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Fay Apts. renovation back on track

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A major renovation and downsizing of the massive Fay Apartments subsidized housing complex is back on track, and developers would like the city of Cincinnati to loan them almost \$3.2 million.

Delayed last year by the economy, the project - to cost more than \$32 million total - could start construction in the fall if City Council passes the funding before recessing at the end of this month, said David Hendy, managing director of Wallick-Hendy Development.

Plans include reducing the number of units from 893 to 703, which fits with the city's concerns about too much density in low-income neighborhoods, expanding some of the two-bedroom apartments into three-bedroom ones and building them to suit environmental standards set by the U.S Green Building Council. Seventeen buildings would be demolished.

Wallick-Hendy has asked the city to allow them to gate the new Fay. Most of the crime and other problems experienced there happen when outsiders come to the neighborhood and cause trouble, Hendy said. The company also has agreed to install more security cameras and plans to hire more off-duty Cincinnati police officers to patrol.

"We're very hopeful," Hendy said. "We were extremely upset 18 months ago when we thought we were almost there and then the economy turned. It's not perfect, but it's a plan that will preserve the housing and improve it."

The complex's owner since 1985, Stern-Hendy Properties, merged early this year with the Wallick Cos., based in Columbus. The merger made the new company the largest provider of affordable housing in the state. The complex is privately owned, but most of those who live there do so with help from Section 8.

The \$3.2 million would come from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOME Investment Partnerships program, which gives money to cities to fund building, buying and/or renovating affordable housing. It would be repaid to the city with 2 percent interest over 40 years.

City Manager Milton Dohoney recommends that council approve giving Wallick-Hendy the money and a 12-year tax abatement. Mayor Mark Mallory supports the project, as does Republican Councilwoman Leslie Ghiz.

Others haven't decided yet. Councilman Jeff Berding said he wants to sit down and talk with Hendy before deciding. The community council in Westwood voted to oppose the renovation, while their counterparts in the Fay welcome it. When the idea came up before, critics questioned why the city should help fund a private development. But Mallory pointed out that Cincinnati does so often.

Wallick-Hendy needs the city's commitment to secure more financing from HUD.