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Roosevelt Square breaks ground on Near West Side

Some residents of the Near West Side feel that the community never fully recovered from construction of the expressways and the University of Illinois at Chicago campus – both of which cut large swaths through what in many ways, was the quintessential Chicago neighborhood.

Today, there's more demolition underway, but LR Development and Quest Development Group say they're recreating the flavor of the traditional neighborhood with a major redevelopment on the site of the Chicago Housing Authority's ABLA Homes.

LR recently broke ground on for-sale units in the first phase of Roosevelt Square, a mixed-use development of 2,441 residential units that will cover more than 100 acres and take about 10 years to complete. The site stretches from Blue Island to Ashland at its widest and from Cabrini Street to 15th at its longest.

Plans call for 1,090 affordable rentals, including 755 CHA replacement units, and 1,351 homes for sale, both affordable and market rate. The mix is similar to that at other CHA redevelopment projects – roughly one-third market-rate; one-third affordable, or "workforce;" and one-third CHA replacement.

Like other mixed-income redevelopments of CHA projects, the public housing units are designed to be indistinguishable from the market-rate units and integrated throughout the site. Unlike some other developments, however, Roosevelt Square will reserve some rental buildings entirely for CHA residents instead of trying to maintain a mix of incomes on a building-by-building basis.

"The CHA units are spread out and building-specific, but they're all equally divided up along the blocks," said Mike Kelly, director of sales and marketing for Roosevelt Square. "Sixteen units is as big as a rental building will get, and there are only a couple that big."

The design of the project, according to Kelly, has taken its cues from the vintage blocks around Taylor Street, where vestiges of the old heavily Italian neighborhood – restaurants, delis and coffee shops – still thrive.

The two largest residential structures have 27 to 45 units – both elevator buildings on Roosevelt – but off of that main thoroughfare, the new construction will echo the area's vintage buildings.

"These two buildings are on Roosevelt, which can handle a bigger building, but to the north and south, the scale gets dropped down to more of a neighborhood feel," Kelly said. "There's a mix of three- and six-flats with garage parking included."

At press time, one-bedroom condos in the first phase were sold out, and two-bedrooms were priced from the \$260s. The 38 phase I townhouses have two or three bedrooms and 2.5 baths and are priced from the \$480s.

The first phase of the project also includes about 40,000 square feet of retail space, 28,000 square feet of it in one block on Taylor with parking tiers above. Some of the smaller retail spaces follow a familiar pattern, retail on the first floor with residential above. "They're patterned after what's already on Taylor Street," Kelly said.

And in a good sign for the developers, the immediate neighborhood is providing more than just a development model.

"We have 45,000 people come into this community every day, doctors, teachers, workers and now they have the opportunity to purchase," Kelly said. "There wasn't enough housing like this in the neighborhood. We're drawing suburban buyers, buyers from the South Side, empty nesters; it's really a hodgepodge. We also have a lot of buyers from in the neighborhood – over 20 percent – which is a good sign."