



The Progress-Index

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Development groups deserve praise for bringing affordable housing to heart of city

It's been a long time coming, but a new neighborhood in Petersburg is on the way.

Van Buren Estates is set to get going this spring, more than a year and a half after a groundbreaking event for the project.

The development is expected to include about a dozen homes in the heart of the city near Peabody Middle School.

The homes will be about 1,600 square feet and have been designed from the ground up to be affordable for some of the city's working professionals.

The project has endured several delays since the idea for the affordable housing neighborhood in the central part of the city started more than five years ago.

Petersburg Community Development Corporation — a non-profit community housing development organization — sought the sponsorship of the Petersburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

The PCDC had to get funding in place, dealing with local and federal governments and getting a reliable contractor. After the groundbreaking, the Petersburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority found that the initial developer was not up to the job.

It was back to the drawing board — literally — for the development because the original developer owned the building plans for the project.

Now, the Petersburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority will serve as the contractor for the Petersburg Community Development Corporation.

The estimate to build the first 12 homes is \$2.2 million or more.

“The challenge is to build that next house and to keep it affordable,” said Julian Marsh, director of the Petersburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

A growing inventory of affordable housing is critical to the long-term future of Petersburg. The city has been plagued with a large number of rental or other housing that is in poor condition. There are at least 125 houses in Petersburg that have been “red flagged,” meaning they are not habitable.

And the group LISC, or Local Initiatives Support Corp., has looked at redeveloping four Petersburg neighborhoods. The four targeted areas are Battersea, Rome Street, Westview and Birdville, and Halifax and Blandford.

LISC works as a bridge between interested residents, corporations, foundations, government and developers interested in increasing the supply of high quality affordable housing in a given area.

Providing affordable housing and renovating existing neighborhoods will go a long way in strengthening Petersburg. And Van Buren Estates is a worthwhile project toward achieving that goal.

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