





But 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.

Their 388 families were given rental vouchers to relocate as developers worked to erect market-quality apartments and condos.

Two-thirds of those homes will be set aside for low- to moderate-income families. The remainder are to be rented or sold to middle-class newcomers who might otherwise spurn that part of town.

The Orange Avenue Projects were fully occupied in the fall of 2018. All but five of the senior residents transferred to other public housing and will get priority placement in the new senior community when it's built at the end of 2021.

When the dust is settled — and isolation guidance is lifted — several former tenants want to host a “tenant appreciation day” celebration.

“To remember, just for a minute or so, what these projects meant to the community,” Gilbert said.



The Orange Avenue housing, built in 1941, was Sarasota's first housing project. The units have been demolished to make room for a 84-unit senior living community. [PROVIDED BY THE SARASOTA HOUSING AUTHORITY]

