

A \$200 million plan to transform one of the city's oldest public housing developments deserves the San Bernardino Planning Commission's support.

The commission will take up the application to overhaul the 70-year-old Waterman Gardens development at its meeting Wednesday, nearly four months after its initial review of the project.

In July, some commissioners and community members expressed concerns about the plan, which would increase the density of Waterman Gardens and lock the city into an agreement with National Community Renaissance, a Rancho Cucamonga-based developer. The commission delayed action on the plan this summer.

Under the proposal, Waterman Gardens would be changed from a wholly rent-subsidized multi-family complex into a "mixed income" community with about 20 percent of the housing selling or renting at market rates.

National Community Renaissance, which has proven itself a pro at turning around aging public housing developments, is working with the Housing Authority of San Bernardino County to completely rebuild the 38-acre site at Waterman Avenue and Base Line.

Anyone who's driven through the neighborhood must concede that it desperately needs work. Everything from the facades to the heating and cooling systems to the wide, park-like open spaces needs updating.

In addition to renovating 252 low-income units, developers plan to add a 74-unit senior housing project and provide 47 market-rate rentals and 38 units available for owners. A recreational facility, community center and multipurpose building also are planned.

This is exactly the kind of project San Bernardino needs — to transform an aging neighborhood and hopefully boost property values in the surrounding area, yes, but also to spur similar investments elsewhere in the city.

Planning commissioners must find a way to address their concerns in the spirit of working with, not against, the developers of this sorely needed project.