



News

Durham's affordable housing plan becoming reality with J.J. Henderson re-opening

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Durham Housing Authority /

Bird's eye view of the Opportunity Sites identified in the DHA Downtown and Neighborhood Plan

On a chilly January night nearly three years ago, residents of McDougald Terrace — a public housing neighborhood in Durham — filled city hall to demand better living conditions.

They had evacuated their units after fears of elevated carbon monoxide levels. Alongside supporters, they demanded the city council and Durham Housing Authority do more for the city's poorest residents.

The city council as well as DHA President Anthony Scott listened to the concerns, and vowed to improve the public housing complexes in the city. Crucially, the council was armed with more than just words to try to make good on those promises. Just a few weeks earlier, Durham voters overwhelmingly approved a \$95 million housing bond, and those funds would give Scott some much-needed help.

Now, nearly three years removed from that chilly night, Scott celebrated the re-opening of J.J. Henderson Senior Apartments, the nine-story building just across NC-147 from the Durham Bulls Athletic Park. This was the first of series of projects to increase affordable housing to reach completion.

"We never took our eye off of this ball," Scott said at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday. "We continued to work on the developments because we knew that McDougald was really a symptom of the bigger issue. So we knew we couldn't take our eye off the ball of trying to continue to redevelop our public housing communities because that's how you avoid a McDougald situation."

Demographics of DHA, Downtown Neighborhood and City of Durham Residents

	DHA Opportunity Sites	Downtown Neighborhood*	City of Durham
Population	545	7,845	251,761
Race/Ethnicity			
% Black	89%	54%	40%
% White Alone	8%	39%	48%
% Other	3%	7%	12%
% Hispanic/Latino	2%	15%	14%
Age			
% < age 5	5%	8%	7%
% ages 5-17	14%	15%	15%
% ages 18-24	2%	12%	11%
% ages 25-64	52%	57%	56%
% age 65+	27%	8%	10%
% Population with disability	42%	13%**	10%
% Head of Households w/ disability	64%	N/A	N/A
Total Households	429	3,121	103,076
Household Size	1.3	2.5	2.4
% Households with Children	12%	25%	30%

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All 177 units at JJ Henderson were renovated while residents continued to live in parts of the building. Bathrooms, kitchens, and floors were upgraded to give each unit a cleaner and more modern look, but those improvements were only half of the \$31 million project. The other half went to fixing and replacing mechanical, electrical, and plumbing, the parts of the building not as readily seen, but

Demographics of Durham Housing Authority residents compared with downtown and Durham residents.

more important for upkeep of the structure.

"It's that behind the scenes work that gets done that really makes sure that you can keep these buildings for 50-plus years," said Scott.

Virginia Williams has lived in the building since 1999 and has seen a lot of people come and go.

"It's changed a lot," she said.



Durham Housing Authority

A renovated room at JJ Henderson in Durham.

With a lot of turnover, some units had better upkeep than others. Williams says she treated her unit as her home, so it wasn't in dire straights. But given higher turnover in some other units meant they needed work. One of Williams' favorite aspects of the locations is that she can see the fireworks from the ballpark across the street.

"I'm TV person, and I love to watch TV. And just about the time a program is getting good, they win the game and here comes the fireworks. Pow pow pow," she said with a smile. "So I said, well I might as well watch that. And I just cut the lights out, opened the blinds and then watch them."

Housing Affordability

	Unit Type	Units	Percentage
Up to 30% AMI [public housing replacement units]	RAD/PBV Rental	447	18%
30% - 60% AMI	LIHTC Rental	843	34%
60% - 80% AMI	LIHTC Rental	560	22%
Unrestricted Units	Market-Rate Rental	663	26%
	Total	2,513	100%

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Breakdown of income restrictions on the apartment units in the DHA Downtown and Neighborhood Plan.

This is the first in a string of projects that fall under what DHA called its Downtown and Neighborhood Plan, [a joint effort between](#) the Durham Housing Authority and the city of Durham to increase the supply of affordable and workforce housing. Importantly, there's a mix of income restrictions across the five locations. About a quarter of the new units will be rented at market rates. Another quarter for renters who make between 60% and 80% of area median income.

The development plans also include more than 100,000 square feet for retail and more than 6 acres for new parks.

Still, even when all 2,000 units come online, city leaders say they know it won't satisfy the full need. Even with the financial support from Durham voters, DHA can do only so much with limited funds from the federal government.

"There's not enough money coming in to support housing authorities," said Scott. "The issues that DHA faces are what all housing authorities are facing across the country."

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Jason deBruyn

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