

Ricardo Alvarez is a single dad, struggling to make ends meet, but determined to make a better life for himself and his 10-year-old daughter. For the past five years, he has lived in Waterman Gardens — a World War II-vintage public housing project in San Bernardino that allows qualified residents to pay based on what they can afford.

For Ricardo, it's been the difference between having a home and life on the streets. "If they didn't have this program," Ricardo says, "I don't know where I'd be."

His is one of hundreds of stories of survival playing out every day at Waterman Gardens — stories of families and seniors, of veterans and people with disabilities, of people simply looking for a chance at a better life.

The development is owned and managed by the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino, which along with National Community Renaissance is proposing to replace the aging, inefficient 70-year-old buildings with a planned development featuring modern amenities, neighborhood facilities and a mix of family incomes levels including some market-based and for-sale housing. The new Waterman Gardens will include the same number of affordable public housing units that it has today, 252, but many new community amenities and additional homes will be added as well.

Throughout our 72 years of providing homes for families in the county, we at the Housing Authority have taken pride in providing thousands of San Bernardino County residents a vital community resource — stable housing and the launch pad for a better life.

The families, seniors and hard-working people who live in Waterman Gardens take great pride in their community. It's the place they call home.

Crime is much lower at the site than in many other neighborhoods. Graduation rates are higher. Households help each other. But because units are old and expensive to maintain, the property needs to be rebuilt.

For our residents and future new residents, higher quality housing within a revitalized neighborhood will help households excel personally and professionally. Homes will be safer with up-to-date fire and safety codes. Improved recreational areas and health facilities will promote healthy living. Learning centers and better coordination with school services will help with educational success.

This project will help revitalize the entire neighborhood, creating jobs, improving safety, dressing up the streetscape, replacing infrastructure and most importantly improving lives. Through the construction period, the impact on the existing households will be minimized by temporarily moving the families within the Waterman Gardens community when possible so as to access the same schools, medical facilities, places of employment, and so on.

What this revitalization is:

A complete rebuilding of a very old property while adding for-sale homes, senior living areas, and many new community amenities including a swimming pool and computer learning centers.

Over \$200 million in construction and new infrastructure with none of the funding coming from the city of San Bernardino.

Hundreds of direct jobs (with new job training) over a period of six to eight years.

A newly revitalized neighborhood in the center of San Bernardino that will become a model for other neighborhoods.

A project designated for success and excellent management based on the experience of local experts such as National Community Renaissance.

A new environment creating better lives for great families and people who are getting started with a stable home.

New properties that are safer and even less of a load for police, fire and schools — and with an increased tax revenue source.

What this revitalization is not:

Additional low-income housing with poor management, absentee landlords and a negative burden on local systems.

A hand-out to people who aren't engaged or employed.

A high-density clustering of buildings.

I really believe that meeting people like Ricardo and his daughter — or any of the other seniors, children and hard-working adults who live at Waterman Gardens — will dispel the stereotypes and show what great citizens live there. We invite anyone who cares to meet our families to join us in our many community meetings where we discuss this revitalization project. Our residents are good people, a part of the city, and a part of your neighborhood. They also aspire to a better life just like you.

Daniel Nackerman is president and CEO of the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino.