

Rebuild San Bernardino block by block: Steve PonTell

By Steve PonTell

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We can rebuild San Bernardino. Neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block it can be done. However, it will require vision, lasting partnerships and a commitment to delivering what is planned.

All of this is embodied in the rebuilding of Waterman Gardens into what we humbly but boldly contend is the most transformational economic development project in the city's recent history.

As master developers of this estimated \$200 million investment in the city, we see a reinvented Waterman Gardens not as an affordable housing project, but an economic catalyst that will transform the community and the lives of people who live there.

That's our mission at National Community Renaissance, and we have a long history of delivering on this promise in communities as diverse as Rancho Cucamonga, Oceanside, La Quinta, San Marcos and throughout Los Angeles County.

Our nonprofit company has built and/or manages nearly 9,000 high-quality housing units across four states, and through our Hope through Housing subsidiary, provided more than 2 million hours of aligned social services.

We are true community partners, and look forward to playing a significant role in the brick-by-brick reconstruction of Waterman Gardens and revitalization of the entire neighborhood, and being a part of rebuilding this great city.

Some don't see the need, preferring to keep things as they are, as if a physically deteriorating, poorly planned 70-year-old public housing project is somehow better for the city than a designed community — one that features contemporary, upscale architecture and state-of-the-art construction, meeting or exceeding fire and safety standards, reducing unit-by-unit energy consumption and water usage and becoming an economic catalyst for the neighboring community.

Property values will rise. Jobs will be created. Opportunity, responsibility and self-sufficiency will rise from what is now an environment of neglect and deterioration.

Claims that the new Waterman Gardens will increase the amount of public housing on the site are simply not true.

The 252 “public” units currently at the site will be replaced by the exact same number, 252. In addition, plans call for 74 senior units, 47 market-rate units and 38 home ownership units — creating a desirable, multi-layered community that 1) people will want to move into, 2) helps address San Bernardino’s middle-income housing crisis, and 3) adds value to the surrounding neighborhoods.

It’s this kind of density by design in a managed setting that’s needed if San Bernardino is ever going to break the cycle of blight and overcrowding caused by scattered-site absentee ownership.

In contrast to out-of-town investor owners, our roots run deep. Though we’ve done work nationally, National CORE is a San Bernardino County-based company founded here 21 years ago. Our partners at the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino have been around since 1941 and currently own and/or manage more than 10,000 housing units in the county.

Waterman Gardens is among those. Built in 1943, it has been home to families who, in many cases, have had nowhere else to go. Community pride and the Housing Authority’s tight management have kept crime rates low, despite economic challenges and living spaces that long ago outlived their usefulness.

There’s not a city in America that wouldn’t welcome a thoughtfully designed and superbly managed project such as this. We’re proud to work with San Bernardino in making it happen.

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