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Controversial West Boynton affordable housing development nearly finished

By Erika Pesantes
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West Boynton – A controversial development that offered affordable housing before Palm Beach County made it a requirement is welcoming residents onto the former site of a 42-acre bell pepper farm.

Green Cay Village, a 420-unit, champagne, salmon and mocha-toned medley of mixed-income housing, is scheduled for completion in May. So far, only the townhouses are ready for families to move in. Builders are still completing the apartments.

The community, developed by Boca Raton-based Goray Communities Inc. and Housing Trust Group, of Miami, consists of 100 townhomes, 160 condos and 160 income-restricted rental apartments.

About 30 units -- with condo prices beginning at just under \$200,000 and townhouses selling for about \$300,000 -- have not sold since construction began more than a year ago, developer Jerry Goray said. They fall well within the \$164,000-to-\$304,000 price range that Palm Beach County considers affordable enough to provide needed housing for essential workers such as teachers and firefighters.

"There's a significant need even with the softening of the industry," Deputy County Administrator Verdenia Baker said. "It's still a need. We're still in the \$300,000 to \$400,000 average [price of a home in Palm Beach County]."

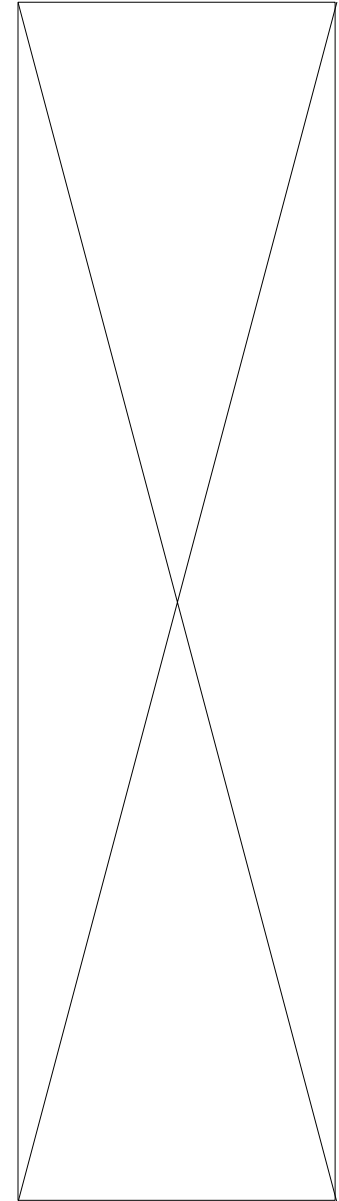
To help meet that need, county commissioners drafted an ordinance in November that required most developers to sell 16.5 percent of the new housing they offer at affordable prices. Before the measure passed, only a handful of projects, totaling 62 affordable homes, were in the pipeline in addition to Green Cay, Baker said.

County, municipal and hospital workers, teachers and police were the target market for Green Cay's townhomes and condominiums, Goray said. Including affordable housing was not a condition of approval of the development.

"We tried to create a village with housing types to meet most every need of Middle America," he said.

Green Cay's original plans called for an all rental apartment project limited to low-income tenants.

But nearby residents in mostly single-family subdivisions shunned Green Cay and wanted the low-income apartments nixed. An e-mail to Commissioner Burt Aaronson's office described potential



residents as "muggers, rapists, killers and maimers."

Many instead favored a development for seniors on fixed-incomes, which Goray said is a population he'll now tap into.

"Most of all of us feel ... beaten," said William Knobler, who lives adjacent to the project at Lakeridge Greens. "This is a land grab with public funds and I still feel that way. Much of it was a sham; that's my view."

He agrees opponents were mobilized by a "fear that the 'wrong' people will be there," he said. But "I don't fear a crime wave or anything like that. I think that's pure paranoia."

Among the first Green Cay homeowners to move in are Ed Capitano, 36, an environmental science teacher at West Boca Community High School, and his wife Kelli. They recently settled into their first home, a three-bedroom mocha-toned villa with a small yard and a small garage.

"It's everybody's story," he said. "I'm exactly where I want to be. This, to me, is like a dream house."

The buyers' contracts stipulate that the townhouses and condos, which sold at market and below-market rates, cannot be resold for a period of three years, Goray said. The county does not impose restrictions on the townhouses or condominiums since the developer did not receive any public money to build them. However, if any buyers receive financial help from the state or county, such as first-time homebuyer's assistance, there are limitations that prohibit them from quickly reselling the property and making a profit.

Since county commissioners approved a \$972,000 loan from the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) Program for the developer, Green Cay apartments must remain "attainable" for 15 years, said Assistant County Attorney Tammy Fields.

Renters can earn up to 80 percent of area's median household income, she said, well within the county's low-income bracket. For a family of four, household income cannot exceed \$51,500, Fields said. In Palm Beach County, the household median income is \$64,400.

With no advertising, but just the controversy and word of mouth to fuel interest, about 200 callers have asked to be put on a waiting list for the apartments, Goray said. Monthly rents would range from \$783 to \$1,030.

"It's something that's very much needed in the county," Aaronson said. "We'd probably be looking at [Green Cay Village] as a model for the future."

"The uproar that was caused by a few has died down completely and I'm certain all people will be able to live together in harmony."

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