

Ground broken on two new housing projects in Chambersburg

Construction begins on 32-unit senior housing complex and rent-to-own town houses

By KATE S. ALEXANDER

October 8, 2009

kate.alexander@herald-mail.com

CHAMBERSBURG, Pa. — Five years after an Ohio-based developer came to town with a vision of affordable housing, Chambersburg officials broke ground Thursday on two new housing projects in the Elm Street District.

PIRHL LLC. of Cleveland, Ohio, together with the Interfaith Housing Alliance Inc., the Housing and Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS), will build a 32-unit senior housing complex adjacent to South Gate Shopping Center and 40 units of rent-to-own town houses on Redwood Drive.

Chambersburg's west end was identified as an Elm Street District Community in 2007 to secure grant money from the state Department of Community of Economic Development and inject pride back into the neighborhoods.

At the heart of the district is the South Gate Shopping Center, Elm Street Manager Jack Jones said.

South Gate has struggled for years to find steady tenants, said Joseph Shafran, chairman and CEO of PARAN Management Co.

“Walk-ability” is critical to future retail development, Shafran said. Adding new housing within walking distance of the shopping center should have a ripple effect on the retail, he said.

PIRHL and Interfaith Housing Alliance saw the need for additional housing for residents aged 55 and older, as well as revitalizing the local economy, Interfaith President Patricia Motter said.

Despite already being home to three housing complexes exclusively for seniors, Chambersburg needs more options for its aging population, Borough Planning and Zoning Administrator Phil Wolgemuth said.

A study conducted by PIRHL backed up Wolgemuth, he said. It found a need for senior housing with access to downtown amenities.

Paul Cullinane, president of Downtown Chambersburg Inc., credited the Elm Street Community Project for opening the door to the housing complex.

“Having the housing development in the Elm Street Neighborhood reinforced the applications for the developer to get funding,” he said.

In addition to seniors, many families in Franklin County are looking for affordable homes, said Charles Scalise, president of HANDS.

Despite filling a critical need, Scalise said the new town houses, also being developed by PIRHL, will not be for everyone.

Scalise said his organization, together with the Franklin County Housing Authority, will target families and individuals eyeing home ownership.

Tenants of the town houses will go through classes and counseling for home ownership, but the town houses will not be eligible for purchase for 15 years, he said.

While it was a long road to the groundbreaking on Thursday, David Uram, principal at PIRHL, said it was a road worth traveling.

Uram said more than \$15 million will be invested between the two projects, the bulk of the money coming through the federal stimulus plan and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. PIRHL will invest an additional \$400,000 in upgrading the facade, lighting and parking of the South Gate Shopping Center, he said.

Construction has already begun on the town houses and PIRHL hopes to begin work on the senior complex in the next few weeks, Uram said.

He said both developments should be completed by next year.

Source: http://www.herald-mail.com/?cmd=displaystory&story_id=231962&format=html

© 2009 The Herald-Mail Company