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excuses and futile pursuits.

But Tuesday, the bitterness was gone. Her whole being seemed to smile as she stood in the complex's community room, welcoming friends, members of a volunteer task force, a police officer, elected officials, the housing authority's executive director and others.

What prompted her inner change? I'd guess the answer lies in the fact that, for once, things at Janie Poe are looking up. In part because of Buchand's activism, the old housing authority was replaced by professional, federally handpicked management: Carmen Valenti and Bill Russell. They worked, listened, and relentlessly built support for a viable redevelopment strategy -- with the watchful participation of Buchand, Green and the dedicated task force volunteers.

This time, the dream was hitched to real money, including millions from local governments. The first phase of the overhaul, which ultimately will turn about 380 units of public housing into mixed-income communities, should be under way by 2008.

Buchand knows that the transition will be challenging. Many current residents -- most of whom are working moms -- will have to move elsewhere during the demolition and construction. Not all may be able to return. Some will have to make big changes, shouldering higher housing expenses, getting more education and learning to cope without the friends-and-neighbors support network they now have. Those who want to try to purchase an affordable unit in the new development will have to prepare financially.

On the administrative end, a newly constituted housing authority board -- unpaid -- will have to learn how to supervise the still-underfunded operation of low-income units.

Nobody can be sure that there will really be a happy ending. Yet confidence was in the air Tuesday, and with it a sense of empowerment. These are people, after all, who refused to accept failure. They bridged a cultural divide, instigated positive change, and caught the full ear of the community.

Attention is being paid. No wonder Buchand is smiling.

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