



Open House celebrates first large affordable housing project in county

posted on Mon, 10/23/2017 - 07:58am by John Chadwell, Reporting for BenitoLink

Eight-year project concludes with open house to dedicate affordable-housing Buena Vista Apartments, the first large CHISPA project in Hollister and San Benito County.



CHISPA representatives and government officials take part in ribbon cutting for Buena Vista Apartments. Photos by John Chadwell.



An effort that began eight years ago to provide affordable housing to low-income families in San Benito County came to fruition Oct. 20 as the Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association (CHISPA) held an open house at its newest project at 810 Buena Vista Street.

The 40-unit Buena Vista Apartments are fully leased. CHISPA began accepting applications Oct. 3, 2016, and by the 30th of December 1,108 people had applied. On Jan. 20, 2018, a computer program was used to randomly pick 36 applicants, which were verified by Supervisor Jaime De La Cruz. Five of the occupants are clients of the county's Department of Behavioral Health who were formerly homeless or about to be homeless. In addition to 40 two and three-bedroom apartments, the complex also has a computer room where Gavilan College will provide adult English as second language classes and computer literacy to adults. Also, the county YMCA will be providing after-school programs. Over time, CHISPA will add other classes and activities. Recognizing the importance of Internet availability, CHISPA is providing free Wi-Fi for the computer lab and each apartment.

The residents pay an average of \$1,000 a month. Eight units are covered under the Housing Choice Voucher Program, also known as Section 8, which provides rental assistance of up to \$2,000 a month.

During the grand opening ceremony, a number of city, county, state officials, and CHISPA representatives took the opportunity to speak about the project and those behind its development. After acknowledging those officials in the audience, Mike Garcia, vice chair of the CHISPA board, told the audience



Jaime De La Cruz was a supporter at the beginning of the project and verified names of those to get apartments.



Anna Caballero said a \$400 million housing bond was coming.



Bill Avera said the city is helping with subsidies on the new senior housing project on Line Street.

that \$1 million of the funding for the apartments came from a state grant and that Supervisor Jaime De La Cruz was the first county official to come onboard in support.

De La Cruz recalled how he was asked for assistance early on and he always agreed to do what he could because he felt it was an important project for low-income members of the community, especially because it would be located in his district. He said he was excited when he was initially told there would be more than 80 units, but later on economic conditions reduced it to 40 apartments. He recounted the day he was told there would be a [lottery](#) to determine who would get the apartments.

“It was an honor for me to actually select the winners of these apartments,” he said. “It gave me great pride that CHISPA gave me that opportunity. I hope it’s just the beginning because there still are families in San Benito

County who are living in garages, in someone’s backyard, and the time has come that we push this issue forward in interest of the low-income members of our community.”

Anna Caballero, Democratic assembly member, said there is no better feeling than giving a family the key to a home they helped to build or an apartment they can afford to live in. She explained the concept of low-income housing in the percentage of income spent for housing. She said if someone is paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing they are over-spending.

“In our region, 68 percent of working people are spending over 30 percent and more than 50 percent of them are paying more than 50 percent,” she said. “What that indicates is we have people living in significantly over-crowded situations, and that leads to issues we see, sexual abuse of family members, and children living under a lot of stress.”

She praised CHISPA for partnering with local governments that help with zoning issues and the state government, which helps with funding. She announced that next year there will be a \$400 million bond on the ballot to deal with the state’s housing crises.

“The state just passed a \$75 fee on property transfers to generate an estimated \$250 million a year to go toward housing,” she said. “Even with all those efforts and the tax credits, we still have a huge need in our community, so every time we chip away from it we’re building hope by stabilizing the lives of the families who live here and we’re making a tremendous difference for the children that finally have a safe and decent place to live.”

Alan Yamamoto, director of the county’s behavioral health department, began working with CHISPA when he was notified it had purchased the land along Buena Vista Street and made



Alfred Diaz-Infante told of the complex funding and coordination needed for low-income housing projects.

\$585,000 in state funding available. Yamamoto told of how the county is funding four units of the project to house five of its clients who will be able to stay there for the rest of their lives.

“None of this would have happened without the help of CHISPA,” he said. “We dedicated this portion of the Mental Health Service Act for these clients, but our access to it was through CalHFA (California Housing Finance Agency), which was a very arduous process that you have to speak the language of the developer. CHISPA helped us with that.”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, president and CEO of CHISPA, said 49 senior affordable housing units were soon be built between Line Street and West Side Blvd., and took the opportunity to thank Councilwoman Mickie Luna for her support for the project, and asked her to make a few comments. In coming forward, she asked fellow councilmember Jim Gillio and City Manager Bill Avera to join her at the podium.

“When you see over 1,000 applications come in a project such as this, you know there’s a need in San Benito County and the City of Hollister, and we can’t stop here,” she said. “I’m glad CHISPA is here in our community and providing for residents of the city, and I want to thank the board of supervisors for their work because we have a partnership here. And no matter what anybody else says, we do work together.”

Bill Avera, Hollister city manager, explained that the project had taken eight years to get to the point of providing 40 affordable housing units. He thanked the CHISPA board and said the project was its first large project in the county. He said the city hopes to continue working with the organizations on many more projects.

“We’ve done several small projects with them and I know our subsidy with them was minimal on this project, but, hopefully, we did a little bit better on the senior project and we’ll be at one of these (open house) in two years,” he said.

Diaz-Infante went on to speak of the computer program with Gavilan College and the YMCA’s Healthy Mind program that provides homework assistance, writing and reading enrichment activities, arts and crafts, science activities, day camps and sports programs for the children in the apartments. After his comments, everyone went outside to dedicate the newest and largest affordable-housing project in the county and city, and to visit with residents of two of the apartments.



About:

John Chadwell

Former U.S. Navy Combat Photojournalist. Award-winning writer for magazine, newspapers, radio and television. BA in Journalism and Mass Communications from Chapman University. Graduate studies at USC Cinema School. Also, author of eight novels, copywriter and scriptwriter.

Source: <https://benitolink.com/news/open-house-celebrates-first-large-affordable-housing-project-county>