

Ground breaks for affordable housing project on Allen Drive **(with video)**

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — A long-sought plan to develop new affordable housing in the city has finally been realized, more than two years after its initiation.

About 50 people gathered for a groundbreaking ceremony Friday at the Allen Drive site, just west of the Amtrak Station, where the foundation for a 15-unit apartment building is under construction.

“It’s been a long time coming,” said Dennis Brunelle, chairman of the board of directors for the Saratoga Springs Housing Authority, which runs an existing 28-unit housing complex on Allen Drive as well as Stonequist Apartments, Jefferson Terrace and Vanderbilt Terrace.

The Saratoga Affordable Housing Group, the nonprofit arm of the Housing Authority, purchased the Allen Drive site in June 2008 with a plan to provide more living space to low-income residents who work in the city.

“There’s a lot of folks who work here that can’t afford to live here,” said Ed Spychalski, executive director of the

Housing Authority. “This is a service town. By building these units and keeping them affordable, folks can afford to live where they work.”

The \$2.3 million construction project is funded by a state grant and will result in a mix of one- and three-bedroom apartments to house up to 30 residents. Two of the 15 units will be designed to accommodate hearing-impaired individuals and another two will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Housing will be made available next spring through an application and lottery process to city residents who earn 60 percent or less of the median income for Saratoga Springs. According to a 2008 report by the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in Saratoga County was \$63,883.

Rent will average \$650 a month, and residents will have access to the Housing Authority’s other programs, such as the free Head Start preschool located in the Jefferson Terrace apartment complex.

Construction is expected to be finished by next summer, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in June or July, officials said.

In 2008, the existing Allen Drive apartments were backed by the city and received support from Adirondack Trust Co.

This newer project is the culmination of several years of work by the Housing Authority and couldn’t have succeeded without the support of city officials such as Mayor Scott Johnson, Spsychalski said.

“When I took office back in January 2008, there really hadn’t been anything happening in the city for almost 30 years in terms of providing affordable housing,” Johnson said, adding that he grew up in subsidized housing in the city himself. “As a community, we need to make sure that everybody comes along for the ride (on affordable housing), and by that I mean everybody from all walks of life, all economic groups.”

Lynn Kopka, who works for the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal — the office that awarded the housing group’s grant — toured the Allen Drive site in 2009 as the agency was reviewing the grant application. On Friday, she called the project “a great example of public-private partnerships.”

“I just want to say to the new residents, hopefully, welcome to your new home next spring,” Kopka said.