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City breaks ground on final Encore segment

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The Tempo at Encore will feature, among other amenities, a swimming pool with outdoor theater, a two-story clubhouse with a fitness center, and community space. Credit: Margie Martin of Walker Brands

TAMPA — Officials broke ground Thursday on the fourth and last apartment building planned at Encore, the \$425 million mixed-use, mixed-income residential community just north of downtown.

The Tempo at Encore will join The Ella, The Reed and The Trio on 28 acres where the Central Park Village public housing community stood until 2007.

“They’ve taken a drug-filled, gang-infested violent neighborhood and turned it into the something to be proud of,” Mayor Bob Buckhorn said at the groundbreaking ceremony.

The seven-story, 203-unit Tempo complex, expected to be completed in 2015, will have a swimming pool with outdoor theater, a two-story clubhouse with a fitness center, community space, a library, a WiFi cafe, multipurpose rooms, a nondenominational chapel and music rehearsal rooms. Construction is estimated to cost about \$43.3 million.

The Encore project pays homage to Tampa’s segregation-era Central Avenue, once a thriving black-owned business and entertainment district. Nightclubs in the area attracted performers like Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Calloway, Ray Charles and James Brown.

When Encore is completed it will have shops, offices, a hotel, a museum of black history and a refurbished Perry Harvey Sr. Park. A grocery store and condominiums also are planned, and there is space for another residential building.

The project is expected to create about 1,000 jobs, officials have said.

“This is another exciting step on the pathway to progress for the city of Tampa and our community,” said U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, a longtime proponent of the Encore project.

Redevelopment of the Central Avenue district long has been a goal of local officials. Through the years the area transformed from a family-friendly urban neighborhood to a magnet for crime and blight between downtown and Ybor City.

Plans for Encore — supported by a combination of local, state and federal money — moved forward after the former Central Park Village was torn down, but came to a halt during the recession. In December 2012, the project received a federal Housing and Urban Development Choice Neighborhood grant for \$30 million so developers could complete work on the last three apartment buildings.

The Ella, a 160-unit senior apartment building, was completed in 2012 and is fully occupied, officials said. Construction is underway on The Reed, another building for seniors with 158 units. The Trio, a 141-unit multifamily building, is expected to open in April.

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