

PA – EASTON -- PUBLIC HOUSING HAILED AS A SUCCESS AMID CRITICISM

Express-Times, The (Easton, PA) – 1/26/2015 -- by Rudy Miller

EASTON

The following are some ‘AFTER’ photos. There are also some ‘BEFORE’ photos at this website:

http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/easton/index.ssf/2015/01/neston_heights_nears_the_end_o.html#incart_river







More than five years after the Delaware Terrace public housing project was torn down, its replacement is nearly complete.

Four homes are under construction and two lots remain undeveloped, but the rest of Neston Heights is complete.

City officials hail the massive public housing initiative as a success, providing an affordable, clean and safer alternative to the Terrace.

"I think what it did was really revitalize the entire neighborhood," said **Easton Housing Authority Executive Director Gene Pambianchi**.

The development puts owner-occupied homes among rentals and gives residents yards and porches to decorate, all with an eye toward promoting pride among neighbors.

Not everyone agrees Neston is a success. City resident Ken Briggs said the Terrace residents weren't given enough guidance when they were forced out after the demolition. Many couldn't afford to return to Neston Heights and scrambled for what shelter they could find in the West Ward.

"Basically, 250 units were shut down and people were sent scurrying," said Briggs, a freelance writer. "Most were essentially left to their own devices, something that would have been unthinkable for some affluent group. I think it caused a lot of family tensions. I think it made for some overcrowding in Easton. It was simply a matter of finding housing you could afford. It seemed to be a rather heartless maneuver."

Pambianchi and Mayor Sal Panto Jr. say it's not true that the crime of the former Delaware Terrace was pushed into the West Ward.

Only a fraction of former Terrace residents moved there, Pambianchi said. And much of the crime in the West Ward is attributable to out-of-state offenders, Panto said.

"Violence in West Ward needs to be addressed, but it's not because of Neston Heights," Panto said.

Briggs said the city's poorest residents can't afford Neston Heights. Nor can they afford the many upscale apartments going in the Downtown.

He called the development of Neston Heights "a very sad and embarrassing moment in Easton's life" that fails to address the housing needs of the city's poorest residents.

"There are a lot of people who are completely overlooked and ignored and treated with condescension," Briggs said.

Panto disagrees. Neston Heights is fulfilling its mission: providing homes for low-income, working-class families.

"There's a lot of people in that socio-economic strata that need help. They're working but they're not making enough to sustain their families," Panto said. He said the city is working to buy up blighted West Ward homes, rehabilitate and sell them as affordable housing.

The city has sought a blight designation for at least 20 properties. Work has started on homes on Pine Street.

"I think we are doing something for the working poor," Panto said. "We have a lot of success stories in the West Ward."