

Ground is broken for two affordable apartment projects

Sarasota Housing Authority flips ceremonial dirt to mark construction of Lofts on Lemon II and Cypress Square II.



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

As heavy equipment and construction workers circled around an 18-inch-high dirt pile, the multiple parties involved in helping the Sarasota Housing Authority build two new low-income residential projects flipped ceremonial soil in dual groundbreaking ceremonies on Sept. 17.

The first photo op came amid the concrete block construction forming the shape of Cypress Square 2 (formerly Amaryllis Park Place III) before boarding trolleys bound for nearby Lofts on Lemon II for a second dig, that project in an earlier site clearing stage.

Before all that, though, in the Cypress Square community room, SHA President and CEO William Russell introduced the project's development and funding partners, and described the arduous process of taking an affordable housing project from concept to completion.



Construction is already well underway on Sarasota Housing Authority's Cypress Square II as it surrounds the ceremonial groundbreaking site.
Photo by Andrew Warfield

When ready for occupancy, the combined 208 apartments will be 100% priced affordable. Of the 108 units in Cypress Square II, 33 will be open to Section 8 vouchers and the remainder will be priced to match one-third of the monthly household income, whatever that may be, up to 80% area median income. Of the 100 units at Lofts on Lemon II, 25 will be available to Section 8 voucher holders and, like Cypress Square II, the remainder subject to the 30% household income rent.

“But the whole development cannot average more than 60% of the area median income,” Russell said. "It truly is an affordable community."

Breaking down the rent	
Household Income	Monthly Rental
\$30,000	\$750
\$40,000	\$1,000
\$50,000	\$1,250
Residents also receive a utility credit calculated by bedroom count, income and other factors designed to maintain total rent and utility costs at 30% of household income.	

Cypress Square II will offer one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments and is expected to be completed by summer 2026. It is being built by Fortis Development of Delray Beach.

Lofts on Lemon II will offer 100 one-bedroom apartment homes with occupancy expected in the fourth quarter of 2026. It is being built by JP Wiseman Construction of Lakewood Ranch and Charleston, West Virginia.

“We don't get to a day like today without a whole lot of people involved who are helping in whatever way they can,” Sarasota Mayor Liz Alpert said of the collaborative effort between local city and county government and private entities. “It just takes us one step closer to trying to provide the affordable housing that we desperately need in our community. We'll never be able to create all that we need, but each time we create some, we're helping some families afford to live here.”



Rendering of Lofts on Lemon II.

Courtesy image

Lofts on Lemon II will add 100 units to the SHA inventory and Cypress Square II will have 69 new units. The second and third phases of Cypress Square — phase 3 will bring 61 more apartments — will stand on the former site of The Courts, a community of 100 single-story duplexes. Displaced residents of those demolished units were moved at SHA expense to new Cypress Square I, which opened in June 2024, or to other SHA residences. Although the site has been cleared, Cypress Square III is not yet in the planning stage.

“I’m extremely humbled to be here today on behalf of the county,” said Sarasota County Commissioner Teresa Mast. “I look forward to doing many, many, many more of these.”

Complicated capital stacks

During his remarks, Russell told the groundbreaking audience it took some two years to assemble the financing to fund the projects and to work them through the city’s approval process.

“It’s super-complicated to get these deals financed, and so many different sources of capital have to go into it,” he said.

The glue that holds the funding together are federal tax credits allocated to the states on a per-capital basis, which results in, Russell said, intense competition for those credits at the state level.

“Once our development team gets awarded credits from the State Housing Finance Agency, then we have to find an investor to purchase those credits,” he said.

In this case, the credits were purchased by Raymond James and Bank of America.

In all, the funding sources for the projects are:

- Cypress Square 2: Florida Housing Finance Corp., Raymond James, JP Morgan Chase, City of Sarasota, Lee County Housing Finance Agency and Freddie Mac via Walker Dunlop. Construction cost is \$24,846,212
- Lofts on Lemon 2: Florida Housing Finance Corp., Bank of America, Sarasota County, Lee County Housing Finance Agency, Raymond James and Fannie Mae via Walker Dunlop. Construction cost is \$28,276,400.



Childhood experience

The leader of the development company building Lofts on Lemon II knows what it's like for families in desperate need of safe, affordable housing to scrape by, and the opportunities affordable housing can provide.

During the groundbreaking comments for the second phases of Cypress Square and Lofts on Lemon, CEO John Wiseman of JP Wiseman Construction said, following the divorce of his parents at age 10, he spent part of his childhood living in an apartment that cost \$45 per month.

That was all his mother, who was working as a waitress, could afford.

“Today that's \$300,” said Wiseman. “That was our rent, but we had a place. It was safe, we could say our prayers, we could eat, we could do our homework, we could live safely.”

His point was a decent shelter at any price can help a child grow up to, say, be the founder and leader of a national building contractor co-headquartered in Lakewood Ranch and Charleston, West Virginia.

“I know you can come from that and make something of yourself,” Wiseman said. “Every one of these homes creates an opportunity for a family.”



John Wiseman, founder and CEO of JP Wiseman Construction, spent part of his childhood in affordable housing.

Photo by Andrew Warfield



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