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Housing authority may take over Barstow apartments

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BARSTOW • Residents of two apartment complexes on Virginia Way may soon be tenants of the regional housing authority.

The Housing Authority of San Bernardino County intends to purchase Virginia Village and Scenic View Apartments to refurbish them and increase the number of tenants in order to lower crime in the area, said Gus Joslin, the agency's development director. The transaction has not been finalized yet.

The Housing Authority will rent half the units at the apartment facilities to low-income residents, said David Wert, San Bernardino County spokesman. The other half will be rented at the market rate.

Both properties house a total of 300 units.

The properties with funds from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. But the apartment buildings will not turn into Section 8 or subsidized public housing, Joslin said.

According to Barstow Police Chief Dianne Burns, even though that area is known for crime, the number of recent incidents has declined. But police have recovered stolen vehicles at Scenic View Apartments and have responded to calls for break-ins at Virginia Village, she said.

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors loaned the Housing Authority about \$9.05 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds last month to purchase the Virginia Way properties. The Neighborhood Stabilization Program is part of HUD. Funds can only be used for properties either in foreclosure or whose owners have defaulted on their loans, Joslin said.

The previous owner of Virginia Village and Scenic View Apartments defaulted on his or her property loans. The properties were taken over by a court-appointed receiver last fall, Joslin said. Virginia Village's occupancy had decreased to 70 percent. Scenic View's had fallen to 80 percent. Both properties had fallen into disrepair, Joslin said.

Roberta Banks, an employee for Beacon Property Management, which began managing the properties in October, said she and Beacon's regional manager hopes to start a crime-free program in the area. Local attorneys, officials with the Fair Housing board and police officers will inform residents on new laws. Property managers will also receive printouts on the type of crime committed on the property, she said.

"(The Housing Authority) will help with that," she said.

Beacon will continue as the property manager for Virginia Village and Scenic View Apartments, Joslin said. The Housing Authority will fix water damage and repair the wooden stairs at Virginia Village. The agency will replace the roof at Scenic View Apartments and repair damage to the building's siding.

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