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Rental in Ballston Spa

Upstate Dumpsters

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By Matthew Hamilton

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With a pair of golden-shovel tosses of muddy soil on Thursday morning, city and state officials kicked off the latest phase of housing developments planned to help revitalize the blight-pocked South End neighborhood.

Phase 3 of the ongoing housing revitalization project is set to bring 56 housing units to the neighborhood, which is marred by abandoned, crumbling buildings. The plan calls for 25 one-bedroom units, 25 two-bedroom units, six three-bedroom units, a coin laundry and the revitalization of three historic Morton Avenue homes.

The funds for the \$9.6 million project are from bank loans and money from the state's Housing and Community Renewal Trust Fund Corporation, the Low-Income Housing and Tax Credit Program, Historic Tax Credits and the Albany Housing Authority, according to a news release from Omni Housing Development, the project contractor.

Albany Housing Authority Executive Director Steven Longo said it's exciting to see a proposed project get off the shelf and be put into action.

Rent will be affordable for lower-income residents, with the cost set at 30 percent of the tenant's gross household income, Longo said. That could have effects beyond just providing

people with housing, he said.

"(Residents will say) 'This is something. I must be something.' It will increase your self esteem," Longo said, adding that confidence could lead to residents seeking jobs they wouldn't have before. "People's income will rise, and I think you'll see them stay."

Residents will be helped during construction, too. Omni Housing Development Chief Operating Officer Duncan Barrett said roughly one-third of the project's workers will come from the South End.

South End Neighborhood Association President JoAnn Morton said the project will help change the perspective of residents toward their community.

Barrett said the projects may encourage surrounding homeowners to invest in their own properties to further neighborhood enhancement.

Signs of the project are already visible in the wooden frame of a unit on the corner of Alexander and South Pearl streets. Another unit is under construction on the corner of Broad and Alexander streets.

Phase 3 follows two projects that began in 2008. Capital South Properties started the project with replacement units at Lincoln Square Homes off Morton Avenue. In May, work started on Capital South Campus Center, also on Morton Avenue. It is expected to be completed next summer.

The cost of the first two phases is \$22 million.

There are plans for fourth and fifth phases, though no timeline has been set, the Omni release said. More construction could be positive in a neighborhood that sorely needs rehabilitation.

Phase 3 might "give people a reason to get up in the morning and say, 'I want to be here,'" Longo said.

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