

Avondale Section 8 housing could be 'historic'

By Jack Walsworth , jwalsworth@enquirer.com 1:21 a.m. EDT June 9, 2014



Dennis Leffler stands outside of his home at the Poinciana Flats apartments on Reading Road in Avondale. Leffler and other residents of the building will need to be relocated temporarily while the building is renovated. (Photo: The Enquirer/Gary Landers)

AVONDALE –Section 8 housing - and the occasional homicide - might not be the first image that pops into someone's head when they hear "historic building."

But that might change if five Avondale apartment buildings are placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The buildings would qualify for federal tax credits for renovations if they are placed on the register. However, they will be renovated with or without the tax credits, a spokesperson for the buildings' owners told the Enquirer.

The Alameda Apartments, Ambassador Apartments, Crescent Apartments, Poinciana Apartments and Somerset Apartments – all on or near Reading Road – are the five nominated buildings.

"These are historic, grand buildings," said Lou Mitsch, senior project manager of nonprofit The Community Builders, Inc Cincinnati, which owns the buildings. "The bones are quite impressive."

Margo Warminski, preservation director at the Cincinnati Preservation Association, said her group supports putting the buildings on the National Register.

"They are highly qualified," she said.

Four of the five buildings are occupied, with tenants using Section 8 vouchers to pay for rent, according to Jacquinn Sinclair, spokeswoman for Boston-based Community Builders. Ambassador Apartments sits vacant and will ultimately require the most renovation. In the four building that are in use, 123 families will have to move out while they're fixed up.

In December 2012, Avondale was awarded a \$29.5 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), according to Enquirer archives.

Mitsch wrote in an email to the Enquirer that renovating the five buildings will cost \$25 million, with \$10 million coming from the HUD grant, pending HUD's approval.

The remaining \$15 million will be covered by a combination of other grants, low income housing tax credits from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency, and federal income tax credits.

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During renovations, residents will be temporarily relocated to the Commodore and Ambassador Apartments in Avondale. While it is currently unlivable, Ambassador Apartments will be renovated first allowing residents to stay there temporarily.

Mitsch said that there have been numerous meetings between The Community Builders and current residents and that residents are aware of the possible renovations.

Dennis Leffler, 32, knows that he's going to have to relocate from the Poinciana Apartments for renovations. "The building needs it," he said.

He didn't know that that the building he lives in might be labeled historic in the near future.

A resident of Crescent Apartments, Kendra Smith, 35, has lived in her current apartment for nearly three years.

A mother of five, Smith said that she was given the option from The Community Builders on where she wants to relocate. She'll be living in the Commodore Apartment while her current apartment is renovated.

Smith isn't against the building being renovated. It's just the hassle of having to move, relocate and moving back in again that she isn't looking forward to.

"Anything to make the area better, I'm all for it," said Smith.

She said The Community Builders are offering counseling sessions for the relocating residents and will also help them with moving.

Renovations are planned to start this fall with a completion date of 2016. The buildings will remain Section 8 housing once renovations are finished.

Alameda Apartments

- 3580 - 3586 Reading Road in Avondale.
- The building, completed in 1905, sits on .79 acres of land. The building has 18 three-bedroom apartments.
- According to the building's National Register of Historic Places registration form, it was designed with Beaux Arts style. According to the form, Beaux Arts style is defined as smooth, masonry walls decorated with garlands, floral patterns or shields.
- According to the registration form, both the building's architect and builder are unknown

Ambassador Apartments

- 722-724 Gholson Avenue in North Avondale.

- The building takes up .4 acres of land and was completed in 1929. The building has 18 three-bedroom apartments. However, the building is currently vacant.

- According to the building's National Register of Historic Places registration form, it exhibits Mediterranean-Revival Style. According to the form, Mediterranean-Revival style was introduced around the turn of the 19th century and became increasingly popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The style is influenced by Spain, France and Italy and drew on the style of palaces and seaside villas. This style became popular in California and Florida but its existence in Ohio is considered rare.

- Both the building's architect and builder are unknown.

Crescent Apartments

- 3719 Reading Road in North Avondale.

- The building takes up .93 acres and was completed in 1911. The building holds 37 apartments.

- According to the building's National Register of Historic Places registration form, the building exhibits Mediterranean-Revival style.

- Both the building's architect and builder are unknown.

Poinciana Apartments

- 3522 Reading Road in Avondale.

- The building takes up .56 acres and was completed in 1908. The building has 44 apartments.

- According to the building's National Register of Historic Places registration form, it exhibits Queen Anne style. The form described Queen Anne style as wall surfaces that are the primary decoration elements of the building and that the exterior showcases a variety of colors and surface textures.

- Both the building's architect and builder are unknown.

The apartment building was the site of a homicide in recent months. Tyan Adkins, 14, was shot and killed on March 29 on the second floor of the apartment building.

According to Cincinnati Police, the apartment has been and will continue to be the subject of a police attention. However, 2014 was the first time in several years in which the building was not identified as a chronic nuisance by the police.

Somerset Apartments

- 802-814 Blair Avenue in Avondale.

- The building, completed in 1896, sits on .515 acres of land. The building has 24 apartments in total. It was the first large-scale apartment building in Avondale.

- According to the building's National Register of Historic Places registration form, it was designed with Queen Anne style.

- Joseph G. Steinkamp was the architect and a real estate company, Thomas Emery's Sons, was the builder.

What's next

According to Tom Wolf, communications coordinator for the Ohio History Connection, the Ohio Historic Site Preservation Advisory Board, a state board, recommended that each of the buildings be nominated to the National Register on March 28.

Since the buildings have been recommended, the nominations have been forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. The Keeper has a staff and if the staff agrees with the state board, the staff will make a recommendation to the Keeper that the buildings be added to the National Register. However, the Keeper makes the final decision about listings.

The Keeper then has 45 working days, by law, to issue a decision. Wolf said that he couldn't give an exact decision date for the buildings but wrote in an email: "It looks as though we should know about the Alameda and the Poinciana around the last week in June or first week in July; the Crescent around the first or second week of July and the Somerset and Ambassador around the fourth or fifth week of July."

Each nomination is separate which is why the dates vary.

Wolf is optimistic that the buildings will be placed on the register.

"We have a pretty good track record," said Wolf. "Most cases go on to be listed if they've made it this far."