

## Waterman Gardens revitalization approved in San Bernardino

By Ryan Hagen, *The Sun*  
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SAN BERNARDINO >> Before the unanimous vote to expand the affordable housing at Waterman Gardens, one of its key backers on Tuesday addressed earlier sharp criticism of the proposal and particularly of the [often-repeated concern](#) that it would bring increased socioeconomic problems.

“We’re asking detractors if they prefer the status quo or this best practice of what’s happening throughout the country,” said Dan

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

The status quo of the public housing southeast of Base Line and Waterman Avenue is notorious in San Bernardino, as [online comments](#) calling it a ghetto and worse make clear.

Some of those, Nackerman and council members said, are inaccurate stereotypes. Of the residents living in the affordable housing there now, 75 percent have a high school degree and 8 percent have a college degree, Nackerman said. Forty-five percent have full-time jobs.

One man who lived there in 1959 and 1960, Rikke Van Johnson, now sits on the City Council and made the move to approve the project.

And in terms of crime, it’s significantly lower than the areas directly to its east and west and lower than the Maplewood Homes affordable housing near the corner of Medical Center Drive and 9th Street, said Interim Police Chief Jarrod Burgan.

Nonetheless, the homes were built in 1943 — before the invasion of Normandy in World War II, as Mayor Pat Morris noted — and currently it’s no one’s idea of a model neighborhood.

The reimagined Waterman Gardens is based on crime prevention designs that Burgan said could reduce crime, and Fire Chief George Avery said the new buildings would be “one thousand percent better” in terms of fire safety.

Once completed, Waterman Gardens will no longer be “public housing.” [It will be run](#) by Rancho Cucamonga-based National Community Renaissance, which now has final approval to demolish the 252 existing units 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.

Some opposition remained Tuesday, such as resident Deanna Adams, who said the city already had “ample affordable housing” and was inviting increased problems.

And others, while supportive, were hoping for more — such as Councilman Robert Jenkins, whose ward borders the project. Jenkins said he wished improvements there would address the flooding that occurs at Base Line and Waterman with nearly every rainfall, closest to the part of the project where senior affordable housing is planned.

National Community Renaissance representatives said the redesigned site would put less water onto Waterman Avenue than the current design and that residents wouldn’t be flooded, but the infrastructure changes needed to prevent street flooding at the intersection just outside of their boundaries would be financially prohibitive.

Others who when it came before the Planning Commission had strongly criticized the proposal — particularly the fact that some information wasn’t provided and some commitments were made verbally but not in writing — and at first seemed to sign the same tune Tuesday.

“As is typical of social needs-driven projects in this town,” said John Matley, vice president of the DMV neighborhood association that represents the area just northwest of the project, “(the Waterman Gardens proposal was developed) in a windowless room in an ivory tower by people with a theoretical understanding of the human condition.”

But despite that, Matley said answers from Steve PonTell and others from National Community Renaissance and the assistance of some within the city had combined with his own research into the group and the specific proposal to make him a supporter.

Construction is planned in phases over six to eight years, with the goal of having residents live in vacant apartments elsewhere on the property while their apartment is being rebuilt.

No city funds are being used for the project.

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