

LOCAL

Initiative aims to transform Cottage Grove

■ **The public-private group wants to create a "green & healthy" neighborhood here.**

By **DIONI L. WISE**
Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — As two charter buses parked beside the five-unit, brick apartment building at 206 S. English St. on Thursday, a man made a beeline to the first bus' door.

"Are you lost?" he asked. "No, we're here on purpose," said Beth McKee-Huger, executive director of the Greensboro Housing Coalition.

The coalition, which advocates for safe and affordable housing, took the "Healthy Homes" tour group to that complex and other spots in the Cottage Grove community to boast about the various city initiatives to create "Green & Healthy" homes.

Speakers at the front of the buses included representatives from the city's Better Buildings program, the Guilford County Department of Health and the nonprofit Housing Greensboro. They discussed their programs to promote energy efficiency, uphold decent housing standards or eliminate in-home hazards, such as high radon levels, to improve residents'

health. "All of this fits together," McKee-Huger said. "Dealing with lead poisoning and dealing with cockroaches and dealing with energy efficiency and dealing with neighborhood revitalization — it all fits together. It gives a return on investment."

The coalition also unveiled plans to transform Cottage Grove into a healthier environment that will attract new tenants and economic prosperity.

"It's not just a pipe dream to talk about changing the atmosphere, the whole set of life opportunities in a neighborhood," said McKee-Huger, as they rode through the idyllic,

Willow Oaks community — a recent neighborhood improvement project modeled on pre-World War II homes.

"What we're going to do in Cottage Grove," McKee-Huger said, "is ... concentrate on making sure that everybody in that neighborhood ... will have opportunities for a great education, fulfilling employment, good health and great quality of life."

The Cottage Grove Initiative, a public-private partnership, is being modeled after the revitalization of the East Lake Meadows neighborhood in Atlanta.

"Which was probably one of the worst places in the state of Georgia to live

in," said Skip Crowe of the Greensboro Housing Coalition.

Now, East Lake Meadows is thriving.

Crowe told the group standing outside Hampton Elementary that a partnership between the city, private property owners and Guilford County Schools is growing to help Cottage Grove become a part of a national network of "purpose built communities."

He said the Avalon Trace apartments could be "ground zero." It could be torn down to rebuild a more modern complex.

"We're getting really close to making something exciting happen," he said.

Marilyn Baird said she's

a part of the initiative because she's still vested in the community. She grew up on English Street, formerly called Cottage Grove, in the late 1950s and 1960s and still attends a neighborhood church.

"We want to see this community flourish to the way it used to be because years ago when I was here, it was such a community," Baird said.

"People stuck together. There were neighbors helping each other. We all knew each other. And I think it's important to go back to that."

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