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EDITOR'S PICK

Culmer Place combats housing crisis

Affordable living options in Overtown through public-private partnership

- Carlton Gillespie Miami Times Contributor
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Renderings of the completed Culmer Place at its construction site in Overtown.
(Carlton Gillespie for The Miami Times)

Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava acknowledged that it was unusual to have a groundbreaking ceremony after construction had already begun at Culmer Place, a new public housing redevelopment project in Overtown.

“I just think it means we are in a hurry to solve this crisis of affordability in this county,” she said.

The project is a joint venture between the county, the city of Miami, Atlantic Pacific Companies and Wells Fargo, and is located just west of I-95 on NW

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Eighth Street in Overtown. Levine Cava was among those who spoke at a groundbreaking Friday morning for Phase 1 of a project that's being viewed as a critical step in combating the local affordable housing crisis. By combining public and private funds, Culmer Place will attempt to deliver a higher standard of public housing units in the historically underserved neighborhood.



An aerial view of construction already underway at Culmer Place in Overtown. (Courtesy of Atlantic Pacific Companies)

That's just the first piece of a master plan that includes 1,000 units in the area. When Phase 1 is completed, it will offer 239 units in a pair of seven-story buildings. There will be 119 replacement public housing units and 120 affordable housing units set aside at 30% to 80% of median household income. The project also includes a clubhouse, fitness center, computer rooms and a pool.

Ken Naylor, president of development for Atlantic Pacific Companies, shared how people are shocked to learn that a swimming pool is part of this project.

"People see the renderings and ask me, 'Are you really building this? Are you really building a pool?'"

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County officials and representatives from Atlantic Pacific Companies and Wells Fargo ceremonially breaking ground for the cameras at Culmer Place. (Courtesy of Atlantic Pacific Companies)

The units include 59 studio, 87 one-bedroom, 21 two-bedroom, 57 three-bedroom, 12 four-bedroom and three five-bedroom units that range in price from \$452 to \$4,521. The rent for public housing units will be based upon what each resident can afford.

“We all need a place to live, a place that’s safe and affordable, and we just don’t have as much as we need in Miami-Dade County,” said Levine Cava. “The need is huge.”

The 119 public housing units are not additional units; rather, they represent the 119 units that existed on the property before construction began late last year. Each of the existing residents was relocated to newly renovated public housing units and will all be offered the right to return once Culmer Place is completed.

District 3 Miami-Dade County Commissioner Keon Hardemon also spoke at the event and highlighted that the project would offer dignity to its residents.

“Some of these people, it’ll be their first time walking into a place and experiencing the smell of fresh paint,” he said. “To not have someone patch up a problem, but to fix it.”

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District 3 Miami-Dade County Commissioner Keon Hardemon speaking at the groundbreaking for Culmer Place. (Courtesy of Atlantic Pacific Companies)

Naylor said that bringing in private-sector funding was crucial to ensure that the property avoids the pitfalls of subpar living standards that plague public housing.

“The public housing of yesterday is in the shape it’s in because it wasn’t built right in the first place, and the maintenance of it was underfunded by the federal government for decades,” he said. “Today, we’re building something that’s built extremely high quality and is financed in a way to keep it at a very high level infinitely.”



Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava speaking at the groundbreaking for Culmer Place, where she acknowledged that everyone is “in a hurry to solve this crisis of affordability in this county.” (Courtesy of Atlantic Pacific Companies)

The project also represents a collaborative effort between the county and the city. Both Levine Cava and Hardemon praised Miami District 5 City

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Commissioner Christine King for working to get it approved. That collaboration is seen as a crucial step forward.

“We have to work together, it’s just a given,” said Levine Cava, “and we have leadership that is very committed to collaboration.”

“The area is changing in a positive way and all it took was a little investment, a few agencies to come together and say, ‘Let’s help the people who live here first,’” said Hardemon.

Culmer Place won’t be the last time the city and county collaborate to tackle the affordable housing crisis.

“We just submitted a grant application to HUD ... The city and county joined as co-applicants,” said Naylor. “That doesn’t happen without intense coordination and a real will to get things done.”

Construction at Culmer Place is expected to be completed within the first quarter of 2025.

https://www.miamitimesonline.com/news/local/culmer-place-combats-housing-crisis/article_8b9be0ba-0240-11ef-8302-23439486db5a.html

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