

VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

Looking to call Tulare home? An affordable 138-unit complex is underway in the city

September 26, 2022

By: Sheyanne N Romero



Santa Fe Commons, an affordable housing complex overseen by Self-Help, is one of two new apartment complexes in Tulare. Ron Holman / Visalia Times-Delta

In order to manage Tulare's growing homeless crisis, affordable housing options are crucial.

Rental properties in Tulare are hard to come by, though, especially for low-income residents. When units do become available, "there's a stack of applicants almost immediately," Tulare Mayor Dennis Mederos said.

Three Tulare apartment complexes, in various stages of development, could bring more than 350 units to the city. Additionally, city leaders are laser-focused on bringing new single- and multi-family developments into the city.

The Regional Housing Needs Assessments recommends that Tulare needs upward of 1,400 new single or multi-family units that are "affordable" for low-income households, and 378 units for moderate-income household, according to City Manager Marc Mondell.

"Our needs are similar to any other thriving city," Mederos said. "We need a cross of low-, middle- and high-income housing, so that in an economy like ours everyone has access to housing."

Since Jan. 1, the city has issued 237 single-family home permits and 113 for multi-family units — complexes.

"We anticipate additional permits to continue to be issued throughout the year," Principal Planner Steven Sopp said.

Tulare on the move

Central Valley residents have median personal earnings of only \$23,000, about \$7,000 lower than the earnings of the typical Californian, a report by Measure of America found.

In Tulare, there are 41 Section 8 voucher holders waiting for a home, according to Tulare County Housing Authority.

Already, the city is staring down a growing unhoused population.

"We have people — our people — experiencing homelessness," Mederos said. "We intend to manage it."

The 2020 Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance's Point In Time count found that there were 203 people experiencing homelessness in Tulare. Of those 203 people, 123 were considered "chronically homeless."

Additionally, a majority of Tulare households spend between 30 to 50% of their monthly income on housing costs, city officials said.

A west Tulare affordable housing project could help provide much needed units for those without homes or on the brink of homelessness.

Santa Fe Commons is being built in partnership with Self-Help Enterprises, a Central Valley-based community development organization.

The city contributed \$1 million to the project and selected Self-Help's development plan for the location at Oleman Avenue and West Street, between Pleasant Elementary School and Tulare Western High School.

Phase 1 will provide 81 units including 25 units reserved for the unhoused and 35 units for agricultural workers. Formerly unhoused tenants will receive wrap around services linking them to DMV, healthcare and even jobs.

The complex will also hire afterschool coordinators for residents with children.

The two- and three-story apartment complex will be Self-Help's first all electric project. There will be seven electric vehicle charging stations on site, and there will be "a whole lot of solar to keep utilities low for residents," Self-Help Project Manager Miguel Arambula said.

When Phase 2 is complete, the project will provide a total of 62 one-bedroom units, 41 two-bedroom units, 35 three-bedroom units. Prices for units range from \$200 to \$1,100, depending on income.

Phase 1 is expected to be completed in summer 2023.

"The city has been a great partner," Arambula said. "They were very responsive to our timeline."

City officials added that the project moves Tulare closer to meeting affordable housing mandates and provides units for people at-risk of homelessness or who were formerly homeless.

Since 2020, the city increased its investment in the production of multi-family units for low-income households and housing options for people experiencing homelessness, Mondell said.

In east Tulare, a smaller complex on Aberdeen Street and Seminole Avenue is under construction. The project includes 16 three-bed units and 16 two-bed units.

A potential third apartment complex is in building permit plan check phase, according to Sopp. The Corvina Avenue apartments will include 208 units — 46 one-bedroom units, 138 two-bedroom units, 24 three-bedroom units.

This project offers units for rent at a market rate. Construction is anticipated to begin by the end of the year.

"The days of not getting things done are gone," Mederos said. "The city is working with the development community in different capacities to try and meet the housing need."