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# Gelato, jazz and soul food are coming to the Food Hub in Oliver

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The fledgling Food Hub in East Baltimore has inked deals with six tenants — a sign of optimism for the \$27 million project as its massive redevelopment begins this year.

Tenants will include Anna Mae's Country Kitchen, a soul food restaurant with live jazz and blues that is a spin off of Granny's Restaurant in Owings Mills; local chain Pitango Gelato; Xquisite Catering, which will bring a 200-person catering hall to the hub; and Greenleaf Construction, developer [China Boak Terrell](#) said.

Terrell detailed the leases this month as part of the overall plan by American Communities Trust Inc., the nonprofit, mission-driven developer she heads that owns and is [redeveloping the Food Hub at 1801 E. Oliver St.](#)

If all goes according to ACT's plan, the new businesses will be surrounded by seven blocks of renovated and new affordable and market-rate housing units. The big picture has helped to ink the deals to restart the community, some of the new tenants say.

"We believe in the demographics. It is a blank canvas, but it's all about the people," said Shawn Peterson, COO of Granny's Restaurant, of his two-eatery chain's expansion to the Food Hub. "We want to bring that same atmosphere and dining experience, entertainment, homemade food from Owings Mills into that area and also be a source for employment."

Peterson said Anna Mae's Country Kitchen will grow its workforce at the Food Hub with full- and part-time jobs. The restaurant will offer live jazz and blues performances alongside its homemade Southern cuisine.

Xquisite Catering is also expected to bring new jobs to the Food Hub at its event space that will total 6,860 square feet. Pitango Gelato is planning to open a small manufacturing operation at the site with about six new jobs, Terrell said.

The leases are a harbinger of faith in the long-ignored and troubled community that has struggled with blight, crime and drugs for decades. Once a stable working class neighborhood, the community is primed for a comeback — and the area is in the midst of an upswing.

A \$33 million [Southern Streams Health and Wellness Center](#) is in the works at Gay and Washington streets. To the south, the 88-acre East Baltimore Development Inc. project is [adding market-rate townhouses](#) and the [former Hoen Lithograph](#)



MELODY SIMMONS

building on Chase Street was recently redeveloped to office and job training space.

Those projects helped attract the tenants to the Food Hub, according to Terrell. ACT acquired the site from the city in 2013 for \$500,000 and will moves its offices to the Food Hub in 2021.

"It took three years, but we are now fully leased," Terrell said. She added that another unnamed tenant was still negotiating to lease 10,000 square feet of space there.

"I am really excited about being able to bring commerce back to the neighborhood. It has been fossilized in its poverty."

The hub property is an eyesore, filled with five vacant and blighted buildings that have no walls, windows or, in some cases, roofs.

It is located just north of the raised rail tracks that wind through Middle East and Oliver and is a reminder of the old days when the property served as a city pumping station after it was built in 1890. Like all historic redevelopments, its Victorian charm is still visible in certain areas that have not disintegrated.

"It's not for the faint of heart," Terrell said of the task ahead. "It's challenging."

The first tenants and businesses are expected to move into the redeveloped space in late 2021. Renderings show open courtyards with public gathering and event spaces as well as large indoor office and restaurant space that will be among the first new businesses to open in the area in decades.

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*Check out the gallery above to see renderings as well as what the site looks like today.*

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Terrell said plans to convert the buildings into rustic, yet modern restaurant, office and entertainment space have been in the works for four years. Financing has been lined up from several sources, including historic state and local tax credits, new market tax credits, private financing and grants.

Future plans for the hub include forming a coalition to help rehab 100 vacant rowhouses that surround it and demolish 50 rowhouses that are too far gone. Terrell said the goal is to have a 51% homeownership rate in the community.

"We're \$12.5 million into it now," she said of the costs so far, which have included \$3 million on environmental remediation. "These buildings have been abandoned for over 50 years."

The hub's first tenant, the nonprofit Humanim, opened City Seeds in 2018 inside a newly constructed catering kitchen for its culinary job training program.

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