

## Dilapidated apartments are eyesore no more in Orange Mound

By Chris Conley

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Among the modest but mainly well-cared-for homes in the area of Barron and Semmes in Orange Mound, there is a huge blot on the landscape: the abandoned Barronbrook Apartments.

That situation soon will change, as city officials and business partners unveiled a \$3 million redevelopment of the complex on Tuesday, a strategic move to bolster an old and largely stable area.

Half of the dilapidated 200-unit complex will be demolished, leaving a mixed-income development called Melrose Place Apartments.

"Don't move. Improve," said Mayor A C Wharton while announcing the project at the Orange Mound Community Center Tuesday. "Why build new housing when we have good housing stock?"

"You can't have a city of choice unless you have neighborhoods of choice," Wharton said following the announcement, in a reference to his administration's vision of making Memphis a city that attracts and retains middle-income families. "You have to do it strategically."

Phase one of the project will make 98 apartments available; phase two will consist of 20 apartments.

The money comes from a federal Neighborhood Stabilization Project grant. Bids for the work will soon go out, with occupancy planned for next spring.

"We're trying to rebuild the community, one brick at a time," said Robert Lipscomb, the city's director of Housing and Community Development.

Lipscomb is largely credited with orchestrating the transformation of such blighted areas as Lamar Terrace, Uptown and LeMoyne Gardens, through private and public partnerships.

Orange Mound "is a good place to start" in the campaign to create anchors for economic growth and stable neighborhoods, Lipscomb said, because of its family feel and history as a place where generations have put down roots.

"This will take the eyesore away," said David Williams, who lives near the deserted complex. "The neighborhood will be better."

Another neighbor, Charles Johnson, said that he worked as a maintenance man for the old apartment complex until 2002, when it started deteriorating. The west side of the complex, which crews were demolishing Tuesday, had plumbing problems and several fires, he said.

"It'll be a good thing," he said of the renovation. "The place is bad for the neighborhood."

The revamping is "an achievable goal," said Juan Self of Self Tucker Architects Inc., principal in charge of the project. The property "is in fairly good shape," he said.

Bids for construction work go out May 15, tentatively. The goal is to start moving people in to refurbished apartments by the end of next March.

-- Chris Conley: 529-2595



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