



Changes for Cherry

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townhouses, and 42 senior apartments in the community.

Sellars and Hunt aren't just any developers, though. "Seven years ago there were some burned out units in the community we went in and bought from investors," explained Sellars. "I owned one; Anthony owned the other." Though his plan was to live in the unit after renovations, Sellars met his wife and moved, but Hunt stayed, and still lives in the community.

"We understand Cherry's place in the hearts of the community," said Sellars. "We're going to be very cognizant to the impact to the people first."

"We found a developer we believe in, to provide housing for seniors and affordable housing," said Cherry Community Organization President Phyllis Lynch.

Cherry, named for the trees that lined the community, is one of Charlotte's oldest surviving black residential areas, predating the Civil War. Many of its residents have lived in the neighborhood for generations, yet the community that used to be a crown jewel for blacks fell on hard times and disrepair, with boarded up buildings that have made it a magnet for crime.

StoneHunt's plans include affordable housing, though how much is uncertain. What is certain is that if StoneHunt were not doing the project, eventually someone would.

"People are stretching the suburbs," said Sellars. "Traffic has increased. Folks are moving back to town...to be closer to the employee base, entertainment and restaurants. That's why historically African American neighborhoods are more attractive. They've been maintained for less than their standard...developers see them and think they can revitalize them and get a higher value."

Cherry leaders "Phyllis Lynch, Virginia Bynum and Lucille Lynch have been able to protect an invaluable asset with very little resources," continued Sellars. "They've been renting out units for \$200-\$300 for years."

This endeavor has left the community organization barely able to cover overhead costs, and completely unable to revitalize the community, which has led to some units being boarded up.

"All of them are aging...as is the community," says Sellars. "What happens to Cherry without resources...without significant investments? What do you do?"

When approached 18 months ago, Sellars asked himself the same questions, because initially he said no to the idea.

"I didn't want to be known as the person who gentrified Cherry," he said.

With Cherry's proximity to million dollar homes in Myers Park, expanding hospitals, and greenways, Sellars realized the community was at risk, no matter what.

"We sat down and mulled it over, and came up with what we thought would be good," said Sellars. "There are three main components; to keep as many original residents as possible, especially seniors. To redevelop and revitalize so the community is no longer at risk, and we're confident in it being sustained as a mixed community with long-term affordable housing. And to make a model that is successful and can be duplicated."

It took six to eight months before StoneHunt agreed to the deal, and then three months to come up with the plan. StoneHunt's plan includes restricted active senior housing and market rate housing that can not be

distinguished from affordable housing.

"[CCO] has entrusted StoneHunt to create the vision they've had for years...while making sure that established residents are taken care of," said Sellars.

"We feel very good about the new housing," said Lynch. "We negotiated with the developer...anyone who lives there now can stay. Neighborhood residents have been there working to provide for youth and seniors."

Sellars said StoneHunt has met with CCO leaders no less than 40 times for informal and formal meetings. They've also met with Cherry Neighborhood Association and homeowners. A meeting with homeowners was scheduled for Monday night, and StoneHunt will present a rezoning petition to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission on Dec. 18. Yet the meetings have not left some residents without concerns.

Sellars estimates the cost of a condo in Cherry to "begin in the high 190s depending on construction costs, and to range upwards of \$700,000 for the larger suites." For the town homes he estimates

"from market range of mid \$200,000 to high \$400,000."

For Patton and other residents, cost isn't the only concern. "There is some hesitancy as far as people going through with what they say they are going to do," said Patton. "Lots of communities have said something and then were basically taken over. They come in initially and then sell out to the powers that be."

The relocation process is a concern to many.

Patton has already been told the location he will be moved to as StoneHunt is works out the details.

"We will be actively remodeling existing units," said Sellars. "We'll shift residents from units being taken out to ones being built out. We'll build out Cherry Gardens (senior apartments) then townhouses, and shift folks back."

Sellars said they are bringing in movers and will be covering the moving costs for those transitioned.

"Cherry is not the same community as it once was," says Patton. "It used to be that everyone knew everyone. Some individuals have

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