

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

NEW HOUSES WILL RISE AMID HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN OLD NORTH ST. LOUIS

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* Developers expect the \$10 million **North Market Place** project to be the start of a much larger housing development covering 30 acres.

Old North St. Louis, one of the city's oldest historic neighborhoods, is about to get 37 new houses. And that, in itself, is a historic event for longtime residents such as Gloria Bratkowski.

"We had maybe three houses built here as part of Model Cities (in the 1960s)," Bratkowski said. "Before that, I can't remember any new houses ... Most of our houses are from the 1890s, or older." The nearly \$10 million **North Market Place** development will rise on vacant land alongside four empty historic houses, which will be renovated as part of the project.

The developers - Old North St. Louis Restoration Group, a neighborhood organization, and the not-for-profit Regional Housing and Development Alliance - say it's the beginning of what they intend to be a much larger housing development with 150 new and rehabbed buildings covering 30 acres.

"We're carefully planning this around the people who have stayed in the neighborhood and kept the lights on," said John Burse, an architect at Mackey Mitchell Associates who's also president of the neighborhood group.

All the buildings to be rehabbed are vacant, said Rachelle L'Ecuyer, project manager at the regional housing alliance, "and all the land we will build on is vacant."

North Market Place is being built for the developers by Charles F. Vatterott Construction Co. Basic prices range from about \$145,900 for 1,360 square feet to \$189,000 or more for 2,100 square feet, depending on features, finishes and other options. The developers are setting up a fund to assist some qualifying buyers with financing. But these won't be typical new houses.

Designed by architect Ralph Eglin Wafer, they'll be 2 1/2 stories with gable roofs, cornices, 6-foot-tall windows and other features to blend them visually with the neighborhood's historic homes. Facades, and in

some cases side walls, will be real brick, not what Burse calls "that rubber glue-on stuff."

"What you'll see from the street will be real brick," he said.

Also in keeping with the historic character of the neighborhood - it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places - Wafer designed the houses close together and near the street. They'll also have characteristic recessed rear porches, small fenced front and rear yards, brick or stone arches above windows, and parking behind each house.

"We've tried to maintain the form of the older houses and fit them into the context of what is there," Wafer said.

Burse, who is rehabbing his own house, said the project began years ago when the neighborhood group began planning for the future. It came up with ideas for new housing but was unable to find a developer or financing until three years ago. That's when the group went to the regional housing alliance, which specializes in neighborhood revitalization projects.

Stephen Acree, RHCDA's executive director, said that pulling together financing for **North Market Place** wasn't easy. But the multilayer approach used shows "how a variety of sources working together" can make projects happen, he said.

Bank of America supplied a construction loan of just over \$4.6 million. The developers also are using state tax credits, and grants or other assistance from St. Louis, the Danforth Foundation, the St. Louis Regional Empowerment Zone, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the housing alliance.

Display houses, less than four blocks from the famed Crown Candy soda fountain and restaurant, are expected to open in the spring. And because of the neighborhood's location just north of downtown, its historic character and the ongoing revitalization, the developers expect the houses to attract a variety of buyers.

"Young families, people coming back to the city, young professionals who work downtown, maybe people priced out of the loft market downtown," said J. David Dodson, deputy director at the housing alliance, "and neighborhood people who might be looking for a newer home."
