

VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

Visalia's University Center, Self Help affordable housing projects mark ambitious plans

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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

Architects have filed building plans for the new University Center at COS, a four-year college in Visalia.

The University Center at COS will be at the corner of Tulare Avenue and Mooney Boulevard, stretching down Meadow Lane. The first phase of the project, which could start later this year, would be the demolition of several buildings and the abandonment of Shady Lane. Local area taxpayers approved the project in 2022 under Measure C.

Now, the city of Visalia is reviewing construction plans.

The project's plan includes a mix of classrooms, labs, university support offices, and open study areas. A 220-seat, plus or minus, lecture hall is also included off the ground floor main entry lobby. The project is currently designed to be two stories tall with a total area of approximately 52,000 GSF. The ground floor footprint is approximately 30,000 square feet.

The complex can support approximately 600-700 students with a supporting staff of around 20-30. Existing parking in the college's Lot 7 off Tulare will support this added student load. Note that the project includes demolishing the existing Cedar Building off Meadow on the college campus.

City easements across college property are proposed to be abandoned and reclaimed by the college as follows:

- Along Shady, the entire distance from Meadow to Tulare
- On Meadow, starting at the alley, moving west across the whole campus to Woodland
- The Southerly portion of the alley between Mooney and Shady (To the Foster's Freeze property)

Measure C gives COS the needed money to open the University Center. The University Center will include not only Fresno State but other California colleges. This gives students a chance to get a college education while staying home.

COS President Brent Calvin says, "We believe that this University Center will serve the two-county area for decades to come."

Calvin says the University Center will be open either in the fall of 2026 or the spring of 2027.

AAAA Liquor is relocating to 1339 S Mooney as a result of the COS expansion. The long-time Mooney retailer filed plans with the city this week.

Self-Help plans a major affordable housing project in North Visalia

Self-Help Enterprises has filed preliminary plans to build a new affordable housing complex in North Visalia that could serve 200 people. Rancho Colegio is a new affordable rental community being developed by Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) in Visalia. Self-Help recently completed The Lofts multi-use housing complex in Downtown Visalia that just opened in December to wild acclaim.

Located immediately east of the Visalia Navigation Center, the new proposed project - Rancho Colegio, offers one-, two- and three-bedroom units to serve working families, seniors, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and farmworker households.

The project includes a fully integrated community offering multi-generational housing where seniors and young professionals live together in a service-enriched environment. The project includes an approximately 3,000-square-foot community center, which will provide office space for the full-time on-site manager and resident services staff. The community center will be available for family gatherings and community workshops and will also provide space for the after-school program and a variety of resident services, including STEM programs for youth, computer lab and classes, financial literacy and budgeting, and various health and wellness activities such as Zumba, health screenings and obesity prevention.

Rancho Colegio will serve residents earning 30-60% of the area's median income, and rents will range from \$300-\$900 per month. This housing opportunity allows families to pay affordable rent, therefore allowing them to achieve housing stability and the ability to pursue other financial goals such as attending school or saving for homeownership.

Rancho Colegio will be an all-electric project that includes renewable solar PV to offset 100% of the residential and common area electrical loads, resulting in a project that is also affordable to operate and has zero net energy.

Self-Help will also incorporate extensive water conservation measures, including highly efficient drip irrigation systems, thoughtful hardscapes, and low water use landscaping.