

## In Practice

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May 24, 2013

# Affordable Housing Renovation Contributes to Pine Hills's Transformation



*Emerald Villas' opening day celebration on January 30, 2013, held at the new clubhouse, marked the transformation of a foreclosed property to the newest asset of the Pine Hills community. Image courtesy of Orange County Housing and Community Development Division.*

County recently hired an improvement district executive director to oversee the creation of a master plan for the mixed-use town center proposed in the task force's analysis. Streetscape projects are underway to establish the town center's public space and encourage private investment. Evans High School, also located in the town center, was rebuilt and reopened in 2012. The high school houses the Evans Community School Hub, the first in Florida to foster student success by incorporating social, health, and other services into the academic environment.

In April 2011, the county provided funds to help purchase Seville Place apartments, a foreclosed complex in Pine Hills. According to Lavon Williams, manager of the Orange County Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization Division, what had been a "hip apartment complex" in the 1980s fell victim to crime, inadequate property maintenance, and a bad reputation that contributed to Pine Hills' poor public image.

Orange County, Florida is using targeted investments to transform Pine Hills, a neighborhood that has experienced crime, declining property values, and vacancies, into a vibrant community. Coordinated stabilization efforts began in 2001, when the county designated Pine Hills a "safe neighborhood" and initiated crime prevention and beautification programs. In 2010, the Pine Hills Business Redevelopment Task Force's economic development and market analysis formed the basis for a redevelopment initiative funded by the Pine Hills Neighborhood Improvement District. As part of its commitment to revitalize Pine Hills, Orange

The renovated affordable complex opened in January 2013 with the name Emerald Villas and was 89 percent occupied by May 2013.

### **Emerald Villas: A Gem in Pine Hills**

The \$21 million renovation decreased the number of residential units from 444 to 264, and in return, gave Emerald Villas' residents more community space, upgraded landscaping in keeping with Florida's climate, and a new swimming pool. A new clubhouse, creating an attractive focal point in the front of the complex, features a fitness center, business center, and youth activities center. The Orlando Neighborhood Improvement Corporation (ONIC), one of the development partners, will provide residential services such as financial education for adults and cultural arts programs for children.

Half of the apartments in Emerald Villas are available to households earning up to 50 percent of the area median income (AMI), and the remaining units are reserved for households with incomes up to 60 percent of AMI. Current Emerald Villas residents, with an average annual income of \$20,000, pay an average of \$679 for a two-bedroom apartment at the complex; HUD's current fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Orange County is \$983. The complex's studio and one-, two-, and three-bedroom units have updated roofs, flooring, wiring, and plumbing. The renovated units also have energy-saving appliances and air conditioners, water-saving devices, cabinets low in volatile organic compounds, and double-pane windows. Bath fans are controlled by humidity sensors, and exhaust fans vent to the outdoors. Incorporating green components wherever possible in the renovation was a priority, according to Michael Glasser, manager of the Orange County Housing and Community Development Division.

To finance the nearly \$22 million in renovations, development partners ONIC and the Related Urban Development Group leveraged \$7 million from the county's Neighborhood Stabilization Program. In addition, the Orange County Housing Finance Authority appropriated \$7 million from its New Issue Bond Program to complement \$5.5 million in 4 percent low-income housing tax credits. Florida's State Housing Initiatives Partnership program provided an additional \$1.6 million.

Residents of Emerald Villas now live within walking distance of quality educational facilities and planned commercial amenities, which replace local disinvestment and vacancy with a connected, family-friendly neighborhood. The county's investments in planning, capital improvements, and residential development provide a solid foundation for Pine Hills' future. As Williams enthusiastically asserts, "For the first time, we have a clear vision of what we want the community to be and how we want it to rebirth itself." Emerald Villas exemplifies what can be accomplished when the local government, nonprofits, and residents play active roles in a community's revitalization. This Florida redevelopment is living up to its slogan: "Pine Hills on the Rise."

