

THE MODESTO BEE

Seed money is turned into micro homes and other housing projects in Stanislaus County

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James Street Apartments in Modesto, Calif., on Tuesday, July 12, 2022. ANDY ALFARO aalfaro@modbee.com

Stanislaus Equity Partners was one of the small recipients of funds through the American Rescue Plan Act, getting \$5 million of the \$107 million the federal government allocated to Stanislaus County.

The nonprofit community development corporation has leveraged that \$5 million into \$39 million in low-cost housing projects that are sorely needed, Executive Director Joe Duran said this week.

Stanislaus Equity Partners has an array of housing projects either completed or in the works, including micro homes for single mothers and families struggling with homelessness, as well as housing for people with mental health issues who need supportive services.

In an update to county supervisors Tuesday, Duran talked about developments in Modesto, Riverbank and other places that have a pressing need for affordable housing.

The nonprofit developer has drawn on grant programs, the county, city of Modesto, Health Plan of San Joaquin, philanthropy and other sources to arrange financing for housing projects far above the

initial \$5 million. It is working with three community development financial institutions to offer mortgages for low-income families to buy homes.

Stanislaus Equity, also known as STEP, is collaborating with Self-Help Enterprises on a 45-unit affordable housing development on East Morris Avenue in Modesto. The Porges Family Foundation donated the one-acre site, about a block east of McHenry Avenue, which helps to keep costs down for the project.

The plans are still taking shape, but Duran said 50% of the units will be for residents in need of supportive services. The rest could be for housing families, seniors and young people coming out of foster care.

A project under construction on East Orangeburg Avenue will include nine micro homes for families near the brink of homelessness. Duran said Free Will Baptist Church provided the property. The Center for Human Services and Modesto Family Promise will deliver services to assist the families.

Stanislaus County Affordable Housing Corp., known as STANCO, will be property manager for the Orangeburg micro home site, where residents will participate in the Housing and Urban Development voucher program.

Another proposal is an 8-unit micro home village on Morrill Avenue in Riverbank for single mothers and children. Stanislaus Equity is partnering with The Bridge Covenant Church and has a contract with Rehabilitation Restoration and Respite for the homes.

The development in the 2200 block of Morrill Avenue will have a playground and garden beds for the 16 to 32 mothers and children. A first phase is slated for completion by the end of this year. A second phase calls for six single-family houses for families qualifying for a program helping them purchase their first home.

Duran said the micro homes for STEP projects will range from 400 to 800 square feet in size and serve as single-family dwellings. The larger dwellings will have three bedrooms and two bathrooms for families, he said. Plans for Village on Morrill include two four-bedroom micro homes.

Duran said Riverbank residents attending a community meeting this month expressed not-in-my-backyard sentiments, which he attributed to a misconception that a homeless shelter was proposed.

The project will be for single moms who qualify for permanent housing assistance to enable them to get back on their feet.

QUICK AND EFFICIENT RESULTS

County Supervisor Terry Withrow said Wednesday he's impressed with the progress made by Stanislaus Equity Partners in a county with a housing crisis that is putting vulnerable people on the streets.

"They are really fulfilling all we hoped they would do," Withrow said. "The whole purpose was, rather than government trying to do this, we can invest in the community and let these nonprofit organizations do it themselves."

He added: "They are getting results quickly and efficiently."

STEP also was involved with a project funded by the state Homekey program on James Street in Modesto. The seven housing units for people at risk of homelessness have been fully occupied since December 2022. The city of Modesto, county Behavioral Health and Recovery Services and STANCO were partners.

The Stanislaus Housing Authority also brought in STEP on a 20-unit apartment complex that's already built in Hughson. Duran said he's talking with Riverbank and Oakdale about additional opportunities and is working on a veterans project with The Salvation Army.

STEP also worked with the Stanislaus Community Foundation to build an accessory dwelling in west Modesto, similar to a granny flat, to showcase the Backyard Homes Project, and assisted with a garage conversion for an adult with mental illness who receives care from elderly parents.

"We have this housing crisis and we want to help people get into homes with affordable rent, and if we can get them into home ownership that is a larger goal," said Kevin Smith, director of housing for STEP. "There is a lot of good organizations, people with good hearts, trying to figure this out. We are grateful to be in the mix for that."

Beside affordable housing endeavors, Stanislaus Equity Partners launched a micro-business development hub for people of color. The program provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to learn from business experts and share their experiences.