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Redevelopment project at New Westbrook Village in Hartford begins

By SLADE RAND
HARTFORD COURANT | JUN 10, 2019





Developers began the demolition process at Westbrook Village last week, the first step toward building the 400 homes and retail space that will be New Westbrook Village. (Slade Rand/Slade Rand)

The dilapidated buildings and overgrown lawns of Westbrook Village are on their way to being leveled and replaced with new homes, storefronts and office spaces.

Developers and city officials ceremoniously broke ground on the housing complex on Friday, but crews began the multi-step demolition process a few days prior. Right now at least four construction companies have a presence on the 40-acre plot wedged between Albany Ave, the University of Hartford and a pair of train tracks in the North End area.

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Phase 1 of the 5-phase project includes 75 housing units and a 10-acre area for commercial use. The first phase of the project is expected to be completed within 14 months, with leasing to begin during the

summer of 2020. Developers hope to have a grocery store, restaurants and other retail among the commercial tenants for the property.

The Housing Authority of the City of Hartford partnered with Pennrose and The Cloud Company real estate developers last year to take on a total demolition and reclamation of Westbrook Village. The final product will include 400 one-to-three bedroom homes, many of which will be reserved for households with incomes under \$20,305, or 60% of the Area Median Income that was measured at \$33,841 in 2017.

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“This project has been a long time coming,” said HACH Executive Director Annette Sanderson. “This is truly a public-private partnership and it’s taken us some time to pull together the necessary resources to move this project forward.”

The initial construction phase will cost \$28 million and will be backed by state funds, a federal home loan grant, tax credit equity and first mortgage financing.

A rendering shows plans for retail and office space at the front of the complex, along Albany Avenue. (Handout/Pennrose) (Handout/Pennrose)

Early in 2018, the state gave \$9 million to assist relocating remaining Westbrook Village residents and to start the demolition process. Sanderson said the last 70 or so residents moved out a few months ago.

“Families have lived there for 40 years, so having them move out was emotional and that’s why we wanted them to be involved in the planning from the beginning,” Sanderson said.

The old Westbrook Village, built in the late 1940s and early 1950s, catered to low- and middle-income families. Part of the Hartford Housing Authority’s original portfolio, the complex stopped taking new tenants in 2012.

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Evelyn Lopez-Ramos, president of the Westbrook Village Tenant Association, is excited to move back in when the job is complete.

“Westbrook Village is more than a revitalization project to me, it is my home,” Lopez-Ramos said. “I have seen the plans and am so looking forward to living in the beautiful new neighborhood it will be part of once the project is done.”

A rendering shows a row of apartment buildings in the new Westbrook Village development. (Handout/Pennrose)

The demolition process will begin when abandoned buildings in the Phase 1 area have been cleared of asbestos and other harmful contents. On Monday, an environmental sanitarian from the Connecticut Department of Public Health's asbestos program visited the site to approve inspection reports of a handful of buildings. Sanderson said developers are targeting a 7-to-8-month time frame for demolition.

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Matt Chalifour of Freeman Companies, the engineering group who designed the project, said the abatement process for phase 1 buildings will take around two weeks.

Oscar's Abatement is handling the asbestos removal. Crew supervisor Bryan Ardon, son of company owner Oscar Ardon, has lead a team in preparing the abandoned buildings for asbestos abatement since last Wednesday.

"So far it's going well, with no complications," Ardon said. "We're going at a pretty good pace."

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