

New project slated to replace Johnson Ferry East

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Johnson Ferry East is an aging public housing project with roaches and termite-eaten cabinet doors. This is how 79-year-old Ha-son Lee describes it.

"I'd say this is the best place to live," the widow said in Korean. "Of course, a new apartment would be better."

Five decades after its construction, Johnson Ferry East seems a lot like an assisted living facility. Half of the tenants are at least 62 years old.

A developer, Norsouth Corp., wants to turn the 56 acres that the authority owns into one huge mixed-use development, according to a master plan that calls for single-family homes, senior apartments, condominiums, shops and a bike trail at the development off Johnson Ferry Road and near Peachtree Industrial Boulevard in Chamblee.

The U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department has to sign off on it. So far HUD has granted the local agency permission only to tear down one section of the complex.

Johnson Ferry East has been home to hundreds of families for decades, but starting last year, the authority began issuing housing vouchers to half the tenants who are younger than age 62. They moved out from the project, using the Section 8 vouchers to relocate to wherever they desired.

Only seniors --- who are eligible for the new apartments --- were allowed to remain and then moved to another part of the community. They have been waiting for the demolition to start.

Carthur Mangham, a 49-year-old former restaurant worker who is disabled, is waiting for his voucher so that he can move back to East Point, where he would be close to his family. His life in Chamblee has been a peaceful, pleasant experience as he enjoyed two spacious bedrooms, festooned with photos of his parents and CDs of Al Jarreau.

"It's pretty nice and quiet," he said, sitting in front of his apartment. "[But] I want to move close to my people."

With HUD's approval, the construction is expected to start in August and continue until December 2007.

Developer Norsouth Corp. has teamed with the Collaborative Firm, a planning firm headed by Michael Hightower, a former Fulton County commissioner.

In the past, Norsouth has partnered with the Housing Authority of Fulton County and transformed the Boat Rock housing project in south DeKalb County into a mixed-use development where new homes sell in the \$300,000s.

Last week, the DeKalb housing authority held an information meeting for the Johnson Ferry East community. About 50 people attended the meeting at the apartment complex office.

Their main concern was traffic on Johnson Ferry, which gets clogged during rush hour.