

Homes, retail planned for former Portsmouth housing project

By Jen McCaffery, The Virginian-Pilot
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One day, a Mount Hermon resident may be able to stroll down tree-lined sidewalks through the site of the former Jeffry Wilson housing complex to shop at a neighborhood store.

Designers who are here this week hope to make the site on the corner of Frederick Boulevard and Turnpike Road the "elbow" that connects the neighborhoods of Westhaven and Mount Hermon.

On Thursday night, a project manager for Urban Design Associates showed conceptual designs and drawings he and others developed this week in conjunction with city and housing authority staff, neighborhood residents and former Jeffry Wilson residents.

Redevelopment of the site is being financed by a \$20 million federal Hope VI grant.

The plan incorporates land from the neighboring campus of the Stephen H. Clarke school complex.

The Portsmouth School Board voted earlier this month to seek approval from the City Council to sell the 4.2 acres to the Portsmouth Redevelopment and Housing Authority, which is managing the redevelopment.

Planners expect the development to eventually contain nearly 300 units. Under the Hope VI grant, 221 of the units must be subsidized housing, project manager Joe Nickol said.

The goal is to seamlessly incorporate the subsidized housing with the other housing, Nickol said.



Portsmouth has accomplished that successfully in the Westbury community, Nickol said.

That community replaced the former Ida Barbour housing complex.

The design also calls for 20,000 to 30,000 feet of retail space.

Nickol said storefronts would face Frederick Boulevard and the stores would be small, neighborhood shops ranging from 1,600 to 10,000 square feet.

The housing authority would maintain control over who the tenants would be, Nickol said. Units would include townhouses, duplexes and apartment houses, according to the designs. The plans include two parks and a community center.

Former Jeffry Wilson resident Donna Clerkin said she would like to return to the new community to live.

"The whole area's changing," Clerkin said.

She said, however, that she thinks people would immediately be able to tell that the residents who lived in the proposed nine-unit apartment buildings were in subsidized housing.

"You're going to know right away that's not condos," Clerkin said.

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