

# Low-income housing set for Wasco, Shafter

## Agencies building homes, apartments each get more than \$6 million in grants

By **VICKI ADAMÉ**

Californian staff writer

e-mail: vadame@bakersfield.com

Low-income people in Shafter and Wasco will have another option for affordable rental housing within the next couple of years.

Two agencies building rental homes and apartments each received more than \$6 million through the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

It took nearly three years to get funding, but construction on Las Rosas Courts in Shafter should begin by the end of the year, said project manager Ernesto Espinoza. Las Rosas Courts will have 81 rentals for people meeting low-income requirements. It is hoped construction can begin by the end of the year, he said.

The rental apartments will be the first in what the National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc. said is a two-phase project, Espinoza said. The second phase, which does not have a start date, will consist of about 45 single-family rental homes, he said.

The center has been trying to get money since it bought the 20-acre site at the southeast corner of Ash and Birch streets in 2002, Espinoza said.

"It's a relief to finally get that project started," Espinoza said.

The center, he said, felt there was a need for affordable housing in Shafter.

"I know they've been working on it for a couple of years and have been trying to get funding," said Jake Sweeny, planning director for the city of Shafter. "They've been pushing pretty hard for this project."

The center already has a conditional use permit, Sweeny said.

Although he did not know the city's need for affordable housing, Sweeny said, "My assumption is there is a need for it."

Because a portion of the money is from the Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker program, 38 units will be set aside for agricultural workers, Espinoza said. The program helps provide housing for low-income agricultural workers.

The rest of the rentals will be for individuals who earn between 35 and 50 percent of the area's median income, he said.

Corporation for Better Housing has submitted a preliminary site plan, said Dennis McNamara, associate planner for the city of Wasco.

The plan calls for a 64-lot rental project at the corner of Poplar and Filburn streets, he said. Each lot will have 3- or 4-bedroom houses.

"This is a unique concept. These aren't apartments but houses with full back yards and front yards," McNamara said.

And like Las Rosas Courts, Poplar Village will have 27 rental houses set aside for agricultural workers earning between 30 and 50 percent of the area's median income.

The cities of Delano and Taft also received grants.

Judy Nevis, chief deputy director of the state Department of Housing and Community Development, said the money, with the exception of the rental assistance program Taft received, are grants to the cities. The cities can then loan the money to families.

The Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Program is a grant to the city of Taft, which then offers rent vouchers to families in the area, Nevis said.

Taft will use one of its grants to make home loans to poor families, said Pamela Taylor, Taft's grant administrator. Depending on the family's ability to pay, the money will either be a deferred loan or grant, Taylor said.

The city has several dilapidated houses. Most were built before 1970, she said.

"We will go in and rebuild a new home and put them in temporary rental housing," Taylor said.

The rental assistance program is an attempt by the federal government to put cities in control of their Section 8 programs, she said.

The city has a large senior citizen population living in rental housing, she said. If they pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent, the city wants to subsidize them, Taylor said.

"The goal is to let them buy medicines and, oh my God, buy food for that month," Taylor said. "It's very exciting what we're going to be able to do for these families out here in Taft."

Delano officials weren't available for comment.

## HOUSING MONEY RECIPIENTS

The California Department of Housing and Community Development awarded these agencies money through the following funds:

### Home Investment Partnerships Program funds:

- Delano received \$200,000 for its American Dream First-Time Homebuyer program and another \$600,000 for the First-Time Homebuyer Program.

- Taft received \$200,000 for the American Dream First-Time Homebuyer program, \$700,000 for the First-Time Homebuyer Infill New Construction program and \$100,000 for the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance program.

### Multifamily Housing Program:

- The National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc. received \$3,357,614

- Corporation for Better Housing received \$3,808,878

### Joe Serna Jr. Farmworkers Housing Grant Program:

- National Farmworkers Service Center, Inc. received \$2,806,784

- Corporation for Better Housing received \$2.8 million