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Healthy, green affordable housing in Downtown Tampa celebrates Earth Day

KENDRA LANGLIE | TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2016



PHOTO BY JULIE BRANAMAN

This Earth Day, the Tampa Housing Authority is celebrating with the community -- and with good reason.

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While much attention has focused on Jeff Vinik’s Channelside project, Florida’s first ever "wellness" district, the Tampa Housing Authority (THA) has quietly developed an award-winning sustainable green space of its own, where the wellness of its residents is also a top priority and point of pride.

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ENCORE! Tampa is a mixed-use redevelopment just northeast of downtown Tampa, a few blocks from where its more famous neighbor is moving into the Channel District along the waterfront. At the west end of the campus sits the newly redesigned Perry Harvey Park, inaugurated earlier this year.

The development replaces what was once a blighted public housing project called Central Park Village -- something difficult to imagine when one views today’s expansive, inviting and contemporary ENCORE! Tampa plazas, walkways and buildings.

The development spans 12 city blocks and has already built out much of its Master Plan, which is designed to honor the historic African-American history of the neighborhood and its long musical tradition.

Currently onsite and fully leased are two buildings for senior citizens, The Ella and The Reed -- both classified as 100 percent affordable housing, and the Trio, which has a mix of market rate and subsidized housing for families. The Tempo, also for families, is wrapping up construction now. On Friday, April 22 -- Earth Day -- The Reed, will be honored with the Florida Water Star Award. Both the Trio and the Ella have already received the award.

Designing right construction

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The award underscores just one aspect of the care in which the Master Plan was designed to create what THA Chief Operating Officer Leroy Moore calls "right construction."

Moore says the Tampa Housing Authority knew from the outset that they had to do the "most 'right' project we could possibly do, even if it took longer, because we've got a social responsibility and social goals as well. It's not just sustainable and affordable. It's historic preservation, it's live-work [balance], it's transit-oriented, minority contracting goals, small business commitment and 'live healthier'."

The [ENCORE! Tampa](#) development was officially kicked off with a \$38 million Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2 grant from the federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) in 2010, followed by another HUD grant for \$30 million in 2012, then amplified through important community and financial partnerships, such as with Banc of America Community Development Corp., the City of Tampa and others.

The latter HUD grant, called Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant is a competitive grant program that "supports those communities that have undergone a comprehensive local planning process and are ready to implement their 'Transformation Plan' to redevelop the targeted neighborhood."

Aiming for sustainability

Sustainability is the topic du jour, all the more so in here in Florida, considered ground zero for climate change and sea-rise impact. (Read the [83 Degrees Media series on climate change](#).)

City of Tampa Green Officer Tom Snelling says the ENCORE! Tampa district is "significant because it is a LEED-certified neighborhood, if you will" (e.g. as opposed to just a solitary apartment building).

"Everyone has to step up and create a more sustainable and survivable way," he explains. "Jeff Vinik, Joe Lopano of TIA, the Housing Authority -- all of them are trying to make this the way we do business. We have to take this very seriously."

Moore says ENCORE! Tampa has a commitment to being sustainable -- aiming to eventually make the entirety of the 28 acres meet the Gold criteria. LEED, a key aspect in sustainable building, stands for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, and is essentially a prestigious, internationally recognized rating standard for green building that takes into account everything from the paint used to ENERGY STAR appliances to water and energy efficiency.

In addition to the obvious benefits to the environment and long-term cost savings, the LEED certification itself adds value. An article in The Philadelphia Inquirer says that, according to recent studies as of January 2015, "the market for houses with green certifications is 10 to 14 percent more than for comparable homes without them."

Though innovative, sustainable and improving property values might not be what first comes to mind when one thinks of public housing, it seems the Tampa Housing Authority is at the front of the global trend.

Keeping cool and green

Beyond the buildings themselves, the [ENCORE! Tampa](#) site has additional green features.

On premise, in what is called the Technology Park, the District Chiller Plant supplies the entire community with chilled water to cool all of the buildings on site, instead of using traditional and much less efficient HVAC air conditioning equipment cluttering the rooftops. Well over 100 A/C units would otherwise sit atop each building, creating additional heat and emitting



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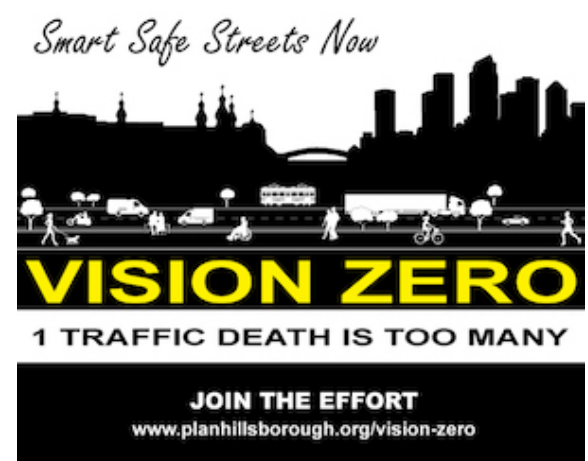
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greenhouse gases.

The process works with enormous chillers -- two are in place already, each capable of processing 1,000 tons of water (an even larger, 2,500-ton chiller will be added as the development progresses) -- that make ice when electricity is not at a premium, for instance at night, and are stored in 51 steel ice tanks. The ice is then melted to cool the buildings as needed.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, air conditioning in Florida accounts for nearly a third of energy consumption -- 40 percent more than the national average. ENCORE!'s centrally chilled water system is a 40 percent more energy efficient means of cooling than traditional residential air conditioning HVAC units and has a life span of 30+ years as compared to 10 years for residential systems. Condensate water that is produced at each building is pumped back to the chiller plant for use as cooling tower make-up, resulting in substantial water conservation.

Managing water and sun

As any resident of Tampa can attest, the summer's rainy season can wreak havoc. Storm water is an issue and often a complicated one in new developments if drainage has not been designed well prior to clearing and breaking ground.

The ENCORE! Tampa development designed a solution to keep its storm water from flooding the neighborhood, by capturing it on-site and reusing it for irrigation. An 18,000-square-foot vault, which holds up to 35,000 cubic feet of storm water, lies beneath the park collecting all the road water and any runoff from the properties. ENCORE! is able to irrigate the entire property with this reused water.

Terrance Brady, THA's Director of Energy Services, notes that the landscaping design consists of "all native plants," employing a xeriscape method that further minimizes the amount of water needed for upkeep.

Solar panels are also playing a part in the sustainability efforts. Two-thousand-square-feet of the park, located above the storm water vault, house 100 array photovoltaic (PV) solar panels, producing 24 kW of usable energy per day. The electrical energy produced by the PV system is used to offset outdoor street light utility consumption on the ENCORE! campus.

The Tempo, Trio and Reed also have solar panels on their rooftops, producing 100 kW of daily usable energy to supplement electrical power usage in the common areas of each individual building. The Ella is scheduled to receive 25 kW-producing solar panels later this year.

Making wellness a priority

In most respects, residents won't notice the sustainable aspects outlined because they seamlessly form part of the community's established infrastructure.

Wellness features, however, are encountered by [ENCORE! Tampa](#) residents on a daily basis.

An active lifestyle is encouraged, for example. The campus itself is walkable and bike-friendly, with the Perry Harvey Park accessible to all. All of the apartment buildings, including the two senior buildings, have pools and fitness centers with top-notch exercise equipment.

The ENCORE! is a non-smoking district -- smoking is banned everywhere on the property. Plus, THA, through its relationship with the Hillsborough County Health Department, offers a free smoking cessation program for residents.

The buildings are equipped with a doctor's office and examining room, giving residents access to visiting medical professionals on a weekly basis.

Healthy eating is also part of life at ENCORE! Tampa. The Ella has a Gardening Club, where residents plant, harvest and till their own produce. ENCORE! weekend activities regularly include an urban market on site that features farm-fresh local organic produce. Moore says these events always start with some sort of physical activity -- yoga or mediation -- to bring the residents outdoors.

And by the end of 2016, a two-acre commercially run urban farm will be in place and operational on premise. The farm is slated to yield organic fruit and vegetables and fresh honey -- supplying residents with truly locally grown produce via weekly vegetable stands as well as downtown restaurants and grocery stores.

The Tampa Housing Authority's philosophy is pretty straight forward, says Moore: "We want folks to live better."

For more information on the Tampa Housing Authority's ENCORE! Earth Day festivities, please contact Gloria Rayder at: (813) 341-9101 ext. 3540.

*This story is supported by the Tampa Housing Authority. Pasted below are links to other stories supported by THA. Comments? Contact [83 Degrees Coalition](#) provides help. [homes for local vets living on streets](#)
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Kendra Langlie is a feature writer at 83 Degrees Media in the Tampa Bay region of Florida.

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Lillian Stringer · Director of Public Relations at Tampa Housing Authority

Great article, very informative. Thanks Kendra

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Lisa Weiss Tampa Realtor

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