

Affordable housing project Cypress Square nears completion in north Sarasota

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[Sarasota Housing Authority transforms outdated housing stock \(heraldtribune.com\)](https://www.heraldtribune.com/story/news/local/2024/03/04/sarasota-housing-authority-transforms-outdated-housing-stock/7048112002/)



The Sarasota Housing Authority is nearing completion on Cypress Square, a three-building, affordable housing project consisting of 84 units and a clubhouse in the 1600 block of 21st Street in Sarasota. *Mike Lang*

William Russell started at the Sarasota Housing Authority about a month after the organization was placed in federal receivership in 2005.

At the time, the authority — founded in 1938 as one of the first public housing agencies in Florida — had not created any new public housing units since 1978. The units it did have were old, lacking central air-conditioning and in drastic need of replacement.

Federal regulators found the agency troubled "in several aspects, including financial, physical condition, and management," according to the housing agency's website.

Those failures led the authority on a path that has resulted in construction of several new projects near the Newtown area, including an 84-unit development called Cypress Square.

The affordable housing development will offer units to people making as little as 30% of the area median income — about \$25,000 for a family of three — up to a family of three making 80% of the area's median income, or about \$65,000.

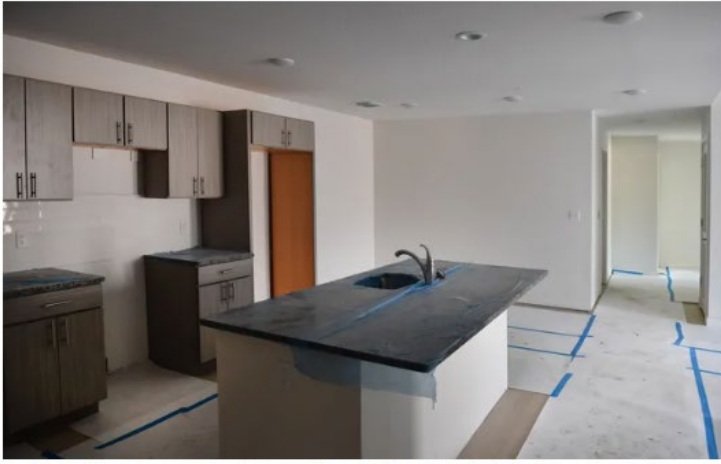
Russell noted the agency helps anyone from nurses and teachers to people on disability or the elderly on fixed incomes. "It really runs the gamut," he said about who Cypress Square could help when it's completed later this year.

Russell, president and chief executive for the housing authority, said the poor shape of public housing sparked a community conversation and a plan that has seen most of the old public housing torn down and replaced with new large buildings constructed to last.

Russell recently toured Cypress Square, a \$34 million development in the 1600 block of 21st Street just east of Amaryllis Park Place, a senior living affordable housing development completed in early 2022.



William Russell, President, CEO & Custodian of Records of the Sarasota Housing Authority, tours one of the apartments at Cypress Square. The housing authority is nearing completion of Cypress Square, a three-building affordable housing project consisting of 84 units and a clubhouse in the 1600 block of 21st Street in Sarasota. *Mike Lang*



The kitchen of a four-bedroom apartment at Cypress Square. The Sarasota Housing Authority is nearing completion on Cypress Square, a three-building, affordable housing project consisting of 84 units and a clubhouse in the 1600 block of 21st Street in Sarasota. *Mike Lang*

The three buildings at Cypress Square have a mix of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom units and replaced dozens of smaller, barracks-style housing built in the 1950s. Rents could be as high as \$1,640 for someone making 80% of the area median income or as low as \$617 for someone making less than 30% of the area median income.

The new units are no different than newer market rate units under construction in other areas of Sarasota County by private developers.

Greg Hodge, the project manager for NDC Construction, said in some ways, Cypress Square is

superior to many of the market-rate units being developed, noting the sturdy masonry-block construction. He said many modern multifamily projects have favored wood frame over the more costly concrete block construction used in Cypress Square.

Cypress Square started development during the pandemic with the building permit issued in February 2022. However, delays with concrete stretched the building's timeline and cost.

Hodge said lead time on windows hit about 26 weeks during the worst of the construction supply-chain disruption. "How do you schedule for that?" he asked.

Still, Hodges said the first building should be completed sometime in the next couple of months, possibly in May, with the third apartment building close behind. The middle building could take a bit longer, which will require moving fencing around the construction site while tenants move into the first two buildings.

Hodges said this was the third federally subsidized project he's worked on. He understands the urgency in completing the project given what many consider to be an affordable housing crisis, as rents increased drastically in local area over the past three years.

"Any of these I've done, they're already full by the time we walk away," Hodges said.

Russell said the first project that was completed under the redevelopment plan was Janie's Garden — a replacement of the Janie Poe housing project. That first phase totaling 86 units was completed in 2009, with the second phase in 2012.

Since 2009, the Sarasota Housing Authority has developed 565 units in eight projects including Cypress Square. It had created 635 units during its first 40 years of existence before it went dormant until being placed under federal receivership.



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Construction workers are putting the finishing touches on the club house at Cypress Square. The Sarasota Housing Authority is nearing completion on Cypress Square, a three-building, an affordable housing project consisting of 84 units and a clubhouse in the 1600 block of 21st in Sarasota. *Mike Lang*

The Sarasota Housing Authority was returned to local control in 2008, something Russell said was a quick turnaround to get back in the good graces of federal regulators.

Russell said the construction of the 84 new units is not all the Sarasota Housing Authority has in the development pipeline. McCown Tower, a 100-unit senior living development in downtown, has a "major rehab/preservation" project on-going at a cost of \$14 million.

There's also Cypress Square 2, planned for just south of project under construction, that will replace more barracks style housing with

a minimum of 108 affordable housing units. Williams said he's got the funding for the 108 units, but would like to expand the project to 144 units if he can secure additional funding.

There's also Lofts on Lemon 2, which will be east of Lofts On Lemon. The estimated address for Lofts on Lemon 2 would be 801 N. Lemon Ave.

Russell said the last project in the pipeline currently is Central Gardens at the southeast corner of 22nd Street and Central Avenue.

Even with all the projects in the pipeline, the Sarasota Housing Authority's waitlists are closed after they briefly opened in 2022. Russell said about 8,000 people applied for that waitlist with about 2,000 people being selected by lottery.

"It's helping," Russell said. "But it's by no means satisfying demand."