

# Hope Village Brings No Hope To Carver Park Residents

BY Anna Eckburg

CHAMPAIGN, IL — In July 2023, construction broke ground on what was promised to be a first-of-its-kind community for some of Champaign County's most vulnerable residents: a 30-home subdivision designed to house homeless people with chronic medical conditions.

Two and a half years later, plywood boards frame six “tiny homes” under construction, while residents of the adjacent Carver Park neighborhood are still raising concerns, saying they were shut out of the planning for the development.

“They don't expect us to fight back. I mean, this is not right ... They did not include everyone's voices,” Audra Owens, a member of North End United, said in an interview with CU-CitizenAccess.

North End United is an advocacy group for the northern parts of Champaign-Urbana, which members have said they consider to be the heart of C-U's Black community.

Since the project's inception in 2021, Hope Village has [sparked debate and frustration](#) among nearby residents of the Carver Park subdivision.

According to the [Champaign County African American Heritage Trail](#), Carver Park is “Champaign-Urbana's first subdivision financed and built by African Americans.” The subdivision was named after African American scientist and inventor George Washington Carver.

With history that dates back almost 80 years, some in the community said they feel as though their history may be erased.

“They keep disregarding the fact that it is Black history, it is Champaign-Urbana history ... and they are ignoring our history so that they can make their history,” Owens said.

Furthermore, Carver Park residents also say they have been shuttled between Champaign, which has played a role in planning and the funding the project, and Urbana, where the project is located, when seeking answers on the planning and construction:

“They are playing ping pong with this neighborhood. Nobody wants to take responsibility for anything that's going down here ...” Owens said.

Despite residents' requests for changes at city council meetings, in late July 2023, [council members approved](#) preliminary development plans, voting four to one in favor.

Council member and Ward 3 Alderwoman Shirese Hursey, who was the one vote against, said she felt “[disenfranchised](#)” with the outcome of the vote.

“I had asked, and they [the residents of Carver Park] had asked, if they could turn the plan around, and have the [Hope Village] residents further north ... Carle refused to actually even listen to the residents regarding that. We even had another plan written out, by one of the community people who is an engineer ... they just ignored everything! If you can just ignore everything, then I call that disenfranchisement,” Hursey said.

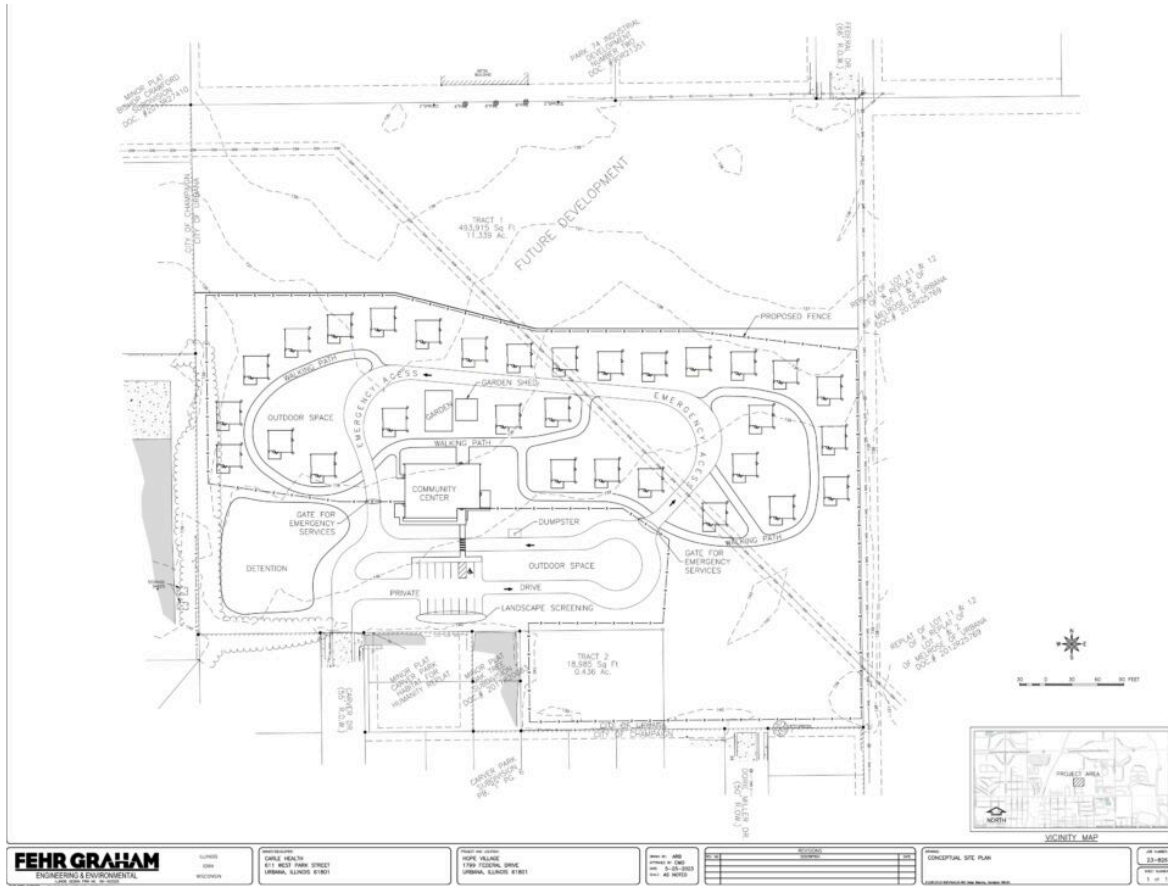
“It's almost like they want to wipe out histories that they don't feel are important. All history is important, no matter what ethnicity, religion or whatever, all history is important,” said Jackie Curry, a lifelong resident of Carver Park and member of North End United.

A representative from Champaign County Health Care Consumers, one of the project’s backers, did not return requests for comment. Carle could not be immediately reached for comment.

### **The Initial Plan**

Hope Village, located on former farmland near North Federal Drive and West Kenyon Road, was envisioned as more than a shelter. Plans included on-site medical support, a commissary, a post office and even a hair salon — all secured within a fenced and a continuously monitored campus.

Residents of Hope Village [will be chosen based](#) on their need for permanent supportive housing. Priority will be given to individuals who are “medically fragile” and experiencing chronic homelessness. The selection criteria will target those who are at the highest risk and have significant medical and case management needs.



(Source: IPM News, Hope Village Conceptual Site Plan)

Its backers, including community health advocates [Champaign County Health Care Consumers](#), Carle Foundation Hospital and the University of Illinois Grainger College of Engineering, [described it](#) as a model of compassion and community innovation.

When community health care advocates first proposed the idea of Hope Village, it was intended to [solve issues contributing to homelessness](#).

Advocates said traditional shelters often couldn't accommodate individuals with ongoing medical needs. The tiny home model, they argued, offered both independence and security for people who otherwise had nowhere to go.

Tiny homes are 400 square feet or less, and have only one level, making everything from the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen easily accessible for their designated residents.

Yet, from the start, residents of Carver Park questioned not the mission, but the way the project was planned. Meetings between organizers and the neighborhood grew tense as concerns

mounted over traffic, flooding, public safety and the construction work imposing on an already established neighborhood.

“It's just a slap in the face to us,” Leroy Dee, a resident of Carver Park for 16 years, said in an interview with CU-CitizenAccess. “Like I said, we already have a neighborhood, we already have a community, and I'm all for it. It's just, you know, you're giving us something that we're not ready for. Especially with kids being here, it's hard.”

### **Neighborhood Hired Engineer to Redesign Plan to no Avail**

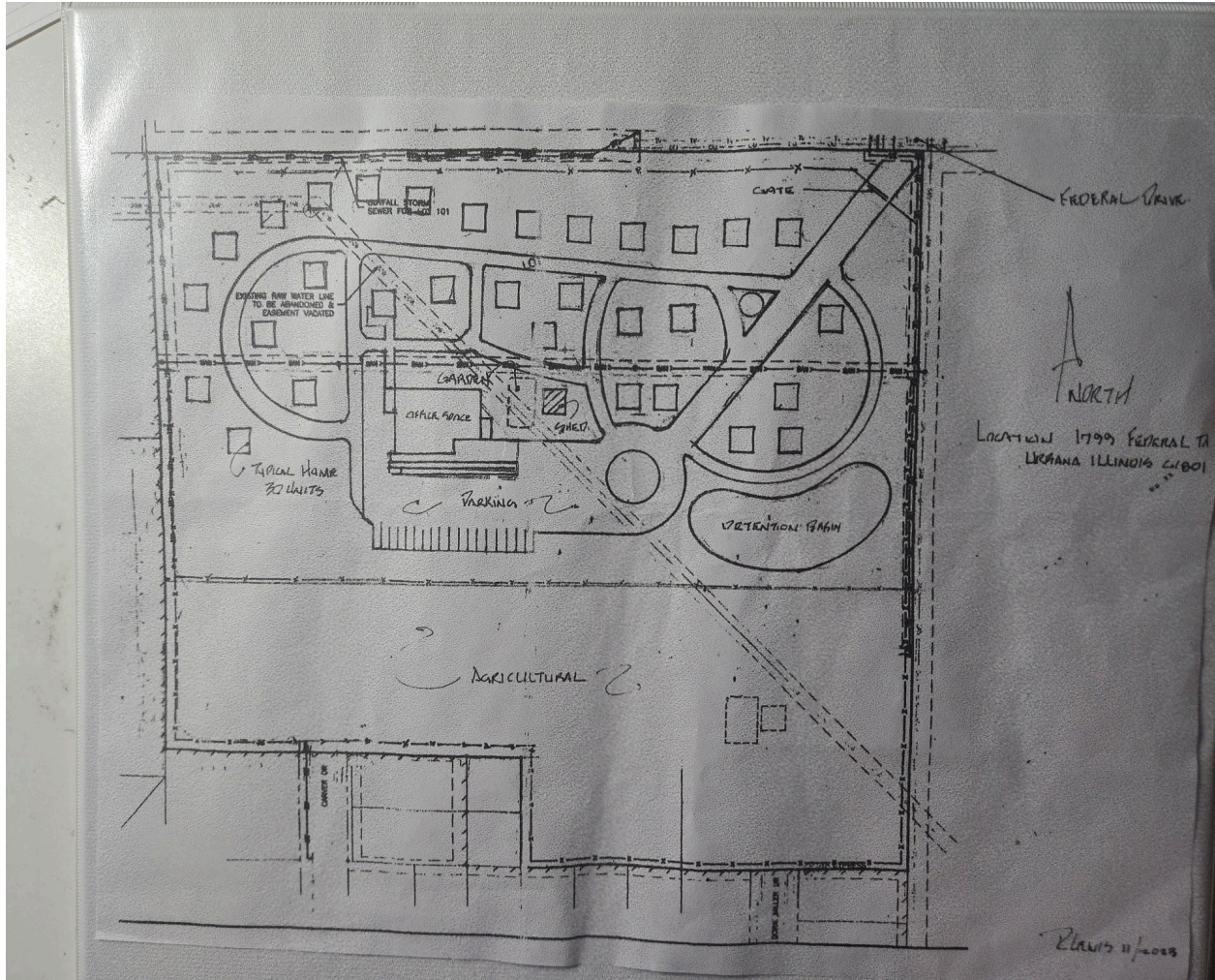
Residents said they felt the decision to place Hope Village adjacent to their subdivision, and to use Carver Drive as the main access road, had been made before they were given a voice.

“It's legal oppression and Champaign is complicit,” Robert Lewis, a former Urbana City Council member who represented Ward 3, said in an interview. “We're not against what they're trying to do. It's the principle behind what they did, and not considering the needs of the people to the south. That's my concern.”

Lewis was privately hired by Carver Park residents in an attempt to ease the frustration of residents.

“I'm not a registered professional architect. I can design anything. That's not my problem,” said Lewis, who has past work experience with American Seating Corporation, Baltimore Aircoil and the Housing Authority of Champaign County.

With that, Lewis flipped the script.



(Source: Robert Lewis, *New Proposed Plan for Hope Village*)

“He made a plan to flip it around so that the detention pond and everything was back on that end where we wouldn't be disturbed so much. [The Urbana City Council] didn't want to see it,” Curry said.

Owens chimed in, “I mean literally, they would not allow him to present it.” “Every public hearing, there were questions that were asked, and when I said to him [Marty Smith], ‘You haven't listened to what the residents have said.’ He said, ‘You just don't like the answers we gave.’ They had already decided that this is how things are going to go, whether you like it or not,” Hursey said.

Residents were told that the main access way for Hope Village would be located on Federal Drive, but since construction began, Carver Drive has been used as the access point, ripping through what once was a quiet neighborhood.

“The reality is, according to the building permit, the access point was to be Federal Drive, because that is in Urbana. The access point they're trying to use is in Champaign,” Lewis said.

“They subdivided the property so they didn't have to [use the Federal Drive entrance],” Hursey said.

“One of the excuses they constantly gave regarding using Federal Drive was ‘Well, Federal Drive is a dead end street.’ So was Carver Drive. Carver Drive was a dead end street too.”

### **The Problems Behind the Plan**

Residents said they fear the development would increase congestion on their one-lane road and heighten risks for playing children or the seniors who frequent the neighborhood's narrow streets.

When CU-CitizenAccess visited the neighborhood on October 13, 2025, construction workers were observed driving down Carver Drive at speeds some residents said were inconsiderate of the people living there.

“Common sense would tell me, if you're in a residential area, you don't go zipping down any of the streets,” Owens said. “It should be at least 15, 10 to 15, miles per hour. But as you saw earlier, they don't. They don't consider that at all.”

Environmental worries also surfaced. A nearby 14-foot detention pond already caused localized flooding after heavy rains, raising questions about stormwater drainage once construction began and the safety of the pond, as the neighborhood is not allowed to have it fenced in.



*(Source: Anna Eckburg, Detention Pond and Potential Tiny Homes, taken on October 13, 2025)*

“By virtue of the fact that it's a small site, only 11.5 acres of land, that's a pretty deep one, and according to code, they can't fence it in, so that is now more than an attractive nuisance for children,” Lewis said.

“There was just a little boy that, a couple weeks ago, yeah, fell in the pond,” Dee said.

“Somebody was walking, a bystander was walking through, and, you know, got him out, and they did CPR on him,” Curry said.

Groundbreaking took place in summer 2023 with an anticipated opening in 2024. But construction soon slowed due to misplaced funds, and by 2025, the vision of Hope Village had been reduced to a single standing unit.

“Funds were lost, and then they got more funds from Urbana to finish,” Dee said.

In August 2025, the Urbana City Council passed a [resolution](#) approving a \$1,000,000 subrecipient agreement between the city and Hope Village, as part of the [Housing & Homeless Innovations II grant program](#).

This was bundled into an omnibus vote alongside similar agreements for shelter and social service providers. That same round of omnibus resolutions included support for other agencies:

- \$130,000 to Champaign County Health Care Consumers for "Special Populations Outreach & Enrollment"
- \$175,000 for emergency shelter (Comfort Corner)
- \$180,000 for Strides Shelter (operating & case management)
- \$200,000 to Cunningham Township for CARES/Bridge to HOME
- \$300,000 for rehabilitation of Mattis Shelter via CU at Home
- \$20,000 for operational support to Mattis Shelter

Earlier, in late 2024, Urbana had received a \$1.45 million grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to support the construction of Hope Village, as reported by [The News-Gazette](#).

In 2023, the initial budget for Hope Village was estimated at \$3 million, but cost projections had eventually escalated to \$7 million before additional grants were secured.

“Carle has managed to get all kinds of grant funds from the city of Urbana for this project, starting with ARPA funds and then CBDG funds. They really know their way around working the system,” Hursey said.

Hope Village's supporters have stressed the intricacy of the construction, making sure that each home meets accessibility standards and accommodates residents with advanced medical needs. Still, residents said the long pauses in progress have left them wondering about what could have been.

“If they had listened to the neighborhood ... I mean, actually listened, maybe they would have actually done something that would have made it safer, like not putting that [pond] there, not putting the entrance here, but again, as always, the neighborhood, the people within it, they were disregarded,” Owens said.

As the year nears its end, Hope Village stands mostly unfinished with no houses built.

“A lot of promises were made. A lot of empty promises were made,” Owens said, who concluded the interview with one wish:

“It would just be nice if we could have what we asked for, and it's not a lot. No more traffic coming through here, and for them to start bringing their traffic through their original address ... Federal Drive.”