NEWS

Vouch For

The Housing Authority finally issued more vouchers, but HUD now wants it to stop.

By Pam Marino

PAM MARINO

Zulieka Boykin, of the Housing Authority of the County of Monterey, is telling partner agencies HACM must honor a HUD mandate or risk losing existing vouchers.

Earlier this month, Zulieka Boykin, executive director of the Housing Authority of the County of Monterey, sat before the Monterey County Board of Supervisors with some good news—finally. Three years earlier, the board and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development were eyeing the agency for possible takeover. Among the many troubling issues was that HACM was failing to issue thousands of housing vouchers to those who needed them. Boykin was hired in October 2022 with a mandate to turn things around.

Boykin told the supervisors on March 11 that voucher utilization was up 40 percent over the past two years, in part due to innovative methods that included two large-scale events in Salinas where would-be renters who had long sat on waiting lists were invited to come take care of all the necessary steps at once and walk out with a voucher in hand.

Over time, the number of issued vouchers increased from about 3,200 to the current level of approximately 4,600. (There were 5,117 available.)

Other pieces of good news included that relations with HUD officials have improved, funding has been secured to reopen the previously shuttered Pueblo Del Mar housing in Marina, as well as partnerships that will bring 450 new affordable units to the county in the next three to five years, among others.

She emphasized they will not issue new vouchers.

What Boykin didn't share was that several days earlier, on March 6, HUD officials issued a mandate that HACM stop issuing any new vouchers, citing a possible HACM budget shortfall in September. The shortfall, if it happens, would be due to uncertainty at the federal level as the Trump Administration makes deep cuts.

HACM's budget depends on reimbursement from HUD to cover the cost of vouchers used in the county—come September, there may not be any additional funds available to cover an increase. Monterey County's high rental costs only compounds the challenge.

"When I came in, one of the things from the [HUD] field office, to keep the agency from getting in trouble, was to get utilization up," Boykin told the HACM board. "However, this is a high rental market." HUD was giving HACM enough money to cover 3,200 vouchers, even after utilization went up past 4,000. HUD did eventually give HACM more money to cover the difference, she said, but now, at 4,600 vouchers issued, it's unclear if HUD will have the money to reimburse HACM further.

Boykin emphasized HACM will not issue new vouchers, because going against the mandate could jeopardize the existing 4,600 voucher holders.

"I'm not trying to scare [anyone], but HUD can tell you to terminate people from the program," Boykin said. "We've got to do what's best for the 4,600 existing families."

She expressed relief that 1,400 more voucher-holders have housing now compared to two years ago due to the agency's efforts.

The last vouchers issued were in September, which means they will soon expire if the holder has not found a place to rent. (Recipients have six months to find a residence.) Previously HACM would issue extensions, but no more. Those eligible will be able to remain on a waiting list for vouchers.

DANIEL DREIFUSS

The former Beerded Bean space in Mid Valley Shopping Center is undergoing renovations to become Monterey-based Ad Astra's second location. The landlord hopes for a late May opening.

Astra-Nomical

The Monterey bakery Ad Astra is rolling out a retail location in Carmel Valley's Mid Valley.

By Dave Faries

Ad Astra is set to open a second location, this one in Carmel Valley's Mid Valley Shopping Center.

According to Reese Stanley of The Stanley Group, the San Jose-based property company that owns the center, Ad Astra plans a retail shop with beer and wine. The popular bakery completed lease arrangements in late March. Renovation is expected to take eight weeks.

Stanley says that the company has wanted Ad Astra as an anchor for the shopping center for several years; the group first reached out in 2022. At the time, however, owner Ron Mendoza was in need of a larger kitchen, eventually moving from Seaside to his current location in downtown Monterey.

"We're really excited to have them in," Stanley adds. "We try to find tenants that the community wants."

A second location of the Pacific Grove cleaners Sudz Cyber Laundry is also slated for Mid Valley.

Ad Astra fills the space vacated by The Beerded Bean. A lawsuit filed in February by Mid Valley Partners alleged that owners of the coffee shop and tap room stopped paying rent in August of 2024.

The Beerded Bean was four years into a seven-year lease agreement. In February, Mid Valley listed the property as available.

It was the owners of the Salinas coffee shop—the original location remains consistently busy—who put The Stanley Group in touch with Ad Astra.

Renovation is currently underway in the space at 319 Mid Valley Center. Stanley notes that the work is largely cosmetic, and though there are often unforeseen delays, the 60-day target date for Ad Astra's opening is feasible. "TBD, but I think they will do it," Stanley says.