

Jacob Price razing, relocation to be done in steps

BY CINDY SCHROEDER | ENQUIRER STAFF WRITER

COVINGTON - Demolition of Jacob Price Homes, one of Covington's oldest public housing projects, will begin as soon as late September and continue for four years, city and federal officials announced Thursday.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development notified Covington last week that it has approved its plan to tear down Jacob Price and partner with Cincinnati-based Model Group to build and renovate affordable replacement housing throughout Covington's Eastside with the help of low income housing and historic tax credits. The housing authority would continue to manage the new housing, which would be available at the same rents residents pay now.

"While the demolition means the end of Jacob Price, it also signals the start of a \$24 million investment in Covington's Eastside neighborhood," said Tony Milburn.

Milburn is chairman of the Housing Authority of Covington's board of directors. "By building scattered site housing that's indistinguishable from adjacent market rate homes, our residents and their children will be able to thrive in modern surroundings free from the stigma that is often associated with public housing."

Initially, just three of the 23 buildings on the Jacob Price site - those parallel to Robbins Street - will be torn down, said Aaron Wolfe-Bertling, Covington's housing development director. Until the scattered site housing is ready, the 17 families living in those buildings can accept Section 8 vouchers or stay in vacant units in Jacob Price or one of Covington's three other public housing projects.

City officials say it's necessary to tear down Jacob Price because the 67-year-old complex that HUD has determined is "functionally obsolete" would cost \$22 million to repair and modernize.

Some Eastside residents remain skeptical.

"I think this site is going to be sold to a private developer once they get through moving people completely out and then the housing authority will sell the site, just like they're doing in Newport," said Bennie Doggett, president of the Eastside Neighborhood Association. "This neighborhood is close to walking to the river. And anybody in their right minds knows what river development means. The poor always lose."

Not true, city officials said.

Covington Mayor Butch Callery said the city has no plans to sell the site to a private developer. He said Eastside residents will be involved in any discussions about its future use before the city solicits any proposals.

One resident asked why the proposed uses for Jacob Price submitted last year by the Eastside neighborhood group were ignored or unusable.

"Most of those plans called for re-use of these buildings and from an economic standpoint, HUD does not let us spend money to re-use these buildings that have been declared obsolete,"

Milburn said. "According to HUD, it would cost more to bring these buildings up to market standards than it would to create new housing."

Stephen Smith, president of Model Group, said he's spoken with residents who've lived at Jacob Price for more than 30 years and can understand their apprehension.

"I'm sure that would be terrifying to have someone come in and say, 'We're tearing your house down,' " Smith said. "But I'm convinced that after we get past the first phase, and folks see that we're replacing this functionally obsolete housing with something really fantastic that they'll have a change of heart."