

SARASOTA

New affordable senior housing coming to Newtown in Sarasota

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SARASOTA — Valerie Buchand squinted in the late morning light and eyed the mound of finely packed dirt. It was all that remained of the area’s first housing project.

Twelve years. Three different contractors. That’s what it took to tear down the Orange Avenue housing units in Newtown.

“It has been a long journey and the day has finally come,” said Buchand, a Sarasota Housing Authority board member at a groundbreaking ceremony for a new facility on Monday.

Replacing Orange Avenue will be Amaryllis Park Place, a \$19 million senior community at North Orange Avenue and 21st Street.



From left: Sarasota Mayor Jen Ahearn-Koch, City Commissioner Hagen Brody, State Rep. Margaret Good and City Commissioner Willie Shaw at a groundbreaking ceremony on Monday in north Sarasota. The Sarasota Housing Authority plans to build an 84-unit affordable senior housing apartment complex. [HERALD-TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTO / TIMOTHY FANNING] *Timothy Fanning*

With a mix of one- and two-bedroom units, the 84-unit, three-story senior apartments will house people 62 and older. Forty-two units are set aside for households earning less than 60% of the area median income. The other 42 units will be subsidized for low- and extremely low-income residents.

“With Sarasota’s significant population of elderly residents coupled with limited affordable housing options, this development will fill a critical need for our community,” said William Russell, the president and CEO of the Sarasota Housing Authority.

The development team includes the Sarasota Housing Authority and Fortis Development. Funding for the project predominantly comes from low-income tax credits (\$15 million) and \$1.4 million from the city of Sarasota.

Construction crews on Monday cleared the site and began establishing the building pad. The L-shaped complex will run along North Orange Avenue to 21st Street.

Numerous city and state officials were at the groundbreaking. Among them was City Commissioner Willie Shaw. Shaw, whose family lineage in Sarasota goes back more than a century, pointed to the multitude of families who called the Orange Avenue projects home.

Many went on to help shape Sarasota, Shaw said.

Built in 1941, the 60-unit development on 21st Street, once called Newtown Heights, brought indoor plumbing, electricity and sidewalks to the long segregated Black community of north Sarasota.

Time and desegregation brought decline to Orange Avenue and other projects that followed. The units gradually descended into blight, becoming eyesores that stigmatized residents and detracted from efforts to spark a Newtown revival.

After years of wishful talk and failed attempts to kick off urban renewal, city leaders struck a deal to take a wrecking ball to four of the city’s five housing projects.

The Sarasota Housing Authority also plans to build a five-story, multifamily structure within 130 units to help alleviate downtown’s scarcity of inexpensive housing.

Lofts on Lemon will sit on three acres in the Rosemary District bounded by Cohen Way, Lemon Avenue, Ninth Street and condos to the south. Groundbreaking is expected this fall.