

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Winners chosen in 'historic' Land Trust lottery

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The Bakersfield Community Land Trust held its first home lottery Wednesday, selecting two winners and two alternates to be the first recipients of homes owned by the trust.

Around a dozen applicants crowded into the conference room at City Hall North in the hopes that their number would be among those selected for one of two homes owned by the trust.

With eyes closed, trust board members took turns drawing numbered balls from a small tumbler, with each number corresponding to an ID number for each of the 19 applicants.

But as each of the ID numbers selected Wednesday was read aloud, none of the applicants in the room stepped forward.

Winning applicants will be contacted by the trust. If they decide not to move forward with the home purchase, the alternates selected Wednesday will be contacted.

Even without winners in the room, Bakersfield Ward 2 City Councilman and chairman of the BCLT board Andrae Gonzales called the lottery “historic.”

"It was really heartwarming for me, personally, to see so many people here," Gonzales said. "To see kids and families here really warms my heart. And it just motivated me on a personal level to work even harder so that we can add additional homes in the future."

The City Council created the land trust with \$6.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act dollars in 2023 and since contracted with Visalia-based Self Help Enterprises to run the trust.

The two homes awarded Wednesday are both on Sunchase Drive in southwest Bakersfield, part of a new development and purchased by the trust.

A third home on Sunchase will be awarded in a lottery at a BCLT meeting next month. Last month, the trust broke ground on the first of several homes it hopes to construct on empty lots across the city.

Several applicants said they were just happy to have the opportunity.

Emily Figueroa, a janitor, said she's tried to find a home on the open market but it's been difficult. Her dream is to own a home.

"I don't think I could qualify by myself and stuff so maybe this would give an opportunity for me," she said.

None of the applicants who spoke with The Californian had ever heard of a community land trust before applying, but all of them said they were hopeful for the opportunity.

Land trusts are an alternative model of homeownership that separates ownership of the land from the home built on it. The land is held by the trust and leased to the homeowner, typically for 99 years or more, with the goal of limiting how much the home can increase in value.

It's a model more cities are turning to as they grapple with both the housing and affordable housing crises.

"All of the questions that I did have, once I read the flyer everything was answered right there," said Chatoya Fitz, one of the applicants.

Fitz and other applicants worked with Self-Help Enterprises before their names were entered into the lottery. Applicants were required to secure a \$110,000 mortgage from their own lender.

Though she wasn't chosen Wednesday, Fitz said she would be back for next month's lottery.

"I'm very hopeful. I will be here next month as well," Fitz said. "I did speak to my intake coordinator earlier just to make sure if we were not selected for these (homes) could we be selected for the other ones. They did have quite a few properties. So I put my name on every one. So I am hopeful."