

Home No More on River's Edge

Despite the usual myriad problems that come with living in an aging public-housing complex, many residents will miss their homes at Riverside-Bradley

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Wyletta Carr-Henson gathered her boxed-up belongings and swept her Riverside-Bradley apartment for the last time.

Her new two-bedroom place at West Bay Apartments off Georgesville Road has amenities such as a swimming pool and a nearby Walmart. And yet, Carr-Henson, 55, fought back tears as she talked recently about leaving Riverside-Bradley.

“It was a blessing to be out here 11 1/2 years,” she said.

The red-brick Riverside-Bradley Homes complex, on the Franklinton side of the Scioto River across from Downtown, is like a ghost town these days. Most of the 127 units are boarded up.

Eleven families remained last week, and all are to be out by the end of June, said Charles D. Hillman, president and chief executive officer of the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority. Some are moving to other CMHA complexes and others are getting vouchers to help with their rent in market-rate buildings.

CMHA has determined that Riverside-Bradley, a public-housing complex built in 1942, would be too costly to refurbish. It's one of six CMHA properties that will be sold or demolished in a five-year plan.

Once the residents are out, Riverside-Bradley will be torn down. Mayor Michael B. Coleman said in his State of the City address this year that the area will be redeveloped into a mixed-income neighborhood.

The property is near the new Main Street bridge and is more-desirable now because it's protected from flooding by the Franklinton floodwall, which was completed in 2004.

Those who live in Riverside-Bradley say it always has been a prime location. When the weather was warm, Carr-Henson would take her Bible and sit by the river.

“It's one of the best views in the city,” she said. And one day a year — for the city's Red, White & Boom celebration — the apartments offered an enviable ringside seat for Downtown fireworks.

But on too many other nights of the year, the booms that residents heard were gunfire.

Rebecca McClendon, 21, is glad she left Riverside-Bradley with her 4-year-old daughter, Apriah Davis, for a South Side apartment near Livingston and Fairwood avenues. She lived just a few doors from Carr-Henson and was moving out on the same day this month.

“This is a horrible neighborhood,” McClendon said.

In the two years she lived at Riverside-Bradley, she said, her apartment was broken into four times. The burglars took her microwave, DVD and CD players. The last time someone broke into her apartment, copper pipes were taken. That caused water to leak, which brought with it peeling paint and mold.

People moved to Riverside-Bradley, she said, because they didn’t have much choice.

“At the time, I didn’t have no income or anything,” McClendon said. Her rent was \$50 a month.

Carr-Henson said the two sons she raised at Riverside-Bradley steered clear of trouble, and she gives credit to God. The sticker that remains on her door proclaims that angels are watching her property.

Her 24-year-old son, Edward Henson, said he didn’t mind growing up in the complex.

“Really, for me, it wasn’t bad,” he said. “I went to school, came home, and that was it.”

Being able to trust in neighbors made living at Riverside-Bradley easier for two women who lived next door to each other for five years and now are moving out.

Alicia Maddox, 26, came to Columbus from Philadelphia eight years ago because there were more jobs here. She has three boys between the ages of 3 and 7.

Lisa Jackson, 42, welcomed the chance to move with her four children into a three-bedroom apartment. Her children are ages 15 to 21.

“We tried to help each other out with baby-sitting and stuff like that,” Jackson said of her friendship with Maddox.

They tried to make life better for others, forming a residents’ association, with Jackson as the secretary and Maddox as the treasurer. They can tell harrowing stories of battles over maintenance delays and roach infestations.

And yet, Jackson and Maddox say they will miss Riverside-Bradley. They both liked the familiarity of the neighborhood and conveniences for their children, such as the proximity of Dodge Park and Recreation Center, the Main Library and COSI Columbus.

There is trepidation about moving someplace new. Jackson and her four children are to move soon to Poindexter Village, a Near East Side public-housing complex that opened in 1940 and also will close eventually. Poindexter Village residents will start moving in October, and it could take up to two years before all are relocated, Hillman said.

Maddox will move with her three young boys to Oakbrook Manor, an apartment complex off Georgesville Road in Franklin Township. Her children will start new schools in the South-Western district, and she doesn't expect COTA bus route connections to be as easy when she's not Downtown.

"I have to learn everything all over again," Maddox said. "But we'll make it work."

Wyletta Carr-Henson pauses at the front door of the apartment she's lived in for more than 11 years at the Riverside-Bradley Homes. Carr-Henson raised two sons at the complex.