The Housing Authority's Bradenton Village has opened another phase, a 25-apartment public housing complex.

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BRADENTON - The transformation continues.
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Bradenton Village -- the colorful town house development that replaced the flood-prone, crime-plagued Rogers Garden housing project -- is still growing.

On Wednesday, the Bradenton Housing Authority, Mayor Wayne Poston and City Council members celebrated the opening of a 25-apartment complex on the site of a former cement factory.
The rental homes are directly across 13th Avenue West from other Bradenton Village apartments and G.D. Rogers Garden Elementary. The county's first "green" school is slated to open in August.

The two-story buildings are the latest phase of a $120 million investment of federal, state, local and private dollars that began in 1999.

In its earliest inception, Bradenton Village appeared to be a plan without a future. After at least two failed attempts, however, the city, the Housing Authority and Manatee County convinced the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to award a series of HOPE VI grants.

That led to the replacement of the battered housing project with a New Urbanist-style neighborhood visible from U.S. 41.

Bradenton Village triggered a regional trend.

The Sarasota Housing Authority is now undergoing a similar redevelopment of its projects in Newtown.

Today, the Venice Housing Authority is to lease its Grove Terrace project to a developer who will raze it and rebuild.

The latest phase of Bradenton Village, dubbed the "New Singletary Apartments" because of its location at the former Singletary cement plant and within the Singletary subdivision, is already occupied except for two apartments that were on display for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"We have literally transformed this site into something new and improved," Housing Authority Director Wenston DeSue said. "It's a true testament to the entire community."

The apartments feature walk-in closets, balconies, carports and butterfly-luring landscaping. A playground will be added. The site is within walking distance of Bradenton Village's amenities, which include a swimming pool and clubhouse.

Manasota Construction completed the complex about a month ahead of schedule.

Bernadette Johnson, leasing agent for Bradenton Village, said she received more than 300 applications from prospective tenants.

Rents start at $836. Yet the tenants, mostly working women with children, qualify for federal subsidies and pay no more than a third of their monthly incomes toward rent. Households can earn no more than $35,000 a year.

Tenants must be employed or be a full-time student with a part-time job. They can have no criminal histories.
The overall goal, DeSue said, is to get lower-income families out of decaying housing projects and into partly subsidized, better-quality housing. Eventually, the authority wants to see them move into market-rate rentals and then become homeowners.

That is why Bradenton Village enrolls its residents in a self-sufficiency program that includes vocational training and job placements.

At a time when many market-rate apartment complexes are struggling to get tenants, Bradenton Village's occupancy rate is about 94 percent.

This summer, Bradenton Village will move into its final phase and start construction on a 36-unit seniors complex at U.S. 41 and 17th Avenue West, the site of a demolished driver's license bureau.

After that, the authority intends to add another 113 multifamily units on 10 acres between 13th and 17th Avenues West. It has yet to decide whether those homes will be rented or sold. Most likely, market demand will be for more rental units in the area, DeSue said.

When the 400-plus home Bradenton Village is completed, the Housing Authority will work on redevelopment plans for the Page and Sugg projects in east Bradenton.