

ALASKA -- Public housing gets a more stylish look

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Artist rendering courtesy of Cook Inlet Housing

Loussac Place will be mostly filled with townhouse-style units. The latest, most stylish version of urban public housing is coming soon to Midtown at 20th Avenue and C Street, across from the community garden. Loussac Place, as it's called, will mostly be filled with three-story townhouse-type units arranged so the homes face each other, with garages on alleys out back. The houses will be colorful. One feature that reflects a modern trend: The tenants in this 120-unit housing project won't all be poor. Some apartments will be what the developers call "workforce housing," set aside for those who can pay the rent with no help, if it's kept at an affordable level. And check out the layout. The development will look more like a small town than the cramped, military-like barracks that used to be built for low-income renters. A city height restriction meant they had to use shed-style roofs instead of pointed ones, said **Carol Gore, director of Cook Inlet Housing Authority,**

the developer. But each residence will have its own front door. "Townhouse-style units we think foster longer tenure," said Gore. "It feels more like ownership." Loussac Place will also have a community center, with an after-school program, where residents can get together. In addition, the Salvation Army later this month will open a recreation center with high-school-sized gym next door to the site. And the development is near the Chester Creek Greenbelt. **Cook Inlet Housing won a national competition sponsored by the Alaska Housing Finance Corp. for rights to build the housing complex. AHFC is Alaska's public housing authority and gets money from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.** Construction of Loussac Place will start within a few weeks, said Gore. The first units will be ready in June or July of next year. Loussac Place replaces an old, 62-unit low-income housing project on the same site, Loussac Manor. Loussac Manor, built in 1967, was demolished late last year when AHFC decided it would be better to replace the units than renovate them. Gore hopes the neighborhood will attract young and old, singles and families of different income levels. "In terms of having housing close to jobs, smack between Midtown and downtown, you couldn't find a better location," she said. "Me and my kiddos, we really miss that area," said Dawn Nash, who lived in Loussac Manor until housing officials re-located all the tenants last year. "It was like our own little community. ... Everybody knew everybody." She now lives near Arctic Boulevard and 74th Avenue, but hopes to move back. Prior tenants will have the right to return. When it was Loussac Manor, the housing was only for low-income residents. Now 75 units will be rented to low-income residents, and 44 are available with no income restrictions. Gore said the mixed income approach is unique. "I think it's the right approach. ... The idea of segregating people by ethnicity or income is a concept that just doesn't work." The full-rent portion of Loussac Place -- the "workforce housing" -- is not subsidized, and there's no income limit for the renters. But there's a cap on the rent that's determined by a federal survey of fair market rents. That's meant to keep rent reasonable for people who are working, but not making big salaries, said Gore. It's still not cheap. If the apartments were renting today, the fair market rent would be \$1,036 for a two-bedroom or \$1,492 for a three-bedroom, said Sherrie Simmonds, spokeswoman for Alaska Housing Finance Corp. Low-income residents would generally pay about 30 percent of their income in rent. Loussac Place is the only development in Anchorage with that mix of low-income units and workforce housing, said Gore. But it's similar, in both design and rental arrangements, to

another development of Cook Inlet's, Grass Creek Village off Muldoon and DeBarr roads, she said. Twenty-four of the 80 Grass Creek units are available to people with any income level. But unlike Loussac Place, there's no cap on the rent. The balance of the Grass Creek apartments are for people with low incomes. Grass Creek is full, Gore said. There's a waiting list to get in, but little turnover for either the low-income units or the market-rate ones, she said. Loussac Place, expected to cost \$35.2 million, is made possible through creative financing. More than half of the money was raised by AHFC awarding Cook Inlet Housing nearly \$23 million in federal tax credits; these are credits Cook Inlet sold to an investor, which then gets to use the credits to offset federal taxes, said Daniel Delfino, AHFC's tax credit program manager. **He wouldn't identify the investor.** Loans and grants and Cook Inlet's own funding make up the rest of the financing for Loussac Place, said Delfino. With it being such an ideal location, AHFC wanted to put the most units it could on the site, said Jim Gurke, public housing director for the corporation. It's a tight fit with just six acres at 20th and C Street, said Gore, but it will also be an example of how to make densely-packed housing work well, she said. More of that kind of housing is called for in Anchorage's comprehensive plan. One reason is that bus commuting works best when riders are clustered in highly populated neighborhoods. This project and two smaller ones by the non-profit Neighborworks Anchorage add a few units to the supply of low-income housing in Anchorage. But most people believe there are not enough affordable apartments here, said Gurke. The most families ever, 3,800, are waiting for rental assistance through AHFC's housing voucher program, he said. The vouchers are popular because they can be used around town. The waiting list for public housing units has 2,000 families, Gurke said, though there's duplication on the two lists. "A lot of them are in some sort of substandard housing," he said. "Some are doubling up with families. There are renters who may be paying more than 50 percent of their income into rent."