

Plans advance for two affordable housing projects



Sarasota Housing Authority President and CEO William Russell speaks at the groundbreaking ceremony for Cypress Square II and Lofts on Lemon II.
Photo by Andrew Warfield

Only weeks removed from the celebratory groundbreaking of two already underway Sarasota Housing Authority affordable housing projects, the organization went before the Sarasota Planning Board on Oct. 8, seeking its endorsement of two more.

Planned to bring 100 more units to the city's affordable housing stock, the SHA won the unanimous approval for Central Gardens, and recommended to the City Commission approval of the third phase of Cypress Square, which is technically referred to as Amaryllis Park Place IV.

Both were 4-0 votes in the absence of Chairman Daniel Deleo and alternate Alexander Neihaus.

Central Gardens, at 1442 and 1456 22nd St., is planned as a four-story, 39-unit building on a 1.18-acre site adjacent to SHA's Janie's Garden. Cypress Square III, technically also referred to as Amaryllis Park Place IV, will have 61 units across two three-story buildings on 2.5 acres.

All will be priced affordable, the rent calculations individually based on 30% of the household income for those earning between 30% and 80% of area median income. There will also be 30 units dedicated to Section 8 housing vouchers across both properties. Although they are separate projects, both are funded as a single unit by Florida Housing Finance Corp., which was created by the state legislature in 1980 to assist in providing a range of affordable housing opportunities.

As neighbors to Janie's Garden, Central Gardens residents will have access to the amenities already in place. "There's a clubhouse, there's a computer lab, there's a gym, there's now a school that's operating out of the Phase III clubhouse," said SHA President and CEO William Russell. "It will be nice to incorporate the Central Gardens residents into that community as well."



The first phase of Sarasota Housing Authority's Cypress Square apartments. The second phase is now under construction and the third phase is working its way through the city's approval process.

Photo by Andrew Warfield

Planning Board member Terrill Salem questioned Russell about whether SHA will manage Central Gardens, citing long-standing issues with third-party management of Janie's Garden, which happens to work under the private investor in the property.

NDC Asset Management Bradenton will manage central Gardens on behalf of the project's co-developer, and unlike Janie's Garden, not by the investor, Russell told the Planning Board. That company currently manages the first phase of Amaryllis Park Place, which is for seniors ages 62 and older with annual incomes between 35% and 60% of AMI, and the neighboring Cypress Square and SHA's Lofts on Lemon.

Planning Board member Douglas Christy lamented that more units could not be planned for Central Gardens in lieu of some opens space and parking, but Russell and project consultant Joel Freedman explained that building's size and location on the site left little opportunity for a larger project.

“Is there any undertaking by city staff to facilitate or discuss maximizing the capacity of the site, especially for attainable, affordable housing?” Christy asked Development Review Planner Rebecca Webster. “That would be a benefit to the community, and something that I would hope is discussed or considered.”

Webster redirected the discussion back to the matter at hand.

“It can be part of the consideration, but we're looking at whether the proposal meets technical review per code,” she said.

At that, Christy “reluctantly” moved to approve Central Gardens to “not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.”

Passed on to the City Commission for final approval is Cypress Square III, which will complete the replacement of a collection of 1940s-era, single-story public housing duplexes with modern and affordable residences.

The first phase of Cypress Square opened in 2022. Once the second and third phases are built, the entire complex will offer 253 affordable apartments. A community center for residents is already in place.

Planning Board member Daniel Clermont praised SHA for the appearance of Central Gardens.

“It's a nice project. It looks more upscale than you might expect,” Clermont said. “It's colorful and it's well maintained ... and it's a place I think that most people would be happy to live. It looks really nice and it's a great addition to the city.”



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