

San Bernardino's Waterman Gardens project receives \$12 million in state tax credits

By Ryan Hagen , The Sun

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SAN BERNARDINO >> The first phase of revitalizing the affordable housing at Waterman Gardens is clear to begin after it received \$12 million in state tax credits Thursday.

The first 76 of the units built early in World War II can now be replaced with newer housing, leading to positive effects on the area of Base Line and Waterman Avenue, said Mayor Carey Davis.

"This is an exciting change in San Bernardino to have this project that's going to change a significant part of our city," Davis said at a celebration in his office Thursday evening. "Over the years, we haven't had a lot of new development. A lot of hard work went into acquiring these tax credits."

In February, the City Council unanimously approved the transfer of the deteriorating 252 units of public housing and the plan by new master developer National Community Renaissance (National CORE, based in Rancho Cucamonga) to tear down the existing buildings and replace them with the same number of "mixed-finance affordable housing units" in addition to 73 affordable senior housing units, 38 for-sale condominium units, 48 market-rate rental units, and community facilities.

The phased approach is intended to minimize disruption to the complex's residents. In a June change from the original plan, 76 new units will first be built at Valencia Avenue and 9th Street adjacent to Waterman Gardens. Any of those units rented as affordable housing will mean that same number of affordable units at Waterman Gardens will instead be market-rate housing.

Groundbreaking is expected in November, with the next phase beginning after the next round of financing becomes available in March, said Steve PonTell, president of National CORE.

"This will be a catalytic input," PonTell said, adding that the city's ability to quickly shepherd the process and facilitate a competitive funding process showed it was "open for business."

The project's backers point to a study by the Center for Economic Research and Forecasting at California Lutheran University suggesting the reconstruction and new management will be a boon for the city.

"The first thing that San Bernardino's citizens will notice is that the appearance of the neighborhood will improve," said the center's executive director, Bill Watkins. "This is not a small thing. A well-maintained, attractive, and modern project inspires a sense of community, even if the residents are identical to the previous residents."

The \$12 million went to National CORE in the form of low-income tax credits. It represents the biggest single portion of the \$25 million needed for the first phase of the project, which

also gets \$2.3 million through the city of San Bernardino in federally-allocated HOME-Investment Partnership funds.

The Valencia and 9th Street site will feature one-to-four-bedroom units, according to National CORE. Subsidized units will be available to households earning 30 percent to 60 percent of the area median income, which for a family of four in San Bernardino County is \$60,700.



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