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Top work vowed in subsidy units

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AC, hardwood, tile to be all-new

COVINGTON - A Walnut Hills development company isn't just promising to turn 24 abandoned housing units in Covington's Eastside neighborhood into nice places to live. The goal is to give them "world-class finishes."

The rehabbed units, which will have subsidized rents, will replace some of the 163-unit Jacob Price project to be torn down nearby.

An average of \$104,000 in labor and materials will go into each remodeled unit as part of a \$3.2 million project to restore empty buildings that now blight the neighborhood. Most of the 24 once were part of a non-profit Anawim Properties redevelopment project that went bankrupt in 2000.

"We're going to be giving these residents just world-class finishes, with hardwood floors, ceramic tile, all-new plumbing, electric, central heating and air-conditioning - everything you would expect from top market-rate units," said Robert Maly, vice president of development for the Model Group.

Covington announced this week the project won \$248,341 in federal Rental Housing Credits, which allows more money to be poured into the units, Maly said.

Tony Milburn, chairman of the Covington Housing Authority's board, said he was impressed with the Model Group's work.

"I mean, hardwood floors in subsidized units? How many people do that?" Milburn said.

Howard Hodge, a former city housing development director who had worked with the Anawim project, said it will be difficult.

"From experience, you can dump as much money as you want into these buildings, but unless you're able to get decent tenants that don't just literally tear 'em up, another five or 10 years from now, you'll just be recycling them again," Hodge said.

"Some attention needs to be paid to the people in the neighborhood," Hodge said. "The neighborhood needs to win the battle against drugs; they need to provide good education and jobs for young people; get people off the corner."

Anawim and similar efforts failed, Hodge said, because, "these projects that were done in the early '90s, the neighborhood changed so much between the time the projects were initiated and when they were completed and occupied."

"The drug situation got to a point that it was almost unbearable," Hodge said.

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