

## New Jersey

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ORANGE

### Building new homes and hope for residents



The Orange Housing Authority held a news conference Thursday announcing the first stage of construction for the expansion of the Dr. Walter G. Alexander Village. Demolition also began on Central Place. Patti Sapone/NJ Advance Media for The Star-Ledger

### Demolition begins at 5 vacant East Ward homes

Marisa Iati For The Star-Ledger

On Central Place in Orange, homes are of two eras. There are the pristine, multicolored townhouses, with fresh paint and perfectly shingled roofs, that have been built in the past six years. Down the street, a beat-up air conditioner hangs out the window of a decades-old home with a scuffed front door.

The tiny Essex County township's East Ward has undergone a revitalization since 2011, when the modern, mixed-income townhouses began rising on the site of a notoriously crime-ridden public housing complex built in the 1950s.

As township officials on Thursday began demolition on five vacant properties to expand the new development, residents expressed hope that the 44 apartments planned for the site would continue to transform their neighborhood.

"This is a good start," said Jean Christine, as she sat on her porch next to the demolition site. "The street is getting better and better. It takes time."

Drug dealers still linger in the neighborhood, where Christine has lived for 30 years. She said she's afraid to sit outside her house for long, and she has repeatedly told her daughter she wanted to sell the home and move.

Her daughter, Dennise Lovell, said she's optimistic the



Artist rendering of the Dr. Walter G. Alexander Village. Courtesy Orange Housing Authority

township's plan to construct four new residential buildings on Central Place and nearby Parrow Street would ease Christine's concerns.

"I'm so glad that whatever's going on here now, my mother can be at peace," Lovell said.

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NEWARK

### Fencing chairman quits amid backlash

Head of state's ruling body had sparked furor with comments about city

Steve Strunsky For The Star-Ledger

The chairman of fencing's ruling body in New Jersey resigned Thursday after drawing the ire of the state's fencing community with a politically charged rebuff of an invitation from Newark to stage an event there.

Gene Costa, who had chaired the board of USA Fencing's New Jersey Division, angered and puzzled city officials as well as fencing coaches and officials in the Garden State who learned of the July 31 email he sent to the Greater Newark Convention and Visitors Bureau that raised issues of illegal immigration and gun control.

A week earlier, the visitors bureau had sought out the sport's Colorado Springs, Colo.-based national governing body, USA Fencing, seeking a New Jersey contact for the sport to arrange a meeting about staging an event.

"Please tell Mayor Ras Baraka that the NJ Division of USA Fencing is not interested in holding any of our activities in Newark, NJ, as of June 19, 2017, due to its Sanctuary City declaration," Costa stated in the email. "Because the Democratic politicians in NJ will not entertain passing Concealed Carry legislation and thereby deny the citizens of the state their second amendment rights, I in good conscience cannot entertain our organization placing many young people in the state and their families in danger by holding an event in Newark."

After word quickly spread throughout the close-knit fencing community, fencers, coaches, fencing club owners and others, including Baraka, immediately condemned Costa's remarks as wrongheaded, improper and even absurd.

New Jersey is a U.S. fencing stronghold, with a large number of clubs and high school and college fencing programs.

Both USA Fencing and the executive committee of its New Jersey Division distanced themselves from Costa's statements and vowed to work with Newark officials to stage an event there.

"USA Fencing does not support or condone the statements made by Mr. Costa regarding the potential for fencing events to be hosted in Newark," read a statement from spokeswoman Nicole Jamantas.

"The National Office of USA Fencing

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# THE STAR-LEDGER

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THE STAR-LEDGER, AFFILIATED WITH



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Patti Sapone/NJ Advance Media for The Star-Ledger

## HOUSING

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Although a crew started razing the abandoned homes Thursday morning, funding for the project remains in question.

The township expects to learn mid-month if it will receive state tax credits it requested to defray the development's \$13 million price tag, said Walter McNeil Jr., the executive director of the Orange Housing Authority.

"Because this is a community project, we are very concerned about the vacant and abandoned properties," he said. "We're taking the risk, we're spending money, to tear these things down so we can ensure the safety of the community overall."

If the New Jersey Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency doesn't award Orange the tax credits, McNeil said, the township will reapply every six months until it does so.

Asked whether Orange would pay for the project if it did not receive the credits, McNeil said: "No, no, we've got to keep on applying for the tax credits. In the meantime, we're praying that it works out eventually. Generally speaking, it will."

The construction of 44 "workplace units" — affordable housing marketed to working families — is the fourth stage in the construction of the Dr. Walter G. Alexander Village that is changing the face of the neighborhood. The public housing complex that formerly stood on the site was known for its drug and gang activity, and multiple law enforcement agencies arrested 33 gang members there in 2009.

McNeil said he expects construction of the new buildings to be completed in about 18 months. Some residents likely will have

lived in the public housing complex that stood in the neighborhood until 2010.

The township will be careful about who's accepted as tenants, he said.

"They're working people, and they're people who have an interest in building the neighborhood," McNeil said during a ceremony before the demolition.

Prices for the apartments will vary based on applicants' incomes, which must fall below certain thresholds. A one-bedroom will cost roughly \$700 per month, a two-bedroom will be \$800 or \$900, and a three-bedroom will be \$1,100.

The township largely credits the redevelopment with a decrease in lawlessness in the East Ward. Crime has dropped 30 percent since the townhouses started rising, McNeil said.

"The police didn't even want to come down this street (before)," he said. "It was that bad."

McNeil said some crime may have migrated from the area already redeveloped to the part of Central Place where construction is just beginning, but the area is safer than it once was.

The township has installed 64 surveillance cameras in the neighborhood since 2012 and plans to install another 64, McNeil said. An Orange police substation is housed in one of the new townhouses.

To Mildred Harris, who for 23 years has lived across from what is now a demolition site, the redevelopment is "the cat's meow."

She's optimistic the new residents will promote a high quality of life in the neighborhood and help it improve. "As long as I'm here, I'm gonna fight," Harris said.

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