



## Small Community of Traver Reaps Big Improvements, More to Come

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For many it is a stop for gas between Visalia and Fresno. For some it is a destination to shop for road trip munchies on the way up north. But, for 700 Tulare County residents, Traver is the place they call home. And their home has seen a lot of improvements lately, thanks to county supervisors and staff, as well as other partnering agencies.

In Traver, like many other small, rural communities, the school is the hub of the community, said Eric Coyne, Tulare County Economic Development coordinator. It is around Traver Elementary School, where a series of public improvements began.

Adopted in 2006, the Tulare County Strategic Management System sets forth several strategic goals to guide the development of all county policy

- Enhance Safety and Security
- Enhance Economic Well-Being
- Enhance Quality of Life
- Improve Organizational Performance

“Embracing this guiding policy, Tulare County Supervisor Steven Worthley challenged the Resource Management Agency to come up with a comprehensive plan to make a series of significant infrastructure improvements in Traver with an eye toward enhancing public safety, economic well-being and the quality of life of all area residents,” Coyne said.

That was in 2013. In the spring of 2014, work began.

“The county completed \$180,000 in safe routes to school improvements along Canal Street, right in front of Traver Elementary School. Improvements include a concrete school bus pullout, adding a County transit stop in this location, building a stormwater drainage system to serve the bus stop, and also the creation of an asphalt pathway to link the school to a new crosswalk that links to Merritt Drive, Traver’s main thoroughfare,” Coyne said.

These projects were funded with Measure R and county funds.

In December, 2015, decisions on a new sewer system for the community were made.

“Tulare County awarded a \$1.5 million Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to fund design and construction of a new force-main sanitary sewer and lift station to convey wastewater to the nearby county-owned wastewater treatment facility,” Coyne said.

“County officials also pledged additional County economic development funds to fully develop the project. Design work will begin in early 2016, with construction expected to be completed in early 2017,” he added. “The sewer expansion should allow for significant future growth within the Traver community and lead to more business expansion.”

And growth is coming.

The new sewer system has prompted Self-Help Enterprises to take another look at the community for a housing project.

“We had looked at Traver more than 10 years ago,” said Self-Help President & CEO Tom Collishaw, “but the lack of sewer put the project on the shelf.”

The new sewer system project allowed Self-Help to dust the idea off again.

In fact, county officials called in Self-Help to serve as a catalyst for the CDBG grant, and it worked.

Self-Help has designed an 11-house development, which should begin construction in March or April, Collishaw said.

Self-Help is a non-profit agency that works with potential first-home owners. Those approved will actually help build all of the homes in the development, dedicating 40-hours per week from each homeowner family until the entire development is completed, as down payment toward their home, Collishaw said.

Some professional subcontracting is utilized for the homes, he said, but the majority of the building, under supervision of a Self-Help supervisor, is done by the residents. Once all homes are complete, the residents may begin to move in.

“The Self-Help homes represent more than \$1 million-worth of construction activity, and will range in size from about 1205 square-feet for three-bedroom, two-bathroom plans, to about 1360 square-feet for four-bedroom, two-bathroom plans,” Coyne said. “This housing tract will also result in substantial sidewalk improvements along one side of Jacobs Drive.”

Along with new homes, and county road, sidewalk and sewer improvements, also comes a new health clinic.

Family Healthcare Network (FHCN) began working with the Traver Joint School District to help respond to the community’s need for local health care about two years ago, said Kerry Hydash, FHCN president and CEO.

A Health Resources and Services Administration New Access Point grant allowed FHCN to move forward with development of a 3,700 square-foot health center on a corner of the Traver Elementary School property.

With notification of the grant in August came a rush to get the site built and operational within 120 days, as a requirement of the grant, Hydash said.

Because of early planning for the center, FHCN was able to get this done with the clinic opening with limited hours in December, and expanding to regular full-time hours soon. While the clinic sits on school grounds, it provides care for all age groups and any residents in the area.

“The school is such an important part of that community,” Hydash said.

It makes the location a perfect fit, she said.

Working with Self-Help and the county has made for a good partnership, she added.

The basic needs “of shelter, food and transportation” must be met, Hydash said. “People can’t concentrate on their health if they have other pressing issues.”

Local residents’ health issues will be met, she said, regardless of their ability to pay. FHCN honors most types of insurance and provides healthcare on a sliding scale for payment.

With the sewer improvements and additions, Traver has the ability to grow from 700 to 7,000, Coyne said.

In addition, in October of last year, a \$1,790,000 grant was awarded from Caltrans as part of the Active Transportation program. This allows for Jacob Street improvements along with widening and a concrete sidewalk with curb and gutter on the south side of the Jacob Street. Asphalt paveouts, bike lane, drainage facilities, ADA Ramps, signs and markings will also be installed, Coyne said.

Plans have also been made and will be presented at the January 26 Board of Supervisors meeting for sidewalk development from the bus stop to the clinic, which will include curbing and gutters, Coyne said.

“We have really embraced the community of Traver,” he said. “Residents were very skeptical of the county, feeling that it wouldn’t come through.

“Now they’re really positive. You came through, you really did it.”

There are approximately 90 communities within the county in similar circumstances to Traver, he said.

“We would like to do this in every community,” Coyne said.

Some of that is already taking place. The county adopted plans for six more communities within the last 12 months.

“This is unprecedented,” Coyne said.

For anyone interested in the Self-Help Homes, visit its website at [www.selfhelpenterprises.org](http://www.selfhelpenterprises.org) or call, (559) 651-1000.

Self-Help has found that developments of 10-12 homes works well. It has built 1,840 new homes in Tulare County and 460 new homes in Kings County with a total of 6,100 homes in the Valley since its inception, 50 years ago.