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Paradise Creek: from toxic site to community neighborhood

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Paradise Creek, affordable housing in National City



By **Allison Sampite-Montecalvo**

APRIL 26, 2017, 2:15 PM

More than 100 families looking for affordable housing in [National City](#) have found a home at Paradise Creek, a 201-unit project on the city's west side.

Tiyana Burke, 30, and her two children, Xavier, 13 and Jazmin, 9, are one of those families who moved into the first phase of the project earlier this year.

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Burke, a third-year psychology student, was one of more than 3,000 people who applied during the first phase of Paradise Creek's development last summer.

Burke had lived in another apartment in the city since 2009 that was lackluster at best. She said she dealt with an unprofessional landlord and a host of maintenance problems, including leaks and faulty appliances.

Her son's room was the size of a small, walk-in closet.

"It was a nightmare living there," she said.

Luckily, Burke qualified for a 2-bedroom, 1½ bath apartment, and after moving in Feb. 1, she said her quality of life has changed drastically.

"In my old place, I only had one (electrical) socket in my bedroom, now I have five. I have towel racks. My son has a normal size room."

Burke said she can't believe she's there.

But many people, groups and organizations knew that one day, she and others would be.

And on April 18, National City leaders and community partners celebrated the completion of phase I and the groundbreaking of phase II.

Construction on the first phase was completed last December. The units are 100 percent leased solely by National City residents.

Paradise Creek is a public-private partnership with developers Community HousingWorks and Related California.

It's near the 24th Street Trolley Station, parks and recreational centers, retail, schools, the library and a medical clinic.

The first phase of the project included 109 units on four acres with one-, two-, and three-bedroom units that range from 605 square feet to 1,390 square feet.

The units have access to a community center, fitness area, computer area, conference rooms and a multi-purpose room.

A wall mural coordinated by local nonprofit A Reason To Survive and created by the community, surrounds an onsite park and includes art such as hand prints.

The affordable-housing project has been in the works for more than 12 years, surviving various hurdles along the way over financing and partnerships.

The total cost of both phases, including remediation, is about \$100 million, with funding coming from various sources:

- National City – about \$36 million plus land (ground lease)
- state – almost \$20 million (Prop 1C and cap and trade funds)
- federal – more than \$42 million in low-income housing tax credit program, other

Sue Reynolds, head of Community HousingWorks, said Paradise Creek is a catalyst for revitalizing the west side of town.

“And it's a platform for opportunity for the folks who live here,” she said during the groundbreaking event.

Mayor Ron Morrison said the day had been a long time coming.

“As we continue the second phase and other projects in the town, we work that delicate balance of affordable housing and market-rate housing to make sure we blend our community together.”

A representative from the Environmental Health Coalition, which had a role in the project, also attended the event.

“We believe that everyone has the right to live in a healthy community, and we're here to make sure that happens,” Carolina Martinez said.

National City had to overcome many issues for the project to come to fruition: the dissolution of state redevelopment, cleanup of a toxic site, financing, and affordability concerns from the community.

The city-owned property was formerly used as a public works yard for the maintenance of city vehicles surrounded by a neighborhood with similar uses.

“It took a lot of work and political will,” said William Vasquez, director of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. “The project is beautiful. It would fit into any community.”

Laura Whittall-Scherfee, deputy director of the state Department of Housing and Community Development, called the project an “example of transformation in the best way possible.”

“We do this because people matter, and because we want to make sure that people are housed regardless of their income levels,” she said. “Housing is a foundation without which, most things in life are much more difficult or can't happen.”

“As Paradise Creek residents we have been given the opportunity of a lifetime,” she said. “I know I’m not the only one that has come from the nightmare of previous housing, so we must do our part to take care of it and pick up after ourselves.”

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