

VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

First phase of Tulare's multi-family affordable housing project is done

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The first phase of a new, multi-family affordable housing project in Tulare is complete.

This week, Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) hosted a grand opening for Santa Fe Commons One, located at 537 N. West Street, between Pleasant Elementary School and Tulare Western High School.

The complex has a total of 81 new units, with more than half of the units earmarked for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming unhoused.

"Santa Fe Commons will serve a truly broad range of people who need affordable housing – from low-income working families to individuals and families with children who have experienced homelessness," District 2 Supervisor Pete Vander Poel said. "High housing costs and homelessness are prevalent issues in our communities."

The Regional Housing Needs Assessments recommended that Tulare needed 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 officials.

Self-Help Enterprises, a Central Valley-based community development organization, has been working to expand its affordable housing efforts in Tulare. To the north of Santa Fe Commons One, a second phase is under construction that will provide additional opportunities for stable housing in the city.

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.

"We need to continue to create diverse, permanent, affordable housing opportunities with wraparound services to meet the needs of all Tulare residents," Vander Poel said. "Self-Help Enterprises' Santa Fe Commons is a great example, and we look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have on the local community."

The first of its kind in Tulare

Santa Fe Commons I offers one-, two-, and three-bedroom units.

Monthly rents are based on unit size and the family's income. Monthly rents range from \$190 to \$1,066, ensuring that families, many of whom work in nearby fields or packing plants, have an affordable place to live, Self-Help officials stated.

Thirty-five of the units are reserved for farmworker households through the state's Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker program.

An additional 25 units are reserved for permanent supportive housing. Residents are referred through a partnership with the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance and Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency.

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."

"This project provides high-quality affordable housing, and the opportunity for our unhoused residents to graduate from the homeless encampment directly to permanent supportive housing," Assistant City Manager Josh McDonnell said. "We are optimistic the on-site services will provide housing stability and result in real transformation in Tulare."

Santa Fe Commons is the first integrated permanent supportive housing project of its kind for Tulare.

Residents in the permanent supportive housing program move into fully furnished apartments and receive welcome home kits, which include household items such as bed linens, bath towels, and kitchenware. This helps ensure that the community's most vulnerable residents will be supported on their "fresh start," Self-Help officials said.

A community building of nearly 3,300 square-feet and an outdoor common area are available for services and activities.

The community building consists of a large all-purpose room with a kitchen and bathrooms where residents can participate in the programs offered by Self-Help's Resident Services team. Programs include financial literacy, English as a second language (ESL), and adult fitness.

"The project will not only promote housing stability in Tulare, but also help transform residents' lives through access to essential services that will enable them to thrive in their new homes," Self-Help Enterprises CEO Tom Collishaw said.

There is also a laundry facility, computer lab, and site management office.

Santa Fe Commons goes green

The new development was designed with sustainable and green building elements, according to Self-Help Enterprises.

The complex was built with a passive solar design to maximize natural heating and cooling, and water conservation measures, such as low water use fixtures. A solar PV system helps provide energy independence and makes Santa Fe Commons I a grid-neutral zero-net energy project.

Each unit features Energy Star appliances, including the dishwasher, stove and refrigerator. Additionally, there will be seven electric vehicle charging stations on site.

The site design includes tree buffers for shading and drought-tolerant planting to minimize rising temperatures.

When completed, Santa Fe Commons will be Self-Help's first all-electric project.