

# Construction underway for mixed-income housing complex

05:57 PM CDT on Sunday, August 30, 2009



Maya Rodriguez / Eyewitness News

mrodriguez@wwltv.com

GENTILLY, La. – New homes and a new name sit on the site of the old St. Bernard public housing complex-- now called Columbia Parc.



Video: Watch the Story

"What we're building here are luxury apartments, which are built for all resident types," said Gerry Barousse, Jr., chairperson of the Bayou District Foundation, which is working on redeveloping the site, in partnership with Columbia Residential and the Housing Authority of New Orleans.

More than 1,300 units are under construction at the site, ranging from townhomes to apartments. It is a mixed-income community that its backers are pushing to see succeed. One-third of the units will be for low-income tenants, one-third will be for those in the Section 8 program and the other one-third will be market rate rentals.

"It's going to take some pioneers," Barousse said. "We'll have a lot of folks that are both former residents and those who are moving into the community – teachers and the like, that look at the opportunity to be a part of something that's new and pioneering, as really an opportunity to grow."

However, it is a growth that did not come without controversy. Back in December 2007, protesters and former residents rallied in front of the St. Bernard complex to stop its demolition.



WWLTV

"It's really, really been rough," former St. Bernard housing resident Chantel Young said at the time. "I'm getting sick by the minute over this."

Part of their concern was that not enough units would be built to accommodate everyone who had lived in the St. Bernard complex. The foundation overseeing the development, though, said they have reached out to former tenants. So far, 350 have indicated they want to return.

"We've had a broad outreach process, in conjunction with the housing authority, to work with the former housing residents here," Barousse said. "The former residents have the first opportunity to come back."

Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell's district encompasses the new Columbia Parc development.

"It's fitting that they see this resurgence now, four years later," Hedge-Morrell said. "The apartments are gorgeous. I mean, they have granite countertops, stainless steel appliances. I think that people are going to find out that when they come in, they have really, really been upgraded to what any citizen would want to have."

Once it is finished, the Columbia Parc development will also include a golf course and a kindergarten-through-eighth grade school, along with a community and early childhood development center. Yet developers admit, there is a stigma attached to the former public housing-- one they hope to overcome with brand new homes.

"It's not something that happens overnight," Barousse said.

However, it is something that may need to happen within the next 90 days, when families are set to begin moving in to the new development.