



A True Community Partnership

Talking about smart growth, enhancing village centers and blending affordable housing into established neighborhoods is one thing. Actually doing something any one of those is a huge challenge. The Courtyards condominium project unveiled Monday in West Chatham manages to do all three, with style.

This weekend, four local families will purchase and move into two-bedroom affordable condominiums created in former commercial space on Balfour Lane, behind Pate's Restaurant. The new housing is the result of a public-private partnership that involved the town of Chatham, the Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing and the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation. Also involved were two of the town's biggest developers — often criticized for their projects — whose philanthropy and ingenuity helped make this endeavor happen. Ronald Rudnick had the initial idea to convert the former Visiting Nurse Association offices to affordable housing. He made two other important contributions: a financial donation and the transfer of sewage flow from an adjacent development, which greatly enhanced the viability of the Balfour Lane project. David Oppenheim's \$100,000 contribution to the Friends of Chatham Affordable Housing was also dedicated to the Courtyards project.

The town contributed money through the community preservation fund, and the CDC oversaw and implemented the project, securing bank loans as well as a TD Banknorth grant to "green" up the housing.

Those who attended Monday's open house were impressed not only with the radical conversion of the space, but with the brightness of the units, their intuitive layout, and the use of renewable and efficient materials and appliances. That the project appeals on an aesthetic level is wonderful, but it also puts into practice recommendations in the town's comprehensive plan and affordable housing strategies. It reuses existing space for affordable housing; it incorporates that housing into an existing neighborhood in an established village center; and it utilizes smart growth techniques. Too often lip service is paid to such concepts, but in this project, we see that they can work, given the right circumstances and people motivated enough to make it happen.

It's disappointing that the units won't contribute to the 10 percent affordable housing goal set by the state, because it was done totally on the local level, with no state or federal funds, and was restricted to Chatham residents. Unfortunately, the state doesn't recognize what works in a specific location may not fit into the cookie-cutter policies established for the Commonwealth as a whole. But Florence Seldin, who took Rudnick's germ

of an idea to the CDC and help foster the project to fruition, pointed out that in the long run, it doesn't matter if the condos are included in affordable housing calculations. What matters is providing homeownership for working people in a town where the second-home market has put the price of housing outside of the means of most wage earners.

In these four units, Chatham indeed has something to be proud of, and a model for future development of much-needed affordable housing.

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