

Mayor hopes West River redevelopment mirrors success of Seminole Heights

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TAMPA, Fla. (FOX 13) - Tampa's Water Street project with the backing of Jeff Vinik and Bill Gates gets more coverage, but Mayor Bob Buckhorn says plans to redevelop the city's West River area is more complex and possibly more far-reaching.

"I think it's the most aggressive and ambitious repurposing of a neighborhood that we've ever undertaken," says Buckhorn. "It's a tougher deal to do because some of it is public housing."

More than 40 acres of the demolished North Boulevard Homes federal housing project will be redeveloped, along with eight acres of city-owned land formerly used by the water department and parks and recreation.

Artist renderings of what it will look like show apartment buildings and townhomes in a tree-lined, pedestrian neighborhood within walking distance of Downtown Tampa.

"A diverse community, a mixed-use community, a vibrant and sustainable community," says Leroy Moore of **Tampa Housing Authority**.

The plan calls for 2,200 residential units along with retail stores and a hotel. Just as The Heights have seen a renaissance, they hope the West River is next, with West Tampa's history of mixed cultures in the cigar industry and the black heritage of nearby Central Avenue.

An event was held Tuesday morning at the Straz Center looking for ideas for the new development.

People who were displaced from North Boulevard Homes will have first refusal of renting the new housing. Officials say about half the units will be rented at market rate and half for a reduced rate for those who qualify. Buckhorn says the mixture of public and private investment makes the project more challenging than some.

"It's more complex, it's more complicated, it's bigger and more ambitious than any of the projects downtown," says Buckhorn. "But, it will be just as meaningful in a different kind of way."