

Published 2/22/2011

Housing Authority Mulls Changes

By Dianne Anderson

SHARE 

The money hasn't come down yet, but everybody at the Housing Authority and the city has their fingers crossed for Choice Neighborhoods.

Under that initiative, the national Housing and Urban Development plans to open up some big money for housing authorities that can come up with a strong plan for how they'll concentrate public services, transportation, and job creation within high poverty areas.

Lucky winners with the brightest ideas will bring down millions of dollars to transform their communities.

Ana Gamiz, director of policy and community affairs for the county's Housing Authority, said that if their plan is accepted, it will help revitalize the community for residents on the second to oldest site that the Housing Authority built back in the 1940s. The new design hopes to increase the existing 252 family units there to about 400 units.

Gamiz expects to double the size of the units offered, provide a larger community center, which will also create more amenities to residents. At the site, the area around the intersection of Waterman Avenue and Baseline Street has a lot of open space and room for growth.

To explore and help develop the concept, the agency hired design specialists Pyatok Architects. Since last fall, over 500 residents have also attended several hands-on workshops to brainstorm their visions for the future. The project, still in the planning phase, is not funded yet, and projections are still cloudy on how many jobs it could produce.

Even so, the city and Mayor Morris are supportive, and with good participation from local residents, she expects the agency can at least put up a good fight for the money.

This week, architects presented three renderings of the potential project at a local planning committee meeting.

"We want to make this a revitalization for San Bernardino, something for the entire community so they can come and obtain services," she said.

Under President Obama, she said that the agency made great use of their \$5.1 million ARRA funding last year to revitalize existing housing stock, but all of that money has been spent, which created 420 jobs with 31 contractors.

President Obama's fiscal year budget 2012 allocates \$150 million for Sustainable Communities, and \$250 million for the Choice Neighborhoods program.

So far, Gamiz said that meetings have been productive, and she believes it will strengthen their standing for the competitive bid process.

If locally funded, the intersection project is expected to be exponentially bigger than the previous ARRA project, providing many jobs, refurbished units and opportunities for small business owners.

"We think we have a great case, we have a lot of support," she said. "We also have local businesses who are eager to see if there can be any possible commercial phase so they can relocate to a new area with their site."

The Housing Authority applied for the first phase of the Choice Neighborhood grant from HUD last fall for the planning grant to explore design layout and scope of work. They should know if they received that \$250,000 grant by the end of March.

If so, it will start the process of architectural input, and the application begins for the second phase of HUD grant funding, which is the bulk of the money for demolition and rebuilding the area.

"I think that our staff and the development department will do everything they can to seek other grants," she said. "I'm sure that with the partnerships with the city and the county, we'll try our best to find the funding."

San Bernardino Mayor Pat Morris said the transformation project is set to benefit the entire community.

"The project will create a more vibrant, contemporary intersection at Baseline and Waterman that will provide not only housing opportunities, but attract businesses and various service providers to the area. We are excited to partner with the Housing Authority in this significant revitalization effort in San Bernardino."

For more information on the next March meeting, call Ms. Gamiz at (909) 890-0644.

written by: precinct reporter group