

SRHA gets federal approval for project



By Jimmy LaRoue

Published 10:17 pm Tuesday, January 28, 2020

The Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority has received federal approval to substantially rehabilitate a pair of city public housing communities, with work expected to begin sometime this summer.

Michael Pack, the authority's community development director, told the authority's board of commissioners at its meeting Tuesday that it had received federal Department of Housing and Urban Development Section 18 Demolition/Disposition approval for the demolition and rebuilding of the 93-unit Parker Riddick Apartments and the substantial rehabilitation of the 113-unit Cypress Manor Apartments.

Under that Section 18 program, public housing agencies can choose to demolish an entire development, or part of it, if it demonstrates that its physical condition, location or other factors makes it obsolete or unsuitable to house people. Authorities can use Section 18 disposition to rehabilitate housing through other financing, or with project-based vouchers.

The 206 total units will be converted to Section 8 project-based voucher assistance housing.

The authority is currently waiting for a commitment for Federal Housing Administration mortgage insurance, which it expects by mid-March.

Parker Riddick's residents will be eligible for Section 8 vouchers to use for other housing while that work is ongoing. The Section 8 housing choice voucher program, which the authority administers, is a federal program to help very low-income families, the elderly and those who are disabled afford decent, safe and sanitary private housing.

Once vacated, Parker Riddick's buildings will undergo a remediation process for asbestos, and then those buildings, roads and underground utilities will be demolished, with new roads and underground utilities to be built and installed before the buildings are constructed, according to TCG Development Advisors LLC's status report on the project.

Cypress Manor Apartments, meanwhile, will get a "substantial rehabilitation," according to SRHA consultant Peter Behringer, a managing member of TCG Development Advisors LLC, though those units will not be completely torn down, as the brick frame of the units will be left intact.

There were previous concerns that the rehabilitation work at Cypress Manor would not completely eliminate the asbestos there, but Behringer has said it will conform to state and federal requirements. He also said he would provide regular reports to the commissioners about the asbestos removal.

The work on both housing communities is expected to begin sometime this summer and take roughly two years. The first section of Cypress Manor will be ready within five months, according to the status report, and groups of buildings will be ready roughly every four months after that until completed.

White Marsh Pointe at Eagle Landing is the project name for the redevelopment of both public housing complexes, and going forward, the Parker Riddick Apartments will be known as White Marsh Pointe, while Cypress Manor will be called Eagle Landing.

The Virginia Housing Development Authority has already authorized a \$22 million tax-exempt bond that the agency will issue for the project. City Council gave its approval for the bond last August.

Behringer has said previously that Cypress Manor's rehabilitation will cost about \$146,000 per unit, while the teardown and rebuild at Parker Riddick will cost about \$161,000 per unit.

The construction period will last roughly two years, he said.

Residents at the 113-unit Cypress Manor Apartments will be shifted to other units of that complex, as the work there will be done in phases.

"We're playing kind of a chess game on the Cypress Manor side," Pack said.

The housing authority recently held a meeting with residents of both housing complexes, with the Section 8 vouchers for Parker Riddick residents to be available as soon as possible, Pack said.

SRHA Executive Director Tracey Snipes said following a meeting of the authority's board that those vouchers would likely start going out next week.

"We've actually (been) letting our residents know that there are vouchers available," Snipes said. "As with HUD, there's always tons of rules, so we have an obligation to give everyone a 90-day notice, but we can also offer people the option, if they would like, to move sooner, which we have done."

She said 27 or 28 families at Parker Riddick had found alternative housing and will be ready to receive those vouchers first.

"We're just at that point where the agency has to distribute these Section 8 vouchers, which we have," Snipes said.

Pack said demolition at Parker Riddick would start once everyone has found Section 8 housing.

"If we run into issues, there's always the option of someone, if they can't find something outside, they can continue to reside in a different property within public housing," Snipes said.

Two of the 93 families have indicated to the authority that they want to stay in public housing, so Snipes said those residents will move to the Chorey Park Apartments and not use the voucher.

While not a requirement of the Section 18 program, current Parker Riddick residents, if they want, will have an opportunity to return to the newly-constructed buildings when they are finished.

Snipes said the authority is still looking for property owners willing to accept Section 8 housing vouchers.

"If anybody has any property that they would like to add to the Section 8 program," Snipes said, "now is a really good time to do it. We're definitely in need of additional housing for the program."

She said there's a sense of relief that the rehabilitation of the two properties will soon begin.

"Anything that's worth having, sometimes you have to give a little blood, sweat and tears to have it," Snipes said. "We have, so now we're going to bask in the fact that we've made it this far and looking forward to the end."

Suffolk News-Herald

Since 1873

“We know that we’re changing people’s lives with this, and we know that it’s scary when we’re trying to move people to a different point, but at the end of the day, 206 families’ lives will be changed, and all for the better.”