

by

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Whenever something old in poor neighborhoods is replaced by something new, eyebrows are automatically raised and the community gets nervous.

Questions about where goes the neighborhood as 242 units of public housing comes tumbling down came up at a

recent city planning commission meeting.

Ana Gamiz, spokesperson for the Housing Authority, said that tearing down and completely rebuilding Waterman Gardens will benefit the entire community, create about 1,500 jobs, and give current low income residents a brand new place to live.

Waterman Gardens is owned and run by the Housing Authority, which is not part of the county of San Bernardino, she said. It is stand-alone public agency, but because the project is located in the city of San Bernardino, the agency is required to go through the entitlement process.

At this point, the plan is to demolish and rebuild 242 low income units with completely new units. The remaining 74 units will be designated for seniors, and the rest of the total 411 units will be condominiums sold at market value.

Before revitalization goes forward, the Planning Commission must approve development plans and then the project will go before City Council for final approval.

## SB Waterman Gardens Demolish, Where Goes the Neighborhood

Written by Precinct Reporter Group

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Last week, the Housing Authority and city staff met with resistance from the Planning Commission on the construction, and were asked to provide specifics on the construction. The Housing Authority made clear that under HUD relocation laws, their agency must and will provide a one-for-one replacement of existing housing units, and that every renter will get one on one assistance in a temporary relocation, she said.

“We answered their questions. They were looking for documentation not normally provided at a planning commission. These questions [typically] come up at city council meetings,” she said.

All renters displaced by the project will get first dibs to return to their new homes after the site is completed, she said, but added that families will not be forced to move back and there is no way of knowing how many of the 242 displaced units will return to site.

Families will also get help moving to other sites, or within the neighborhood while the construction is being completed, or they will receive Housing Choice Vouchers while the project is ongoing.

“We have to provide financial assistance, also we walk them through the process. Our families have the first right of return, [to the completed site],” she said.

Also, as part of HUD requirements, the agency must urge vendors through the federal Section 3 guidelines to increase local hires. The agency also plans to use low income workers that have already been trained through Housing Authority programs, and now ready to hire.

Even so, she believes, the bigger problem is NIMBY-ism, Not In My Back Yard.

Some area residents are speaking out against the development because they fear that the displaced public housing recipients are now going to flood into other neighborhoods.

“There was a lot of concern that they don't want this to spread to other neighborhoods,” she

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said. “This is an example of why our developer is saying that these are not the type of issues that are discussed at the planning commission level.”

From the time the project begins, the rebuild is expected to take six to eight years spanning eight phases. She said that the demolition will not happen all at once, and the project will start with rebuilding public housing.

“We want to bring back our families as quickly as we can so they come back to their community and their new homes as soon as possible,” she said.

The City Planning Commission did not return calls by press time.