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Renaissance in bridge's shadow

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Barrio Logan is fast shedding its image as a ghetto.

The heavily Latino neighborhood shadowed by the Coronado Bridge is booming with new affordable-housing complexes and an upscale townhome development. Two ambitious retail projects in and around the barrio are also being planned.



HOWARD LIPIN / Union-Tribune

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The San Diego Redevelopment Agency and private companies are pumping tens of millions of dollars' worth of investment into Barrio Logan. The state and federal governments also have provided millions in tax credits.

On Thursday, city officials and developers will celebrate the opening of the 42-unit Gateway Apartments – an affordable-housing complex at Logan Avenue and 16th Street with sweeping views of the bridge and downtown.

It's one of at least three such projects being built in the area.

La Entrada is under construction near Logan Avenue and Beardsley Street and Los Vientos near National Avenue and 16th Street. Together, the two developments will have 174 units of affordable housing.

Nearby at National Avenue and Sigsbee Street, an upscale four-and five-story development offers townhomes in the \$600,000 to \$800,000 range. Called Bohemia, it caters to young urbanites who don't want to settle in suburbia.

“We just thought it was an up-and-coming neighborhood, with everything that's going on there, the proximity to the ballpark. We liked it,” said Glenn Wilbor, president of California Equities, which developed Bohemia.

Commercial developers are also rushing to build in the area.

A five-story retail complex is proposed for the former Unocal petroleum yard at 16th Street and National Avenue. In addition, the long-stalled Mercado project near Chicano Park has been revived. A shopping center and other uses are being considered for the fenced-in site.

The affordable-housing projects have the look and feel of upscale developments, but tenants pay below-market rent.

Gateway Apartments has two-and three-bedroom apartment units. They rent for just \$498 to \$1,189 per month, depending on a family's income.

Shea Lewis and her fiancé, Robert Parham, were the first residents to move into Gateway. They share a three-bedroom, two-bath home with Lewis' three children. Their balcony has a view of the Coronado Bridge. All for less than \$600 per month.

Having lived in homeless shelters, the couple said it was a “blessing” to be able to move into an upscale, yet affordable home. Gesturing to the view from his balcony, Parham said, “People pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for a view like this.”

As is the standard at many affordable-housing developments, social services will be provided at Gateway. An after-school program and computer classes are being planned.

The complex has a large central courtyard, playground, community room with a kitchen, and a computer center. The exterior of the building is graced by eye-catching mosaic tile art and murals.

Ricardo Montoya, the project designer, said the artwork pays homage to the community's cultural heritage.

“The neighborhood is very conscious of gentrification,” Montoya said. “So we try to be very sensitive to the fact that they didn't want something that could look like it could be another downtown project.”

La Entrada, also designed by Montoya, will include a community center with a kitchen, fitness room, technology center, courtyard and sun deck.

“The good thing about what we are doing is, with La Entrada and Gateway, we are providing really upscale affordable housing. We are not coming into the neighborhood with luxury condos,” Montoya said.

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