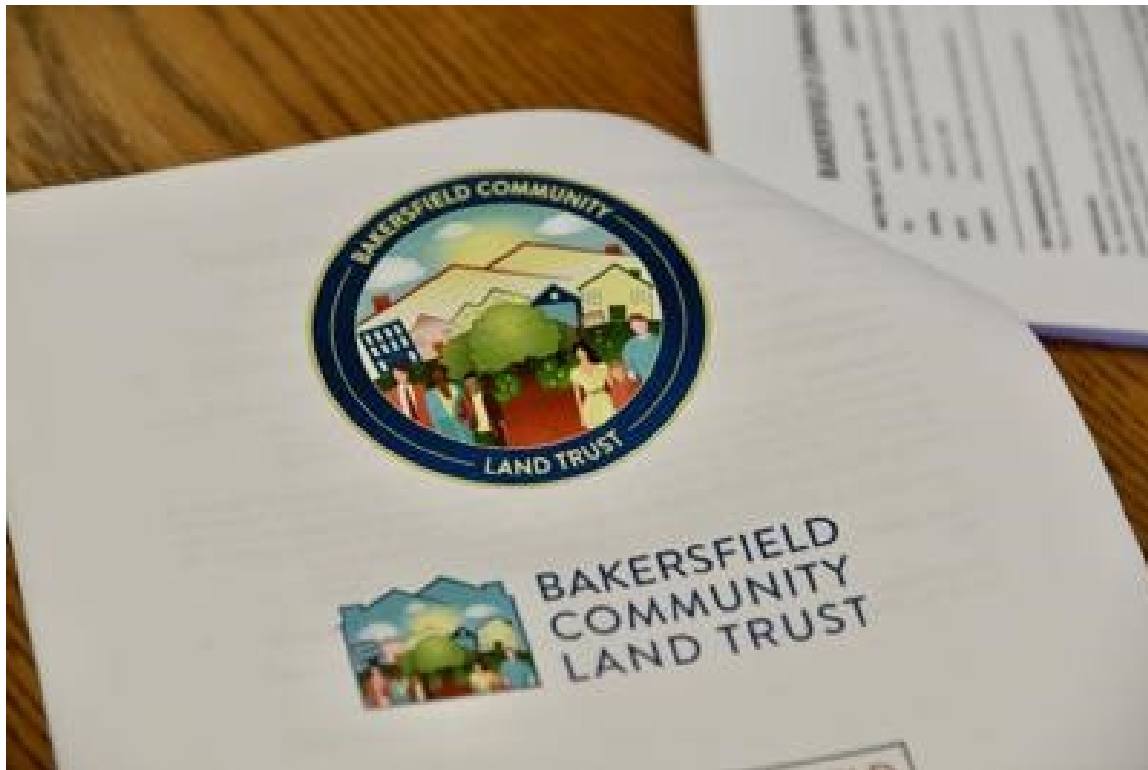


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Land trust hopes to break ground on first projects this summer homeowners

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By: Peter Segall



With a newly selected logo and administrative pieces falling into place, the Bakersfield Community Land Trust hopes to break ground on its first affordable housing units this summer and start selling them in 2026.

"Our target for construction would be pulling permits and the land transfer, ideally, pulling permits in June," said Self Help Enterprises Vice President Betsy McGovern-Garcia. "That is an aggressive timeline but is using every tool that we're driving towards typically on a build like this."

The city hired Visalia-based Self Help Enterprises, or SHE, to run Bakersfield's new community land trust, an ambitious project to build permanently affordable housing locally.

Community land trusts separate ownership of the land from the buildings on it in an effort to limit the amount a property can rise in value, thereby keeping the home price affordable. The model has grown in popularity recently as cities across the nation struggle with rising housing costs.

Bakersfield approved its land trust in 2023 and has worked to establish the land trust as an independent nonprofit organization.

On Wednesday, SHE presented the land trust's board with a list of city-owned properties organized into tiers of ease of development. The first tier — the easiest properties to develop — includes eight sites that can facilitate up to 20 homes.

Tier one sites are currently empty lots, and because SHE already has a library of plans for affordable homes and experience developing land trusts, things are able to move quickly.

There are still a number of issues for the trust to work out such as guidelines for who is eligible to apply to purchase a land trust home and what conditions need to be met, but McGovern-Garcia was confident that information could be decided at the trust's next meeting in April.

Properties named in the first tier include vacant lots at 340 and 346 S. Owens St.; 1509 Potomac Ave. and 1300 R St. Seven of the eight tier one sites will be typical single-family homes but the R Street lot sits on a vacant portion of a development with 21 three-story townhomes, and BCLT's new homes will be slimmer, two-story homes more in line with existing construction.

"If it's a finished lot we're probably looking at six months for construction on the traditional single-family homes, so that means around the end of the year, early next year we would start selling our first homes," McGovern-Garcia said. "Then R Street we're hoping would be probably three, four months behind that and we'll just roll them out in waves."

Initially funded by an \$8 million allocation from the city's American Rescue Plan Act funding, it's hoped that the sales from the trust will continue to fund the construction or acquisition of additional homes.

In addition to new construction, McGovern-Garcia said the trust was looking into purchasing existing homes that could be sold under the trust's model.

Further information on how to apply to purchase one of the homes will be released in the coming weeks.

Also Wednesday, the board selected a new logo for the trust. Board members were given four similar options and ultimately chose a circular "badge" version.

Bakersfield Ward 4 Councilman Bob Smith, who also serves on the land trust's board, said he was pleased with the progress.

"Self Help Enterprises is very professional and very good and their reports are very professional. I think it's moving right along," Smith said. "It's a lot of details to work out and but I think things are moving in the right direction."