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Developers ink big Bronx housing deal

Briarwood Organization, CPC Resources and The Bridge were tapped by the city to develop a \$90 million affordable housing project on portion of 5.5 acres in the South Bronx. **By Amanda Fung**

One of the last remaining large tracts of city-owned land in the South Bronx has been slated for development as affordable housing.

Briarwood Organization, a Queens-based developer, announced that it and two partners will create low-to-moderate income apartments on one of the three remaining sites in the Melrose Commons North Urban Renewal Area. It is one of three groups of firms the city recently selected to create 770 affordable housing units in the neighborhood, which during the 1970s became widely known for abandonment and arson.

The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development issued a request for proposals for the sites in late 2008.

“The mix of affordable residential units and commercial was highly appealing to us,” said James Riso, principal of Briarwood, noting that other neighborhood developments such as Boricua Village will create huge demand for retail. “Although the residential components will bring Briarwood a modest profit, we identified incredible long-term value in the retail space we will retain.”

Briarwood, along with CPC Resources and The Bridge, will build and develop 260 units of affordable housing and 27,500 square feet of retail space on the site. The project, which is designed for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification, is estimated to cost \$90 million, and the developers are considering a variety of financing options, Mr. Riso said.

“In this economic climate, securing construction financing is always a challenge,” he added.

Separately, the city recently chose Phipps House Group to build about 216 affordable housing units and the team of Blue Sea Development and WHEDCo to build 290 units at the two other sites at Melrose Commons North URA. The three sites are located on 5.5 acres of land between East 161st Street and East 163rd Street, bounded by Courtlandt, Melrose and Ettona avenues.

The development of Melrose Commons North URA is part of the city's South Bronx initiative to revitalize the entire area. So far, 2,743 affordable housing units have been built or are currently under construction in the Melrose Commons URA, according to the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

“We've witnessed tremendous growth in the South Bronx,” Mr. Riso said. “We're thrilled to be part of the transformation of Melrose.”

The Melrose Commons North development is also part of the city's ambitious plan to create or rehabilitate 165,000 apartments by 2014. Earlier this month, the housing preservation department said it would likely hit the 100,000 milestone by the end of this year.

“With the development of the Melrose Commons North sites we are moving to complete the transformation of this area of the South Bronx and creating a thriving neighborhood of new affordable and mixed-income housing, new commercial enterprise, and new opportunities,” said Rafael Cestero, the city's Housing Preservation and Development commissioner, in a statement.