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## Housing development targets 'essential workers'



By [LADY HEREFORD](#)  
*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*

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LAKE WORTH — Teachers, firefighters, police officers and first-time home buyers will be among those who will call Hammon Park home.

Envisioned four years ago as a 110-unit townhome development on Dixie Highway just north of downtown, the project's developers are addressing the downturn in the housing market by reinventing the project as a mix of townhouses, condominiums and retail shops.



Rendering courtesy of New Urban Communities

This artist's rendering shows a building that will be part of the Hammon Park development on Dixie Highway near downtown Lake Worth. The building will have retail shops in the first floor, with condos and townhouses above.

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The target home buyers will include "essential workers," such as educators and city employees. Recently, the effort received a boost when the project won a \$5.5 million state grant through the Community Workforce Housing Innovation Pilot Program.

The grant will help with the construction of 117 units - 82 condominiums and 35 three-story townhouses. Those are in addition to 13 townhouses that already have been built on the 3.8-acre site.

The project also will include 48,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space. The developers said they hope to begin construction by the fall.

The homes will be priced from the \$120,000 range for the condominiums to the \$199,000 range for the townhouses. "It addresses a market need," said Tim Hernandez, a principal with New Urban Communities, part of the development team for Hammon Park. "It'll help stabilize the area."

New Urban Communities and Caster Developers, both based in Delray Beach, worked on the grant application with the city, the Lake Worth Community Development Corp., the Lake Worth Community Redevelopment Agency, the school district and a number of private businesses.

"We put together a broad spectrum in terms of our partners," said Kevin Rickard, also a principal with New Urban Communities. "They're all coming to the table with financial assistance."

That includes down payment assistance for the home buyers. For instance, the school district will give 25 experienced teachers who work in low-income schools \$10,000 each toward a down payment in Hammon Park.

"What we're trying to do is partner with developers along the east coast to help teachers at Title 1 schools become homeowners," said Angela Usher, the school district's manager for government relations.

The CRA, meanwhile, will give down payment assistance to city employees and city residents. Also, the Lake Worth CDC will help other qualified home buyers apply for state and county down-payment subsidies.

"I'm excited about bringing that community to the downtown. I think it will be

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good for business," said CDC President Edward Grimm.

The new residents will be those making up to 140 percent of the area's median income, or a maximum of \$89,000 for two people, officials said.

There also will be provisions for those making less than 80 percent of the median income to live in Hammon Park. That, in part, is what convinced City Commissioner Cara Jennings to give her approval to the project's higher density.

"It's incumbent on elected officials to look out for the interests of a range of people in the city," Jennings said. "In Lake Worth, that range includes people

who are on a single income or a limited income. And we would be negligent not to include those people into our overall housing plan."

In addition, some private employers, such as Romano Law Group and Living Designs Group, plan to provide down payment assistance to their employees who want to live in Hammon Park, the developers said. Also, county commission Chairwoman Addie Greene pledged \$250,000 from her discretionary fund.

Out of 49 projects statewide, including a handful in Palm Beach County, Hammon Park scored the highest of the applicants in the CWHIP program, said Rick Caster, principal with Caster Developers.

The project earned points by being located near three major bus lines and the Tri-Rail station. It also earned an additional \$500,000 by incorporating "green" building practices approved by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

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