



Staten Island Advance

Deal signed to develop new Markham Gardens

25 two-family homes for sale, 240 rental units and recreation center are to be built in West Brighton

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Private developers closed a deal yesterday to take control of an emptied public housing development in West Brighton, where nearly 300 new units of low-income housing will replace the vacant and deteriorated Markham Gardens.

Partners Arker and Domain companies took title yesterday to much of the land from the federal government and finalized the details of nearly \$60 million in financing for the project, the biggest example to date in the city of privatizing former public housing.

In return, the developer will guarantee low-income rental housing at the 12-acre site, which sits between Richmond Terrace, Broadway, North Burgher Avenue and Wayne Street, for at least the next three decades. A total of 240 rental units will be built, and another 25 two-family homes offered for sale to income-qualified buyers. The developers will also create a recreational center with an indoor basketball court, computer center and classrooms.

Demolition of the empty 360 units at Markham Houses will begin in February, the developers said yesterday. No groundbreaking has been set, but a new Markham Gardens is expected to open by summer 2008.

The new Markham is going to be much like the old Markham, in that there will be multiple buildings with a lot of open space, play areas and a basketball court. It will be different from the old Markham in that there will also be less buildings, because we are going one floor higher, and there will be on-site parking and, obviously, the new buildings, said Alex Arker, a principal in Arker Companies.

RESTORING HOUSING

New York City Housing Authority officials contended that razing Markham was the most cost-effective way to restore affordable housing on site. Built during World War II as temporary housing for shipyard workers, the two-story wood frame buildings were plagued by sewage backups, termite infestation and buckling roofs and considered beyond repair by the Housing Authority.

It's also a chance for the country's largest public housing authority to rein in its own costs in the face of decreased federal funding for public housing.

The Housing Authority provides apartments for 425,000 New Yorkers, or about one in 12 city residents, and has made clear that it's looking for creative opportunities to build or renovate affordable housing, even if it means privatizing public housing.

The project will be financed through \$25 million in tax-exempt bonds from the city Housing Development Corp., \$16 million raised through the sale of low-income housing tax credits and another \$17 million from the sale of tax certificates to other developers. A conventional construction loan for the 25 new homes is expected to close early next year.

DHK Architects designed the new community to reflect the uniquely suburban nature of Markham Gardens. Renderings show neat row houses with gabled dormers, backyards and antique-style lightposts.

The new Markham will include fewer than half the original number of public housing units, but will also offer apartments to low- and moderate-income families who are not eligible for public housing.

MOVING BACK

The Housing Authority has said it will set aside 150 Section 8 housing vouchers for residents who had to relocate to other public housing developments but want to return to a new Markham. The remaining 90 affordable apartments will be made available to people who don't qualify for housing subsidies and who have incomes ranging from \$30,082 to \$85,080 for a family of four.

The Housing Authority is retaining an acre of land for the future development of a senior housing apartment complex, where another 80 units will be made available to very low-income seniors, a spokesman said yesterday.

Yehern Hutchinson, 48, had to trade in her two-story unit at Markham for a smaller apartment in the Berry Houses in Dongan Hills. She worries that she might not be able to go back when the new community is complete.

I think that it's just something they say just to please everyone or to make people comfortable in moving, she said yesterday.

But Arker said that all former Markham inhabitants, even if the number is more than the 150 Section 8 housing vouchers currently set aside for returning residents, would have the first right of return. He said about 200 families were living in Markham before the buildings were vacated last year.

If there are more than 150 residents who want to come back, we will accommodate them, he said.

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