

## CA – SAN BERNARDINO -- HOUSING IN SAN BERNARDINO [PART 3]

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**Officials say all must be on same page. The final installment of a three part series.**

A rough neighborhood—notorious for its crime and violence—is undergoing a large transformation.



The **Waterman Gardens apartment complex**, which has stood on the corner of Baseline Street and Waterman Avenue for over 70 years, is being replaced by new state-of-the-art housing units.

National Community Renaissance (National CORE), a nonprofit housing developer that has helped revitalize housing complexes and neighborhoods nationally, is leading the effort to revive that area. The organization’s Senior Vice President of Public Affairs Ciriaco “Cid” Pinedo said the 411 housing units that will be built represents progress for the residents of San Bernardino.

“Our partnership with the city has been amazing,” Pinedo said. “Even in spite of their financial situation, they are a partner at the table. This is a real testament to their desire to transform the community.”

Gentrification in San Bernardino?

Some residents have expressed concerns over gentrification. Sandra Ibarra, featured in the previous article of the series, believes an increase in property taxes will push residents who can’t afford it out of the city.

“All these tax raises are going to drive those who can’t afford living here away to other places,” she said. “My house went up \$100,000 in value in two years. How is that possible? The cost of living is going up and we’re still not getting \$15/hr minimum wages.”

According to Dictionary.com, gentrification is the process of buying and renovating housing and stores in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper or middle-income families or individuals. It improves property values, but also potentially displaces low-income families and small businesses.

Waterman Gardens has had a tumultuous history. Gang fights, brutal homicides, and endemic poverty are some of the issues residents of the complex have confronted. Built in 1943, the 252-unit, low income housing complex is slowly deteriorating and has a number of deficiencies, according to Pinedo.

National CORE, in partnership with the City of San Bernardino and the **Housing Authority of San Bernardino County**, have put forth over \$150 million to redevelop the aging housing complex, as well as an additional multi housing complex—Valencia Vista.

The new Waterman Gardens will undergo a complete overhaul and is slated to have a new name—Arrowhead Grove. The site will remain as an affordable housing complex. Construction of the site began in June, and is scheduled to be completed by 2021.

Valencia Vista, a combination of market rate units and senior housing, is expected to open next month. The complex includes a 2,200-square-foot community center, afterschool program facilities, a computer lab, children’s play area, swimming pool and outdoor gathering spaces.

According to National CORE spokesperson Steve Lambert, the revitalization of the complexes will spur significant economic benefits for the region. According to a 2014 study by the Center for Economic Research and Forecasting, construction activities alone may increase economic output in San Bernardino County by \$81.1 million, support 1,032 jobs and pay roughly \$46.8 million in labor income to residents.

“On an annual basis, the study concluded that the project will generate more than \$2.2 million in direct, indirect and induced economic activity, 31 jobs and nearly \$1 million in labor income,” Lambert explained in a statement. “Long term, Arrowhead Grove will generate millions of dollars a year in tax revenues to support vital services.

Lambert also said the San Bernardino City Unified School District has also committed to transform and expand nearby E. Neal Roberts Elementary and Sierra High School campuses into an integrated K-12 campus as part of the revitalization.

When asked if current Waterman Garden residents would be displaced as a result of the project, Pinedo responded by explaining that they are required under U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations to relocate residents in temporary housing until the completion of the project.



Photo/Anthony Victoria: The Valencia Vista complex, displayed above, includes a 2,200-square-foot community center, afterschool program facilities, a computer lab, children’s play area, swimming pool and outdoor gathering spaces.

“We don’t do gentrification,” retorted Pinedo. “I believe that a mix of people with various backgrounds and experiences is absolutely wonderful. I don’t believe in coming into an area or neighborhood and saying, ‘You’re no longer welcome here.’ That’s wrong.”

Pinedo, who is also the president of National CORE’s Hope Through Housing Foundation, said the nonprofit will be in charge of managing and maintaining the complexes. The organization will also provide programming dealing with financial responsibility, after school programs for children and teenagers, and nutritional information for adults.

“It’s not enough to dream,” Pinedo said. “You have to have a plan to realize that dream. We’re big on building people’s capacities to fulfill their dreams. We change people’s concepts of what affordable housing is supposed to look like.”

Fifth Ward Councilman Henry Nickel believes people shouldn’t view gentrification as a “bad word”, but should instead take the time to understand the benefits of it.

“It has to be understood as a way to rehabilitate troubled communities,” he said. “What we have done is ghettoized our impoverished population by concentrating them in neighborhoods with other poor people. The way you break that is through gentrification. You have to balance your low income with higher income residents.”

A code enforcement inspection walkthrough

Community Policing Specialist Matthew Gillespie visited the Wood Ridge Villas, located on 1275 Date Street to do a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) inspection.

The inspection entails walking through a multi housing property to make sure property owners are maintaining their properties.

With a camera in one hand and a clipboard in the other, Gillespie inspected all 56 units at the complex—taking photos of aging and rotting wood, chipped paint, loose rail handles, loose stair railings, exposed flood lights, and broken windows.

According to Gillespie, an annual fee—ranging from \$150 to \$185—is paid by property owners participating in the Crime Free Multi Housing Program to ensure a thorough inspection by code enforcement.

“We’re ten minutes into the inspection and the property is already failing,” Gillespie said. “We still want to make sure we give them the full inspection.”

Gillespie explained that items such as step railings, complex and parking lot lighting, windows, and signage should be preserved by property owners to help their cause. The Wood Ridge Villas had issues with all these items, including a unusable swimming pool, inoperable vehicles, and blight.

The results of the inspection will be sent to property owners to assess, though Gillespie said it may be uncertain whether site managers are informed about the process.

“Not every property owner informs their manager about the results of an inspection,” he explained. “There is miscommunication between property managers and owners. We try to talk to them and encourage them to get their property in shape.”

As I was speaking to Gillespie, one resident walked by and confirmed his skepticism of code enforcement’s actions. “Y’all never do [expletive]. It’s all [expletive].”

“They have to be the change also,” Gillespie said regarding the man who spoke. “Tenants, managers, and owners all have to be on the same page.”

City continues to work on housing policy

Nickel has confirmed that a set of policies to address housing issues have been discussed. However, he says it remains stagnant at the moment.

The councilman explained that Mayor Carey Davis’ office formed a committee to develop recommendations back in 2014 for the City Council to review in order to form efficient housing policy.

“As of today, I as a council member have yet to be briefed on that set of policy recommendations,” Nickel said. “I’ve got bits and pieces from members of that committee that have grown frustrated that it has not moved forward.”

Davis was repeatedly contacted but refused to respond to questions about housing issues and policy.

Nickel explained that the core of the plan revolves around the idea of creating a system of inspections to mandate more accountability among landlords. Once they undergo initial inspection they will be given a grade similar to what one may see in restaurants.

“For example, if a housing complex falls in the A category, they are subject to a less intensive or extensive inspection process,” said Nickel. “It creates an incentive standard.”

One of the members of that committee, real estate agent and businessman Scott Beard, believes the problem does not solely fall with Davis, but with every level of the city’s government.

“This issue has been discussed at great lengths with every council member, and none of them have done a thing,” Beard explained. “I don’t look at it as the Mayor dropping the ball. What’s frustrating is that someone like [Seventh Ward councilman] Jim Mulvihill, a former urban planner, does nothing. Their agendas do not fall in line with fixing housing.”

Mulvihill said the city’s Receivership Empowering Neighborhood Upkeep (RENU) and Crime Free Multi Housing programs have helped deter crime and hold landlords accountable. The RENU program is designed to target properties that pose health and safety risks to the public; a motion is then filed through the courts where a receiver seizes the property, rehabilitates it, and resells it to an individual or party that makes good use of it.

The court appointed receiver’s duties include, but are not limited to, taking full and complete possession of the property, managing that property and paying all operating expenses, taxes, insurance and utilities, according to the city’s website.

“We’re working with landlords to upkeep the surrounding areas,” he said. “We’re supporting the good actors that are committed to improving these places.”

This three part series was produced and edited by freelance editor R.A. Contreras.