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Home builder seeks fed, state funds

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Self-Help Enterprises may not have to wait for the economy to rebound before breaking ground on 180 affordable homes in the Villages of Patterson.

A state grant or federal stimulus money "would allow us to start pretty quickly," said Tom Collishaw, the nonprofit agency's vice president and development director.

"We get calls all the time, asking when we're going to get started," Collishaw said. "We tell them, 'As soon as we can.' "

City officials two years ago approved a master plan for the Villages of Patterson, which would bring shopping, soccer fields and 3,100 homes to 692 acres on the city's northeast fringe.

But construction tanked soon after and has been virtually nonexistent during the recession. The foreclosure crisis hit Patterson particularly hard, with banks repossessing nearly one in five houses, the highest rate in Stanislaus County.

Self-Help Enterprises, a Visalia-based organization helping families build their own homes, signed on to build affordable homes north of First Street and Walnut Avenue. Proximity to city services could enable the project, called Stonegate Shire, to go forward before the rest of the Villages, Collishaw said. And his project would dig a well needed to serve the Villages area.

Self-Help expects to hear by late June whether the state will award an infrastructure grant. "We're worried but also optimistic," Collishaw said; officials previously favored more urban areas with ready access to transit that doesn't exist in Patterson, he said.

News in early April that an unknown entity in Stanislaus County wanted \$38 million in federal stimulus money for a huge affordable housing project puzzled many, including county Chief Executive Rick Robinson, his housing experts and others with the Housing Authority and in Modesto's housing program. None had heard of Stonegate Shire, they said at the time.

Patterson subsequently filled in the blanks, noting that Self-Help had submitted the information without the city's knowledge. Collishaw said the stimulus form, generated by the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley's secretariat, had no field for location other than Stanislaus County.

"Finally, some light shed on the Stonegate Shire project," Robinson said in an e-mail.

On the Net: www.selfhelpenterprises.org.

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