

Redlands housing project demolition under way

[By Kristina Hernandez, Staff Writer](#)

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Construction crews work on the demolition of the 70-year-old rental homes at the corner of Orange Street and Lugonia Avenue in Redlands, on Wednesday. The site will be the future home to the Valencia Grove Housing Community, made up of 228 factory-built housing units, a multi-use recreation center with a pool and three playground areas. (John Valenzuela/Staff Photographer)

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REDLANDS -- As the wind began to pick up mid-morning Wednesday, demolition was halted on a beige building that once was a community center for residents of low-income housing off Lugonia Avenue and Orange Street.

Dust-control laws prevented workers from continuing, said workers on the site.

The demolition, expected to be completed this week - is part of the construction process to develop the Valencia Grove housing project that will replace 70-year-old rental homes.

Several phases are expected before the work is done. A groundbreaking on the project's first phase was held in early August. The Housing Authority of San Bernardino County and Housing Partners I Inc. are spearheading the project.

Once greenery, leftover buildings and other materials are cleared from the site, a foundation will be installed, and soon homes will start filling the empty dirt lot.

The first phase - which has a budget of \$18 million - is expected to be completed in late summer 2014, said Gustav Joslin, senior vice president/chief operating officer for the Housing Authority.

Costs to complete the entire housing community - which will be an energy-efficient mixed-income community made up of starter homes and townhome apartments - could reach \$50 million.

A multi-use recreation center with a pool and three playground areas for children will also come with the new housing complex for low-income residents. A separate housing unit will be open to first-time home buyers, Joslin said.

"The older units were extremely old and lacked the amenities that are common with modern rental housing," he said. "For example, they might have one bathroom for three or four bedrooms, so we're going to put back units that have two bathrooms where we will have large room sizes, more storage. ... We're going to put in modern amenities like carpet, for example.



How the playgrounds will look at the site that will be the future home to the Valencia Grove Housing Community. ((John Valenzuela/Staff Photographer))

"The old HUD units generally were bare bones, so the new units will be like market-rate rental units. "

The process to develop the homes began in 2007, with designs and a master plan developed some time later.

The homes that once stood on the lot were first built in 1941 in what was the oldest public housing site in the community. If local plans are successful, construction could begin on projects in such cities as San Bernardino and Rialto.

"It's a great first step for us," Joslin said. "It's an example how we can go about evolving our entire old housing portfolio ... and redevelop each site and bring it up to the modern standard. "

An estimated date of completion was not available, but after each phase is completed, those who lived in the housing community before the construction process will be allowed to pick their new units and move in. Currently, former residents have moved to other homes with the assistance of the county Housing Authority and the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department, said Ana Gamiz, director of policy and community affairs for the authority.

Weeks before the August groundbreaking, Redlands Mayor Pete Aguilar said the project was a long time coming and will help improve housing stock in the city. "The city is happy to have approved the plans," he said at the time.

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