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# Building pace picking up on Encore development in Tampa

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MAIN -- Construction continues at the Encore complex Thursday, Sept. 19, 2013 in Tampa. Encore is a planned mixed-use, mixed-income community that replaces Central Park Village, a 1950s-era public housing complex torn down in 2007. It is a \$425-\$450 million project north of downtown along Cass Street, Nebraska Avenue and Central Avenue. CHRIS URSO/STAFF

TAMPA — The building pace is quickening at Encore, where one apartment complex is fully leased and three more are under construction or nearly ready to build.

The redevelopment on 28 acres just north of downtown Tampa, where public housing once stood, is expected to be completed in five to seven years. The enterprise is a \$425-million planned community that will honor the segregation-era Central Avenue district of black-owned businesses, restaurants and nightclubs where entertainers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Calloway, Ray Charles and James Brown performed.

Encore also could be one of Florida's first master-planned communities to achieve national certification as a "green," environmentally sustainable neighborhood. Individual buildings within Encore also could qualify for certification which is issued after review by the U.S. Green Building Council.

"Everything has a certain architectural and cultural reference to that (historical) period," said Leroy Moore, Tampa Housing Authority's chief operating officer. But, he added, "We knew we wanted to push the envelope and create the most smart community we could."

Last week the housing authority and its partner, Banc of America Community Development Corp., hosted a walking tour of the musically-themed development to showcase its eco-friendly design, including a chiller plant, solar park and storm-water vault.

Among those taking the tour were members of the Florida Gulf Coast Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council.

"It looks like something now. It's really coming together," said Taylor Ralph, chairman of the council's Tampa branch.

The chiller plant, near Nebraska Avenue and Cass Street, already provides chilled water for the air-conditioning system at The Ella, a 160-unit senior apartment building that opened in December. Ultimately all of Encore's buildings will connect to the chiller plant.

"We have a shared cooler plant for the entire site," said Stephen Koontz, vice president of Tampa Bay Trane. "It's more efficient and uses less space."

Conventional air-conditioning would require hundreds of units spread across rooftops, Koontz said. "This way we can use those roofs for solar panels where before we'd have all those units."

The rooftop solar panels are designed to provide lighting for the buildings' common areas.

An 18,000-square-foot storm-water vault, in front of the chiller plant, can collect rainwater to recycle and irrigate the site's landscaping. A traditional retention pond and collection system would have taken up nearly three times the space.

A small park was built atop the storm-water vault with walkways, pavers, benches and landscaping.

An urban farm for growing vegetables is planned on a plot of land where the Hillsborough County School District expects to build a middle school. Construction could be as far off as 10 years, school officials have said.

Last month construction began on The Reed, a 158-unit senior apartment building. The Trio, a 141-unit multi-family apartment building, is slated to open in April.

By January, The Tempo, a 203-unit multi-family apartment building, should be under construction with completion in 2015. All apartment buildings will have about 5,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space.

The Ella's apartment balconies now are filled with tables, chairs and flowering greenery.

Seniors who live there have a bird's-eye view of construction all around them. Within next two years the town square at Ray Charles Boulevard and Hank Ballard Street could be the traffic hub for what housing authority officials say is an emerging downtown neighborhood with an expected population of about 2,500 people.

Eventually shops, a hotel, a condominium, a refurbished Perry Harvey Sr. Park and a black history museum will round out the mix. About 1,000 permanent jobs are anticipated.

"We're hoping to get a number of restaurants in particular," said Moore.

Developers are under contract to scout for a grocery store and offices for Encore parcels, Moore said.

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