



‘Something To Be Proud Of’

Public-private Partnership Creates Housing For Four Chatham Families

by Tim Wood

CHATHAM --- For seven years, Beverley Buckley have lived in a tiny cottage with a kitchen counter no more than a few feet wide. The pantry consists of two small cabinets. So when she saw the kitchen in the new affordable condominium she and her husband Stephen will move into this weekend, with more than a dozen cabinets and a huge amount of counter space, she was overjoyed.

“The planets were aligned for this one,” she said Monday during an open house at the newly completed Courtyards condos on Balfour Lane.

Developed through an unprecedented partnership between the town, the private Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing and the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation, the four units are providing the Buckleys and three other local residents the opportunity to own their own homes in a town where the median home price tops half a million dollars.



Florence Seldin prepares to cut the ribbon Monday dedicating four new units of affordable housing on Balfour Lane. Conversion of the commercial space to housing was overseen by the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation in partnership with the town and the Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing. Shown helping out with the ribbon cutting are, from left, CDC Housing Development Manager Emily Loomis, CDC Executive Director Elizabeth Bridgewater, Seldin, and contractor Eric Barsness. TIM WOOD PHOTO

“It’s a golden opportunity,” said another of the new homeowners, Rory Nickerson, a Chatham native who graduated from Plymouth State University last year and has been renting an apartment in West Chatham.

“I don’t think there’s any other way to get my foot in the door [of homeownership] if it’s not affordable,” said the 26-year-old carpenter, who works for his father, Steve Nickerson.

Previously commercial space occupied by the Visiting Nurse Association, the first floor and basement of the 15 Balfour Lane building were gutted and completely renovated into four two-bedroom, two bathroom condominiums, each about 1,000 square feet. Efforts were made to use durable, sustainable and energy efficient materials and appliances, right down

to the bamboo floors, said Emily Loomis, housing development manager for the CDC. Situated in the Cornfield village center, the development meets the goals of the town's comprehensive plan by placing housing side-by-side with commercial development, as well as redeveloping existing space.

"This really is a smart growth project," Loomis said.

Florence Seldin, who helped initiate the development three years ago when she was head of the newly formed Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing, said words could not describe her feelings at seeing the project come to fruition. It was a testament to the "power of one," she said. "This was one person's idea."

She described how she received a call from developer Ronald Rudnick who told her that the space was vacant. He thought it would be the perfect spot to develop affordable housing.

"I was not too sure when I first looked at it," Seldin said. She contacted Gwen Pelletier, then-director of the CDC, and to enlist the Lower Cape nonprofit's help in the project.

The Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing had received a \$100,000 donation from David Oppenheim which was directed to the project, and the town's community preservation committee endorsed, and town meeting approved, two grants totaling \$260,000 toward the purchase and renovation of the space. TD Banknorth contributed a grant of \$10,000 for energy efficient fixtures and appliances, as well as providing construction financing. Rudnick also donated money toward the project and contributed sewage flow from an adjacent subdivision which allowed the development to tie into the town's sewer system.

"This was truly a private-public partnership," said Seldin, who also sits on the CDC board.

The CDC purchased the space for \$450,000. Construction costs were about \$620,000, according to Loomis, and the project came in within 1 percent of the budget. The units are being sold for \$156,000. There were six applicants who met the qualifications for affordable housing, including income limits of 80 percent or less of the Barnstable County average. The four buyers were chosen in a lottery overseen by the Chatham Housing Authority.

Even though the units meet affordable housing guidelines, they will not help meet the state-imposed goal of having 10 percent of the town's housing stock be affordable. That's because no state money went into the project and the units were reserved for Chatham residents. State Representative Sarah Peake, D-Provincetown, said during the open house that she and Cape and Islands Senator Rob O'Leary have meet with Undersecretary of Housing Tina Brooks to stress the need for state funds for small projects such as this. She congratulated the CDC and its partners and said she felt it was "the family of Chatham that helped create these units."

“Chatham has a lot to be proud of,” she added.

Seldin said she wasn't disappointed that the units won't count toward the 10 percent goal, “because we provided housing for four very deserving families. You want it to count, but the bottom line is we're providing affordable housing.”

Natural light infuses all of the units, even the one in the basement. Each has an open kitchen-dining-living space, a large master bedroom with a bathroom, a smaller bedroom, and lots of closet space. The units include stackable washer and dryer units, refrigerators with freezers on the bottom for energy efficiency, and electric stoves. High efficiency gas furnaces provide heat, and there is central air conditioning to help regulate humidity, especially in the basement, where a humidistat triggers heat or air conditioning to ensure low moisture levels.

Contractor Eric Barsness of E.A. Barsness and Company said there were challenges in renovating the pre-existing space, including to the need to reinforce structural walls. “I personally felt a connection to this project,” he said, noting that he had benefited from a first-time homebuyers program in Hyannis years ago.

CDC Executive Director Elizabeth Bridgewater called the project “a real community development” which was completed “right on schedule, down to our chinny chin chin.” Added Ernest Rogers, president of the CDC's board of directors, “The Partnership came through at the right time with the right people.”

The units will belong to a condominium association that also includes three existing, market rate units on the second floor. The monthly condo fees were factored in when calculating the mortgages, said Loomis.

Closings on the four units were scheduled for Friday. Nickerson and the Buckleys said they planned to begin moving in Saturday.

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