



Summit will target solutions to workers' housing

By Malia Spencer/SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Local officials with backgrounds in business, government and development are hoping a meeting of the minds will yield solutions for the Central Coast's housing crisis.

The Housing Trust Fund of Santa Barbara County is hosting a symposium Wednesday morning in Santa Maria to discuss how to provide housing affordable to the county's workforce.

Registration for the Workforce Housing Summit is available at the event starting at 7:30 a.m. at the Radisson Hotel, 3455 Skyway Drive, Santa Maria. The meeting slated to last until 11 a.m.

The trust fund is a countywide nonprofit that looks to "create innovative financing partnership" to bridge the gap between the cost of housing and what people can afford to pay, said Jennifer McGovern, coordinator of the fund.

The upcoming housing summit is meant "to inform people about what's possible, to galvanize support for moving forward countywide (with) creative solutions," McGovern said.

"There will be an overview on why we need workforce housing ... (and) a model of successful projects to inspire others to get involved," she added.

A keynote address is expected from Carl Guardino, president and CEO of Silicon Valley Leadership Group, who was part of creating the Santa Clara County Housing Trust Fund.

McGovern noted that the Santa Clara program, which has helped 5,400 families afford homes, is one that Santa Barbara officials would like to emulate.

The Housing Trust Fund of Santa Barbara County was incorporated in 2002 but has been operational only for the last two years, McGovern said. The group has a 10-member board of directors from all parts of the county representing business, government, developers and financial interests.

One of the first programs for the nonprofit was a \$2.7 million revolving loan fund that has already been used to develop a 62-unit project in Santa Barbara. That project received a \$1 million low-cost construction loan, she said.

There are two projects in North County that may also benefit from the trust. One is a 28-unit home ownership project in Los Alamos and the other is a five-unit project in Lompoc.

In Santa Barbara County, the trust fund uses a broad definition of workforce housing, McGovern said, including employees from the farm fields to the service industry to middle management.

Workforce housing means it is affordable to the average worker based on a household paying no more than 30 percent of household income for rental housing and no more than 35 percent for home ownership, she said.

DeWayne Holmdahl, a housing trust board member and Lompoc City Councilman, said he is pleased to see a diverse group of interests coming together to talk.

"We have the developers, we have government, we have people in need, we have everyone in the same room," he said. "Usually it's government talking to itself ..."

"We have everyone together to see what they can come up with. We are not stopping on this," he added.

Fellow board member and Santa Maria City Councilman Bob Orach agreed, noting that other communities have faced similar situations and come with solutions and through sharing ideas maybe similar projects can be implemented here.

Getting commuters out of their cars and working where they live benefits the entire community, Orach said.

“So much time, energy and money is spent commuting they don't become part of the fabric of a community,” he said, adding that in the few hours people save commuting each day they can use the time to invest in their children's schools or become involved in community groups and projects.

For more information on the housing trust, see www.sbhousingtrust.org, or call McGovern at 685-1949.

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