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By Julius A. Karash – Staff Writer



In another boost for Midtown revival, work began this week on a 116-unit apartment complex skirting the west side of historic Union Cemetery.

The apartments, called Union Hill Place, represent the neighborhood's latest effort to overcome blight. They will double the number of newer residences in the Union Hill redevelopment area, bounded generally by Main Street on the west, Gillham Road on the east, 31<sup>st</sup> Street on the south and Crown Center on the north.

Since the early 1980s, 110 owner-occupied, upscale town houses have been developed in Union Hill. The area

also includes about 100,000 square feet of shops and offices.

The apartments are being built as the Glover Plan, which aims to bring suburban-style shopping to Midtown residents, moves forward.

Lawyer James C. Bowers Jr., one of the Union Hill development's managing partners, said he and his colleagues had been working on the project since 1990. He said a \$1.8 million construction loan was obtained July 31 from Boatmen's First National Bank of Kansas City.

"It's been a very difficult project to put together, making people believe this

area of town will support this quality of project," Bowers said. "It's easy to convince people to invest in Johnson County, to build apartments out south in the suburbs. There's still a psychological barrier to getting people to invest in a project like this in Midtown."

Robert L. Frye, another Union Hill managing partner, said the first phase of the two- and three-story complex will contain 24 one-bedroom apartments, 12 two-bedroom apartments and 16 two-bedroom townhouses. The town houses will have 2 ½ bathrooms.

Rents will start at \$545 a month for a one-bedroom apartment, \$700 for a two-bedroom apartment and \$935 for a town house.

About 90 off-street parking spaces, some of them covered, will cost \$20 to \$40 a month. They will require key-card access.

The apartments will have individual security systems, washers and dryers, and telephone jacks designed for computer hookups.

Frye said the apartments are aimed at people who work Downtown, in Crown Center and on the Country Club Plaza

The first phase of the project will cost \$2.8 million, including construction and land acquisition. The 1.86 acres was bought from Hallmark Cards Inc., the developer of Crown Center. Hallmark financed the land sale through a \$210,000 second mortgage. The long-vacant land once was home to a plumbing supply business.

The developers expect the first dwellings to be ready for tenants by May. Frye said work on the 64 other units should begin by summer 1996 and be completed by spring 1997.

Home builder Jim Young began planning Union Hill in the long-decaying neighborhood in the late 1970s. Young made some initial progress in the early '80s but soon foundered because of financial difficulties. The partnership led by Frye, Bowers and Stephen J. Block bought the development in 1988. Block, of Block & Co. Inc., also is a Glover Plan developer.

Union Hill now contains about 400 residences, including order homes and apartments. Besides the 110 town houses built since the early 1980s, about 70 older Union Hill homes have been renovated by individual owners.

The Union Hill group several years ago bought and demolished a commercial center that had included an adult bookstore. That land, at the southeast corner of 31<sup>st</sup> and Main streets, is now being marketed for development.

Frye said the suburban-style stores in the Glover Plan, named for Kansas City Councilman Jim Glover, would help draw tenants to Union Hill Place.

The segment of the Glover Plan known as Midtown Marketplace, southeast of Linwood Boulevard and Main Street, will be anchored by Kmart, Payless Cashways, Toys 'R' Us and Price Chopper stores.

Frye said most Union Hill residents now drive to the Brookside area, the

Northland and Roeland Park to buy groceries and other goods.

“Clearly, it will help this project enormously,” Frye said. “Within six blocks you’ll have a full service grocery store and a full-service discount.”

Glover said the Union Hill apartment plans represented another example of Midtown’s viability.

“Good news feeds upon itself,” he said. “This activity will give people confidence to promote other investment in Midtown.”

Robert Landman, president of the Union Hill Neighborhood Association, said the neighborhood ‘wishes the developer speedy success. It will have a positive effect.”

Pictures may differ from the original newspaper article.