They are ready,” she said, “for a place where it’s just me and them.”

This story comes from a partnership between the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. Saundra Amrhein covers the Season of Sharing campaign, along with issues surrounding housing, utilities, child care and transportation in the area. She can be reached at [samrhein@gannett.com](mailto:samrhein@gannett.com).



A view of downtown Sarasota from the fifth floor of Lofts on Lemon. Lofts on Lemon is a Sarasota Housing Authority project designed to provide 76 affordable and 52 attainable apartments, with easy access to downtown Sarasota. *Mike Lang, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*



Katie Dore with her daughters, from left, Ta-nyia, 10; Elaya, 4; and Mckayla, 8, at her mother's home in Ellenton. Dore, has applied for an apartment in Lofts on Lemon in downtown Sarasota. *Mike Lang, Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

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