

Housing renewal in Hornell

By Neal Simon *The Spectator*

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HORNELL — After more than five years of planning and challenging, complicated work, the City of Hornell Housing Authority needed a celebration like the one it held Thursday in the Maple City.

After all, it's not every day that a housing agency gets to announce the completion of a \$17 million rehabilitation of its entire portfolio of 147 scattered-site residences. The redevelopment was accomplished under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration program, which allows housing authorities to access private financing to meet capital needs while also protecting long-term affordability, officials said.

The Hornell Community Apartments consist of three multi-family complexes and nine scattered-site single-family homes. In total, there are 24 residential buildings, three community buildings and one administrative building.

Thursday's event at the Church Street Court complex featured remarks from local, state, and federal officials, and residents, along with a ceremonial ribbon cutting in front of the community building.

Jason T. Sackett, executive director of the Hornell Housing Authority, referred to the long list of contributors to the redevelopment when he said, "Without all of you, this would not have happened. The goal is achieved.

"'Community' is such a fitting name for our project," Sackett added, as he thanked residents, the Housing Authority board, city of Hornell government leaders and departments, state and federal agencies, financing institutions and many more.

The Hornell Community Apartments project has been a true mission-driven and successful collaboration at the local, state, and federal

levels,” Sackett said. “The revitalization of the 147 units will ensure that at-risk seniors and families continue to have access to energy-efficient, modernized, and suitable housing.” This was the first RAD project utilizing tax exempt bonds in the State of New York and the demonstration has, under the right conditions, proven to be a very powerful tool for (public housing authorities) to work to attract both public and private equity to address capital needs and to stabilize operations of their portfolio.”

The multi-family buildings were originally constructed between 1971 and 1976. In partnership with the City of Hornell, the single-family homes were built between 1991 and 1996.

Rehabilitation work included updating select kitchens and bathrooms, new smoke detectors, new entry doors, new windows, new finishes, paint and flooring, and roof replacement, as needed. The community buildings and 24 one-bedroom apartments were reconfigured to allow for greater handicap accessibility.

The renovations incorporated energy-efficient features including LED and EnergyStar lighting, EnergyStar appliances, low flow plumbing fixtures, high efficiency boilers for single-family homes and highly efficient tankless hot water heaters in one of the multifamily sites. All windows were replaced with new EnergyStar models, and insulation was improved at three buildings.

Sackett said that with the project completed, the Hornell Community Apartments are well positioned for long-term success and stability.

New York State Homes and Community Renewal allocated Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits that generated \$4.95 million for the project and awarded \$4.85 million in subsidy from the Public Housing Preservation Program. The Federal Home Loan Bank of New York provided a grant.

Officials said all 147 apartments will be covered under a new, Project-Based Section 8 Housing Assistance Payment through the HUD RAD program.

“Being here today is very gratifying,” said Charles Oster, director of development for Edgemere Development, Inc.

Edgemere served as development consultant for the project, which Oster called “trailblazing.”

“The rehabilitation of the Hornell Community Apartments will improve the standard of living for the individuals and families who call this development home,” said RuthAnne Visnauskas, Homes and Community Renewal commissioner.

Individuals like Church Street Court resident Sue Brown, who is enjoying a real kitchen in a newly redeveloped apartment.

“I actually have a kitchen I can get into now,” Brown, who attended the ribbon cutting ceremony. “There is room for a kitchen table and a cart. It’s nice.”

Hornell Mayor John Buckley spoke about the importance of the community apartments.

“Hornell Housing Authority fills a tremendous need for our community by providing affordable housing to city residents,” Buckley said. “This much needed rehab will benefit those who are most vulnerable in our community including seniors and people with disabilities. I would like to thank our state partners for helping make this a reality.”

Leonard Skrill, upstate director of development for New York State Homes and Community Renewal, praised the commitment that he said the Legislature, including Sen. Tom O’Mara and Assemblyman Joe Errigo, and Gov. Andrew Cuomo have made to affordable housing.

Since 2011, Homes and Community Renewal has financed the creation or preservation of nearly 2,000 affordable multifamily homes in the Southern Tier, according to state officials.

“This important and significant state investment in the rehabilitation of the Hornell Community Apartments brings welcome quality-of-life

improvements for local residents and families and enhances the overall vitality of the City of Hornell,” O’Mara said in a written statement.

Also adding comments prior to the ribbon cutting were Mary Hilfiger, corporate secretary, CRA officer and executive assistant to the president of Steuben Trust Company, and Susan Anderson, a resident member of the Hornell Housing Authority Board.

Anderson struggled to control her emotions as she thanked the housing authority staff for navigating through “tons and tons of paperwork.”

And then Anderson, speaking more as a resident than a board member, gave up trying to stop her tears. She finished by expressing her gratitude that the funding for the redevelopment was provided.

“Without that money, this never would have happened,” she said.