

Housing authority reveals redevelopment designs

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On June 27 the Beaumont Housing Authority (BHA), along with consulting team Abt & Associates and KAI Architects, revealed the final design concepts for the redevelopment of Magnolia Gardens and the city fairgrounds at the BHA central office with many public housing residents and community representatives in attendance.

Apartments and single family homes available for mixed income rental and homeownership opportunities were present in the designs as well as controlled access, resident-only parking areas, brick exteriors, porches, playgrounds and a community center.

The designs are the continuing process of the BHA's proposal to receive a \$20 million HOPE VI grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The grant submission and project has been pushed to the forefront due to the damage caused by Hurricane Rita and the urgent need for affordable housing as a result.

During several meetings with the residents of Magnolia Gardens, the BHA and consultants were able to gather input and ideas on how to best revitalize the neighborhood. Their final design concepts reflect the needs of the residents as well as the need for

a revitalization of the north end community, according Robert Reyna, Beaumont Housing Authority's executive director.

"We are taking this opportunity to reveal our design concepts to the residents based on everything we were able to gather from them," said Reyna. "These are still concepts, but we are certainly moving along in the process."

In his presentation to the residents and community representatives in attendance, Reyna said that the north end of Beaumont had not been given its due.

"From what I have heard, the north end used to be 'the' place to live in Beaumont," said Reyna, who came to Beaumont to work for the BHA in 2003. "We want to revitalize the whole community of the north end."

Reyna also said that the need for redevelopment was realized in about 2004 when engineers hired to evaluate the state of repair to Magnolia Gardens determined that the property was in a dilapidated condition, and that fixing all the current problems would cost about \$8 million. "Their final recommendation was to tear it down and build a new development that would last another 30-something years," he said.

Reyna added that the residents were excited about the redevelopment, because it would change their lives and renew the area.



Photos by Melissa Tilley

Beaumont Housing Authority Executive Director Robert Reyna shares the final design concepts for the redevelopment of Magnolia Gardens and the city fairgrounds with the public housing residents and community representatives in attendance.

The redevelopment property includes the current Magnolia Gardens location at 3720 Magnolia Ave., as well as at 28-acre site at the fairgrounds on Gulf Street. The design plan calls for 222 total units — 139 rental and 83 homeownership units — at the fairgrounds site and 158 rental units at the Magnolia Gardens site. A total of 380 new units will be built, with a mixture of one- and two-story townhouse, garden and walkup homes.

Magnolia Gardens is a 195-unit property that was built in 1954. Current residents of the property would be relocated, with moving assistance provided by the HOPE VI grant, so that the current buildings could be demolished and new ones built.

In addition to the HOPE VI grant, the BHA is currently pursuing a variety of funding opportunities to allow them to

revitalize the development and the entire neighborhood through mixed income rental and homeownership properties.

According to the BHA, there are currently more than 3,500 families on the BHA waiting lists. The public housing waiting list grew 110 percent from 2004 to 2005, and the Section 8 waiting list grew 69 percent in that same span. They also report that due to the overwhelming demand combined with the lack of affordable housing, BHA stopped accepting applications in March 2006.

The grant proposal is due to be submitted by July and they should receive HUD's response by September. For more information, call (409) 951-7208