

# Developer to be Picked for Large-Scale Redevelopment of Miami's Liberty City

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2014- Liberty Square housing in Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, Fl.

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The pressure is on for builders competing to redevelop Miami's Liberty Square, a 67-acre affordable housing complex with apartments dating back to 1937.

The Miami-Dade County Commission will decide between two finalists, South Florida developers Atlantic | Pacific Communities and Related Urban Development Group, who must submit revamped proposals by 2 p.m. Friday.

One will be chosen to replace the existing 753 public housing units with a mixed-use, mixed-income development.

Liberty Square is a component of a county-led \$74 million initiative to revitalize one of Miami's oldest public housing projects and the surrounding Liberty City neighborhood.

The county attracted companies by allocating more than half of the funding — \$46 million — for the housing component, and six developers bid last summer. A breakdown of the funds shows \$32 million came from general obligation bonds, \$8 million from the Capital Fund Financing Program and \$6 million from surtaxes.

If Related is chosen, this would be the firm's 10th public-private public housing development in the county.

"The Related Urban team is ready, willing and able to negotiate a fair and equitable agreement with the county for the benefit of the current and future residents of Liberty Square," said Albert Milo, principal and senior vice president of the development group.

Related Urban's proposal includes a combination of more than 1,000 public, affordable and workforce housing units, a community health center, a YMCA family center and a museum aimed at preserving the history of the poor, predominantly black neighborhood. A number of educational and social programs would be offered by community institutions like Miami Dade College and OneUnited Bank, the first and largest African-American-owned online bank.

The plan also calls for at least 65,000 square feet of retail to be occupied by a national grocery store and mom-and-pop businesses.

Atlantic's \$287 million plan calls for 1,549 residential units in a variety of one- to three-story structures, including single-family homes, row houses, duplexes, quadplexes and garden-style apartments, a spokeswoman for the developer told the Daily Business Review.

The company would also create a "prime retail corner" at Northwest 62nd Street and 12th Avenue and a town square anchored by ground-floor retail and upper-story residential units.

"We envision this town square hosting community gatherings and street fairs or farmers markets," spokeswoman Jessica Wade Pfeffer said. "Within this commercial space several restaurants, small businesses and service providers will provide the community with quality services and will infuse the local economy with new capital."

Both proposals would bring a charter school to the neighborhood.

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## Neglected Neighborhood

Before Liberty Square is touched, about 250 units will be built in Liberty Gardens, a nearby nine-acre site. Apartments won't be demolished until residents are relocated to the new units, said Michael Liu, director of the Miami-Dade Public Housing Agency.

"Displacement is really a non-issue," he said. "We are looking to revitalize and create a safer and healthier community for that part of the county that for too long has not received the kind of attention that it needs."

The county has been criticized in the past for evicting low-income tenants and tearing down their housing without offering replacement housings.

Liberty Square residents have expressed concern over the extended bidding process, which was delayed in October when complications arose on the county's selection committee. The project was enveloped in a cone of silence for months, leaving the community wondering what would happen next. But now the county is promising a final recommendation by the end of the month, which would catalyze negotiations for the master development agreement, Liu said.

Groundbreaking is expected by the end of the year.

Milo said Related Urban is confident it will prevail as the "most qualified and the best financial partner" for the project once the county completes its due diligence and background review of Atlantic Pacific, its principals, work history, experience and financial capacity"

Miami-Dade County has a checkered past with affordable housing. In 2006, politically connected developers were exposed in a multimillion-dollar housing scam. The county's affordable housing agency eventually fell under federal control after media reports shed light on developers who received millions of dollars to construct affordable units yet delivered close to none.

Atlantic | Pacific Companies acquired the affordable housing division of Carlisle Development Group to create Atlantic | Pacific Communities in 2013. Two Carlisle executives fell under federal scrutiny that year for allegedly pocketing government subsidies intended to create low-income housing in impoverished Miami neighborhoods like Overtown, Brownsville and Little Haiti. Its former CEO Matthew Greer pleaded guilty to two counts of conspiracy to commit theft of government money last September.

Atlantic | Pacific Communities is now led by Kenneth Naylor.