

VISALIA TIMES DELTA

Tule River Housing Authority breaks ground on affordable housing in Porterville

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Forty Tule River Tribe families will have a new home in Porterville in early 2021 if all goes to plan.

The Tule River Indian Housing Authority and Self-Help Enterprises broke ground Tuesday on Nupchi Xo' Oy, an affordable housing development on West Mulberry Avenue in Porterville.

Nupchi Xo' Oy includes 15 single-family homes and 25 townhouses and is expected to be completed in December.



The Tule River Indian Housing Authority and Self-Help Enterprises break ground at Nupchi Xo' Oy, an affordable rental housing complex in Porterville.

The development will house low-income families at or below 60 percent of the area median Income. Rents, which are based on the unit and on the residents' income, will range from just under \$500 to just over \$1,000.

A new collaboration

Nupchi Xo' Oy is Tule River Indian Housing Authority's first large-scale affordable rental project and Self-Help Enterprises' first tribal collaboration.

"We undertook this effort several years ago starting with our search for suitable acreage and then conducting many months of due diligence so the site would meet the approval of the Department of Housing and Urban Development," said Christina Dabney-Keel, chairperson of the TRIHA Board of Commissioners.

TRIHA reached out to Self-Help, a community development organization, about three years ago, after the authority secured initial approval to develop the West Mulberry property. Self-Help owns and operates 33 affordable rental communities in the San Joaquin Valley.

"We worked together to develop the funding proposals and the competitive funding we had to go for to build this 40-unit project as codevelopers," said Tom Collishaw, president and CEO of Self-Help Enterprises.

For example, TRIHA was instrumental in securing a Title VI loan from Native American Bank, Collishaw said, while Self-Help brought experience in working with the Low-Income Tax Credit program and applying for other state grants.

The need for housing

The new development will take some of the strain off the reservation's existing system, said William Garfield, vice-chairman of the Tule River Tribal Council.

"We have about 200 people on a housing list who are just waiting, and some of the houses we have currently have two or three families living in them," he said.

Limited water and other resources have complicated building additional homes on the reservation's steep terrain, so TRIHA looked outside the reservation for potential housing sites to address the growing need.

"One of the limitations of building housing right on the reservation is that it currently lacks some of the infrastructure needed to do anything very substantial," Collishaw said.

The tribe also hopes to address its housing shortage in part by relocating Eagle Mountain Casino to tribe-owned land adjacent to Porterville

Municipal Airport. Reallocating the water currently used by the casino would allow up to 100 more houses to be built on the reservation. The tribe started the lengthy relocation process in 2016.



Sage burns by shovels at a groundbreaking ceremony for Nupchi Xo' Oy, an affordable rental housing complex in Porterville.



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Garfield said those living at Nupchi Xo' Oy will have the same access to services provided to those living on the reservation.

The development will include a nearly 2,000-square-foot community building with laundry facilities and a computer lab. The tribe plans to have a language program there, as well as other educational and cultural programs. Self-Help will collaborate on other on-site programs for residents, such as job training and after-school activities.



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While the development is primarily for Tule River Tribe members, housing laws don't allow the units to be called exclusively for the tribe, Collishaw said. However, the law does allow Nupchi Xo' Oy to have a system that prioritizes tribal members, he said.

"Some of the units are set aside for tribal members because of the nature of the funds themselves, but after that, we employ a priority system," Collishaw said. "We expect for it to be largely if not exclusively tribal members or other Native Americans."

What's in a name

The Nupchi Xo' Oy name honors someone who long advocated for more affordable housing for the tribe.

Joseph "Darrell" Vera, who died on Memorial Day in 2018, was a member of TRIHA for many years, his sister and retired tribal council member Nancy McDarment said. His nickname "Nupchi" means friend or close relative, and "Xo' Oy" translates to "village."



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McDarment said that though Vera wasn't able to be at the groundbreaking of the development named in his honor, he was represented by his family and the people he served.

"He would have been just as happy as can be that there would be 40 people moving into new homes," she said. "It means (TRIHA) is still working for the people, even if they have to go offsite to bring housing. Housing is much needed by our people."