

THE FRESNO BEE

Latest affordable housing coming to an empty lot in Fresno. It's different from the rest

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By: Joshua Tehee



Fresno Councilmember Miguel Arias, at left-center, looks over renderings of new homes with representatives from Self-Help Enterprises, the Fresno Redevelopment Successor Agency, and the Golden West Side Planning Committee, after announcing the beginning of construction of a single-family affordable housing project on an empty lot near Edison High School at Walnut and Florence avenues in west Fresno on April 4, 2023. CRAIG KOHLRUSS ckohlruss@fresnobee.com

For decades, the parcel of land at Florence and Walnut avenues across from Edison Computech Middle School has been a series of encampments for the unhoused and a dumping ground for trash and other garbage.

In Google map photos, it's a long vacant lot, green with overgrown weeds.

It is, in fact, the last vacant lot in an area of southwest Fresno full of new development, including Fresno City College's West Fresno Campus and a United Health Center.

On Tuesday, the city along with representatives from Self-Help Enterprises and the Southwest Fresno Development Corporation broke ground on an affordable housing project that will turn this parcel into more than a dozen three- and four-bedroom homes.

“It’s going to flip,” said Fresno City Councilmember Miguel Arias, who represents the city’s District 3 that includes the new development.

Arias has initiated nearly 30 housing projects within the district in an attempt to alleviate the city’s ongoing housing crisis. That includes both temporary and permanent housing, tiny home villages, market-rate single family developments and apartment complexes.



Plans and renderings show the single-family affordable housing project now underway in a former empty lot at Walnut and Florence in west Fresno. CRAIG KOHLRUSS ckohlruss@fresnobee.com

Notably, the Monarch at Chinatown had its grand opening late last month.

The Hotel Fresno is expected to have final inspections this week and begin taking applications soon after.

The idea is to have as many housing options as possible, for as many residents as possible, Arias said.

Historically, Fresno has been really good at building single family and market rate housing, he said. But that ignores the 65% of city residents who rent, which leads to competition for available spaces.

The Monarch at Chinatown is already at capacity. It received more than 3,000 applications for 57 affordable housing units.

There’s also been an increase in prices. Currently, residents must make three times the minimum wage to afford rent, Arias said.



Fresno Councilmember Miguel Arias, at lectern, is joined by representatives from Self-Help Enterprises, the Fresno Redevelopment Successor Agency, and the Golden West Side Planning Committee, announces the beginning of construction of a single-family affordable housing project on an empty lot near Edison High School at Walnut and Florence avenues in west Fresno on April 4, 2023. CRAIG KOHLRUSS
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“As rents have escalated to record highs, the most effective form of rent control is that 30-year mortgage,” he said.

So, the 14 houses in the new project will be made available to those who make under 80% average medium income, ideally at a mortgage rate of \$600 to \$800 a month.

Thirty percent of the cost will be provided in sweat equity, Arias said, which means the buyers will have a direct hand in building the homes. Full construction should begin in October and take about a year.

Ideally, the project will take residents currently living in the area and keep them there, only now as home owners, Arias said.