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KEY WEST

Robert Pedroza

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BUILDING UP LOWER KEYS



ROB O'NEAL/The Citizen

The Florida Keys Community Land Trust has four homes currently under construction on Big Pine Key and could have one complete within the next month. The trust plans to soon start construction on another four and could have all eight of the units complete by the end of the year. The trust was formed after Hurricane Irma decimated the Lower Keys.

2 projects move ahead, others are planned

BY TIMOTHY O'HARA
Key West Citizen

Two worker housing projects in the Lower Keys are steadily moving forward, with construction of one well underway and funding approval for another recently clearing an important hurdle.

The recently created Florida Keys Community

Land Trust broke ground on four two-bedroom rental units in the Avenues neighborhood on Big Pine Key less than a month ago and could have the first one completed within the next two months, group representatives.

The stilted, 760-square-foot homes will be two-bedroom, one-bathroom units, said Marianne Cusato, who

is overseeing construction. The energy-efficient homes will be raised out of the flood plain and built to withstand Category 5 hurricane winds, Cusato said. The homes will be rented out at affordable rental levels.

Also, the group already plans to soon break ground on four larger three-bedroom, two-bath units in Big

Pine Key and could have those complete by the end of the year, Cusato said.

The group is focusing its efforts on Big Pine Key, which was one of the hardest-hit neighborhoods during Hurricane Irma.

The homes are similar to the “Katrina Cottages” built in Louisiana and

Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Cusato described the homes as kit houses that will be assembled on site, but without the need for a large crane or other heavy equipment.

These “Keys Cottages” are constructed to help streamline the assembly process, she said.

The land trust has either closed or is in the process of closing on nearly 20 properties as future housing sites.

Staff for the Florida Finance Housing Corp. has recommended some rough-

ly \$6 million in financing for a 208-unit affordable housing project on the border of Big Coppitt and Rockland keys and the board for the corporation will formally vote on the funding when it meets June 15 in Tampa, according to attorney Bart Smith.

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