

THE SUN-GAZETTE

Homeless village to open next fall

March 24, 2021

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Salt+Light partners with Self-Help Enterprises to build 52-unit mobile home park for the homeless on 6.5 acres in Goshen

VISALIA – The answer to housing some of Visalia’s least stationary residents may be to provide them with their own mobile home.

Homeless advocacy organization Salt+Light unveiled the latest version of its homeless village at the March 15 Visalia City Council meeting. Founder Adrienne Hillman described the project as a 52-unit mobile home park just outside the city limits. The village will be located on 6.5 acres next to Self-Help Enterprises’ Sequoia Commons multifamily housing project, phase one of which opened in 2020, at Road 76 and Avenue 310 south of Florence Ave. in Goshen, adjacent to the



Each of 52 pre-fabricated homes will include a bedroom, restroom, kitchen and laundry room.

city of Visalia. The 11 by 30-foot mobile homes will primarily be one bedroom, with a few two bedroom units, and include a kitchen, restroom, laundry room and bedroom. The project is expected to begin construction in April 2022 with a move-in date of November 2022.

“We are thrilled for this opportunity to get 52 plus of our neighbors off the street,” Hillman said.

Hillman was originally searching for a 20- to 40-acre site to house as many as 200 unsheltered residents. The project was going to be built in three phases beginning with a community kitchen, wash house and homes, followed by a park, health clinic, library, bus stop, etc. About a year ago, Hillman started talking with Self-Help Enterprises (SHE), the Valley’s expert on low-income and affordable housing projects, to not only find a site suited to the project but also find a way to get it funded more rapidly to open sooner as the homeless population continues to climb.

“At first I was hesitant because this property was too small for my dream,” Hillman said. “But I realized doing this project now means not waiting to do a larger chunk five years from now. Five more years would be hard to swallow.”

By building adjacent to the SHE project, Hillman said the homes can tie into existing underground utilities, residents can walk to a nearby Family HealthCare Network clinic and to an adjacent commercial development that will include a grocery store, convenience store and fast food restaurant. By building each unit with a bathroom, residents not only get more privacy, but it

eliminates the space needed for a large-scale wash house. The central kitchen, micro-enterprise work stations, service offices, and chapel, have been combined under one roof, a 5,000-square foot unity hall. Other amenities at the project include a dog park, community table, outdoor barbecue pits and a garden.

“There are so many positives to being in this area but the real key here is working with Self-Help Enterprises,” Hillman said. “Their expertise has been invaluable.”

Betsy McGovern-Garcia, program director for real estate development at SHE, said using pre-fabricated homes will cost half that of stick built homes, or those built on site, and will shave off five to seven months from the timeline. All of the homes will be built by Redman Homes’ facility in nearby Lindsay, Calif. She also said residents will pay rent to live in the homes. Rent will be calculated at 30% of their individual income. For those without income, the rent could be paid for through vouchers with the Kings-Tulare Homeless Alliance, which often has more vouchers funded than housing available.

“There will also be an onsite manager to ensure rules are followed,” McGovern-Garcia said.

Hillman said the village will be the first of its kind in California, but not the first in the nation. Salt+Light’s project is modeled after Community First! Village in Austin, Texas. The 51-acre master planned community has built 500 tiny homes to provide permanent supportive housing for the homeless and for some a stepping stone to a more traditional housing unit, such as an apartment or low-income housing. Unlike other projects using FEMA tents or “tiny homes”, housing units at the village in Goshen will have running water, sewer connections, be wired for electricity and include a stove.

“Tiny homes are meant to be very temporary and do not meet state standards for housing,” Hillman told the council. “These units meet state standards for housing.”

Visalia Police Chief Jason Salazar, who sits on the board of directors of Salt+Light, said he visited the Central Texas homeless village a year ago. During the trip, he spoke with the Travis County Sheriff’s Department, whose jurisdiction includes the village. The project will be located in Goshen, meaning it will fall under the jurisdiction of the Tulare County Sheriff’s Department and not VPD. Salazar said the property was well managed by the nonprofit Mobile Loaves and Fishes and incredibly clean, a serious issue with other types of permanent housing for the homeless. Like Austin, the Goshen project will not require security guards or fences and any law enforcement presence will be routine patrols or in response to calls for service.

“The Sheriff’s Department spoke highly of it and said they don’t have significant issues with the village,” Salazar said. “If this was in the city limits, I wouldn’t have any qualms about it. If it works like Austin, which is what it is modeled after, this will be a good thing for our community.”

The project’s conditional use permit and affordable housing regulatory agreement was expected to be approved by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors this week. The meeting happened after press time.