



WARRIOR VILLAGE PROJECT

The Bugle: Vol 2, Issue 10, October 2020

www.WarriorVillageProject.com

PROGRESS REPORT

During this first year of our nascent program, we expected to learn a lot about how to: fund our program through monetary and in-kind donations, build cottages on a high school campus with student labor, find suitable sites for our cottages, and navigate the process of obtaining the necessary approvals and permits to install our cottages as permanent dwellings. It has been a constant learning process.

San Diego County Planning & Development Services (PDS) has published an informative, 4-page document entitled "[How to Obtain a Building Permit Summary](#)", which advises that the "overall processing time to obtain a new single family dwelling building permit is typically six months to one year from submittal to issuance of the permit." "Overall processing time between initial and permit issuance is often prolonged due to multiple re-check cycles." So, we expected that it would be a slow process. But, the protocols that were put in place to protect staff during the COVID-19 pandemic slowed the process considerably.

PDS has also published a 5-page document entitled "[Conditions of Approval](#)", a "Checklist of Clearances Required for Building Permit Issuance". Depending on the nature of the project, some of the conditions apply, and some do not. When we launched our program, PDS and related Agencies were still trying to figure out how to implement the evolving rules for the construction of ADUs under the County's Fee Waiver Program. The rules became clear during the last year. Fortunately, the County's Fee Waiver Program has greatly benefitted us by reducing our permit costs significantly.

Last month we told you that we could see the light at the end of the tunnel. Our building plans had passed the PDS Plan Check process and were at the City of Vista for the next steps in the process. We thought it would take another month to receive our building permit so that we could start site work at a [Wounded Warrior Homes](#) residence in Vista. The tunnel through the Vista Civic Center was longer than we expected, but we received all of our Agency Clearances from the Vista Unified School District, the Vista Irrigation District (water supply), the City of Vista Buena Sanitation District (sewer), and the Vista Fire Department. On October 26 our plans were returned to PDS' Kearny Mesa office, and placed on their "Ready to Issue" building permit table. We can almost grasp the light at the end of the tunnel!

We were doing something new, so we have been on a steep learning curve. I'm not going to lie; we made mistakes and made some sub-optimal decisions that slowed down the construction and approval processes. We have learned from our mistakes and will do better on future cottages.

***A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.
Albert Einstein***

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FUTURE EVENTS

Visit our Website:

[WarriorVillageProject.com.](http://WarriorVillageProject.com)

Our Mission

Our mission is two-fold:

- to provide affordable, permanent housing for homeless veterans, and
- to train the next generation of home builders.

The Webster's Dictionary definition of affordable is: "able to be afforded : having a cost that is not too high." As an example, Webster's describes *affordable* housing as "housing that is not too expensive for people of limited means." However, this definition refers only to the cost of the housing to the consumer, not the actual cost of producing the housing. The cost of producing "*affordable*" housing in California is definitely not affordable to taxpayers who must pay for it.

"In February of 2016, California's Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) reported that California's shortfall of subsidized housing units - affordable to those who earn 80 percent or less of the median income where they live - was about 1.7 million housing units. The LAO estimated that closing this shortfall through new construction would cost in excess of \$250 billion in public subsidies, though the report also noted: 'There is a good chance the actual cost could be higher.'" [Reid, Carolina: "*The Costs of Affordable Housing Production: Insights from California's 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program*," A Turner Center Report (March 2020)]

That caveat now seems prescient. According to a [March 2020 report](#) from the Turner Center for Housing Innovation at UC Berkley, "between 2016 and 2019, the costs to develop a new affordable unit in California under the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program have increased from \$425,000 per unit to more than \$480,000 per unit, an increase of 13 percent in just four years (after accounting for inflation). Costs per square foot have increased by 30 percent over the same time period, reaching \$700 per square foot in 2019. A report by the federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that average development costs for new LIHTC projects in California were the highest in the nation, eclipsing those in New York City."

In November 2016 Los Angeles voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition HHH, a \$1.2 billion bond measure to partially subsidize the construction of up to 10,000 supportive housing units. The ballot language of HHH provides that the City Controller shall conduct a financial audit of the program each year bonds are outstanding or proceeds remain unspent. Almost four years later, only three projects have been completed, construction has not started on three-quarters of the planned units, and many projects may "never come to fruition," according to Los Angeles City Auditor, Ron Galperin

According to an [audit report](#) issued by Galperin, the cost of building a single unit of housing for the homeless in Los Angeles has risen to \$531,000. Mr. Galperin also cited two projects whose costs have risen to \$750,000 per unit, noting that delays have driven city-funded homeless construction expenses up from initial projections of \$350,000 per unit. According to Galperin, "When you create a very complex model, it requires many levels of funding and approval and puts more and more requirements on what a unit should look like and what features you need, and you end up with an expensive paradigm for building housing."

Closer to home, on 18 September 2020, San Diego Housing Commission staff recommended that the Housing Commission approve a loan to partially finance a 78-unit affordable rental housing development at the intersection of Front & Beech streets in San Diego ([the Front & Beech Project](#)). The \$36.5 million, 78-unit building complex would consist of 77 '*affordable*', 321 square foot studio apartments and one 2-bedroom manager's unit, at a cost of \$467,433 per apartment. The artist renderings of the building are beautiful; they should be at this price!

After we have completed the construction and installation of our first cottage, we will perform an audit of the costs with the help of Construction Management students at [California Baptist University](#). Our unit costs will come in under \$100,000 to construct, transport and install our 400 square foot cottages as permanent Accessory Dwelling Units, all funded through private monetary and in-kind donations.

Our mission is to provide affordable, permanent housing for homeless veterans while training the next generation of home builders

PARTNERS

Those who have been following our program for the last year know that our goal has been to grow our network of high schools participating in the Warrior Village Project, with the objective of adding at least one more school to our program in the 2020 - 2021 academic year. Unfortunately, we did not factor COVID-19 into our plans. Since March, school administrators have been struggling to put infrastructure and curriculums in place to educate students online, while planning for the uncertain date when students will be able to return to in-person learning. In the current, very uncertain environment, no schools can contemplate starting a new, ambitious curriculum to build cottages for the Warrior Village Project.

Our vision is to still to build [Pocket Neighborhood](#) communities of 12 of our cottages and a community center throughout San Diego County with the needs of homeless veterans in mind: permanent, truly affordable housing in a supportive community environment. To work toward this vision, our first cottages will be installed as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs, or 'Granny Flats'). Installing our cottages as ADUs will enable us to:

- take advantage of building fee waivers offered by local jurisdictions to encourage the development of ADUs. While these incentives are in place, installing our cottages as ADUs is the most cost effective way to increase the affordable housing stock in San Diego County.
- postpone investment in land and infrastructure and building fees for our first village until we have enough schools enrolled in the Project to build 12 cottages at the same time.

Even without COVID-19, it is not an easy decision for school administrators to introduce a new building trades curriculum in their schools. Few schools have thriving woodshop programs like Chris Geldert's program at San Marcos High School. After telling our children for generations that a four-year college degree is the only path to success, many students are not interested in learning a trade. Many school administrators are still focused on preparing their students for college and are not really supportive of vocational education. Others probably see our program as being a bigger commitment than they are prepared to take on. We get it!

So, while we have been waiting for our building permit and for our students to return to school, we have been thinking about innovative ways to accelerate the growth of our program so that we can have a more meaningful impact on the crisis of homelessness. We formed a non-profit, Warrior Village Project, Inc., to facilitate activities with other potential partners, in addition to our relationships with individual high schools. We have been looking at options for schools to participate in building our cottages at a level that is consistent with the resources of each school, enabling them to 'dip their toe' in construction trades training without making a major commitment:

- Some schools, like San Marcos High School, would continue to build complete cottages on campus.
- Other schools could assemble cottages on their campus from modular components of walls, floors, etc. shipped to them from a partner. Only assembly tools would be required.
- Some schools may choose to build modular components for assembly at another school. More tools would be required, but the commitment would be less than building an entire cottage.
- Some schools could bus their students to a village site where they would be provided with tools and instruction in building a cottage in place from raw materials or from components built by others. Only eager students would be required. This could be an option for 'home schooled' students.
- Over time, schools may find that they are ready to transition from one option, like assembling cottages from components, to building components, or building an entire cottage onsite or on campus. The transition could take place when the school is ready to take on a bigger challenge.

With these ideas in mind, we decided to reach out to potential partners with compatible goals that we could work with to grow our program more quickly. This led us to the CTE Program at the [Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility](#) in Otay Mesa. If you are like me, you don't know much, if anything, about rehabilitative programs in our correctional facilities. I hope you find the information about Richard J. Donovan in the following pages enlightening.

PARTNERS

Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility

Mike McSweeney once told me that an inmate leaving prison with "basic building skills and the keys to a pickup truck could easily get a job in construction when he or she is released from prison." He and a colleague talked with the [Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility](#) (RJD) two years ago about developing a building trades training program at the prison. We felt that it was time to follow through on this idea with a version of the Warrior Village Project at RJD.

RJD, in the unincorporated area of San Diego County, is part of the [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation](#) (CDCR). The prison is in the foothills of Otay Mesa overlooking the Mexican border about 1.5 miles away. The 780-acre site is shared with six other law enforcement properties.

RJD has about 3,500 incarcerated male prisoners. About 1,800 prisoners are employed in the prison, working in the bakery, a shoe factory or in maintenance, custodial or clerical jobs. The prisoners are paid \$0.08 to \$2.00 per hour for their work, but most of their jobs do not prepare them well for lucrative careers upon their release.



I was pleased to learn that RJD has a Career Technical Education (CTE) program in its Otay Mesa Adult School. Their CTE programs include: Carpentry, Construction Technology, Electrical Construction, HVAC, Masonry, Plumbing, Welding and Roofing. It sounds like the men in these programs could build cottages for the Warrior Village Project while preparing themselves for careers in home building! That's when I decided to reach out to Rebecca Kroll, Community Resources Manager at RJD.

The more I learned about RJD and its Otay Mesa Adult School, the better the story got. Rebecca told me that RJD was considering a program for inmates to build 'microhomes' at RJD in a program similar to the [Microhome Project](#) at the [Correctional Training Facility \(CTF\) in Soledad](#). The Soledad program was initiated by Eric Johnson, David Elliot and David Balch at [R3 \(Rehabilitation, Restoration & Respite\)](#) to "combine rehabilitation, education, and community service."

The testimony of Chris Martinez, former CTF Inmate and future General Contractor, at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Microhome Project attests to the ability of rehabilitative programs to change inmates' lives for the better when they are given a sense of purpose, hope, and the skills to work toward a better future for themselves, their families and their communities (link to [Rehabilitation Nation Video](#) of the ribbon cutting ceremony).



Does it sound like there is scope to collaborate with RJD? For us the answer is YES! So, we invited Otay Mesa Adult School staff and instructors for a visit to see our cottages at SMHS and to start a conversation about how we could help each other. We, and our new friends at RJD, have lots of ideas about how we could work together to provide affordable, permanent housing for homeless veterans while training the next generation of home builders. The RJD folks are our kind of people!

VIP PROFILE: Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility Otay Mesa Adult School

On September 25 staff from the Otay Mesa Adult School at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility (RJD) visited us to see our cottages under construction. The visit followed a Zoom Meeting about the Warrior Village Project and RJD's plans to start a program similar to the [Microhome Project](#) at the [Correctional Training Facility \(CTF\) in Soledad](#). We soon discovered that we had compatible goals and could benefit from exchanging information and finding ways to collaborate.

The RJD group included Rebecca Kroll, Community Resources Analyst; Ana Mondet, Principal of the Otay Mesa Adult School; Ronald Bates, Vice Principal, and; Instructors Ramon Gonzalez (Carpentry) and Mark Feaster (Welding). Joining the group, on their second visit to SMHS, were Robert Bird, Reentry Liaison for the San Diego County District Attorney's Office, and Brahman Kyrie, from the [Brahman Project](#). Chris Geldert, Mike McSweeney and Mark Pilcher acted as hosts for their visit.

The Otay Mesa Adult School is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, offering a college education within the RJD facility. The school also offers training in Carpentry, Construction Technology, Electrical Construction, Heating/Ventilation/Air Conditioning/Refrigeration (HVAC), Masonry, Plumbing, Welding, Roofing and other trades.

In addition to the Otay Mesa Adult School, RJD has a California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) program. CALPIA manages over 100 manufacturing, service, and consumable industries within 35 CDCR institutions. The objectives of CALPIA are to 1) develop and operate industrial, agricultural and service enterprises that provide **work opportunities for offenders** and to serve government agencies with products and services commensurate with their needs; 2) create and maintain working conditions as similar as possible to those of private industry, **to help offenders work productively to earn funds, and to acquire or improve effective work habits and occupational skills**, and; 3) operate self-supporting offender work programs through the generation of funds from the sale of products and services, avoiding the costs of alternative CDCR offender programs. CALPIA receives no annual appropriation from the legislature.

You can tell from the smiling faces below that the visit was very successful!



L to R: Mark Pilcher, Chris Geldert, Ronald Bates, Mike McSweeney, Brahman Kyrie, Ana Mondet, Ramon Gonzalez, Robert Bird, Rebecca Kroll & Mark Feaster.

SCHOOL UPDATE San Marcos High School



On October 14, 2020, the first wave of teachers returned to San Marcos Unified School District campuses to ready themselves for the in-person return of the first group of elementary students on Tuesday, October 20th. Most Grade 6 - 12 students will not return to school until January 26 (start of semester 2), although small cohorts of students, including some of Chris Geldert's woodworking students, will be returning for in-person learning on a limited basis prior to this date.

Starting in late October, all of Chris' students will be introduced to building and construction by creating a framing model of our cottage using [SketchUp 3D Modeling Software](#). Then the students will build wood scale models of our cottage. Chris has been burning the mid-night oil to compile 100 model building kits of all of the tools and materials required for the models, including a tape measure, mitre box, custom made mitre saw, glue gun/glue sticks, and scaled wood lumber. Chris will distribute the kits to his students at curbside at SMHS in a drive-by, masked, socially-distanced process. This will give Chris an opportunity to see all of his new students for the first time in person. The scale model build will be a culminating project for all of his first-year students.



Chris has approval for 5 to 8 second- and third-year students to come on campus to complete individual woodworking projects that they started in the last school year but were unable to complete due to the closure of the school in March. These advanced students will also have some time to contribute to finishing touches on the cottage that the Class of 2020 started last September before it is transported to its installation site in Vista.

DONATE TO THE WARRIOR VILLAGE PROJECT

We can provide truly affordable, permanent housing. But, we can't do it for free. To succeed, we need financial support. The materials required to build our cottages cost about \$25,000 per cottage. It will cost about \$10,000 to transport a cottage to its installation site. The cost of installing a cottage as an Accessory Dwelling Unit will depend on the site. But, it should cost about \$30,000 per cottage. Hence, we can provide permanent housing for a veteran for about \$65,000 per unit. This is a bargain compared to the cost of government supported 'affordable' housing projects. According to the [Turner Center for Housing Innovation](#) at UC Berkeley, it cost an average of \$480,000 (\$700/sq ft) to build one unit of affordable housing in California under the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program.

Donors who wish to donate for the construction of our cottages at San Marcos High School can make a contribution through our fiscal sponsor, [The San Marcos Promise \(https://thesanmarcospromise.org/donate/#ways-to-donate\)](https://thesanmarcospromise.org/donate/#ways-to-donate), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

- **Online Donations:** When you donate online, please '*Leave A Comment*' indicating that your donation is for the [Warrior Village Project](#).
- **Donations by Check:** Mail your check, made payable to [The San Marcos Promise](#), to:

**The San Marcos Promise
255 Pico Avenue, Suite 103
San Marcos, CA 92069**

Please write on the Check's Memo Line that your donation is for the [Warrior Village Project](#).

If you would like more information on the Warrior Village Project and our Partners, please visit our website, WarriorVillageProject.com, or send an email to Mark.L.Pilcher@gmail.com.

Please help us to provide affordable, permanent housing for homeless veterans while training the next generation of homebuilders.

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