

Affordable housing comes to New Milford

By Nanci G. Hutson
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NEW MILFORD — Patricia Emmons and Kristen King want to be among the first tenants selected to move into Indian Field on Fort Hill Road, the town's first affordable family housing complex.

The two local Wal-Mart coworkers now live with relatives and are eager to be more independent. King, 26, is in a wheelchair and needs

a handicapped-accessible apartment, and Emmons, 66, said she wants an apartment where she can mingle with people of all ages.

Affordable housing options in New Milford and surrounding communities are few. Planning for Indian Field began almost five years ago, and King and Emmons put their names on the waiting list two years ago, when

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the complex was still on the drawing boards.

Now under construction with state and federal monies, the \$11.5 million, five-building complex on 7.5 acres is expected to be ready for tenants by the end of the year.

"I think it's great because we need it, especially for those who don't make much," King said.

Emmons said the town needs a better balance of housing to cover a variety of incomes. Numerous active adult communities have been approved, but their unit prices are often more than \$400,000.

"We're active, too, but we can't afford to live like that," she said.

Affordable housing leaders had an open house Thursday afternoon at the Richmond Citizen Center to give residents a chance to learn about the Indian Field project and

Indian Field housing complex

- 40 units arranged in five buildings on a 7.5-acre site on Fort Hill Road
- Eight one-bedroom units that are handicapped accessible, 16 two-bedrooms and 16 three-bedroom units
- Arranged around an open courtyard with a community building
- Built with state and federal grants and non-interest loans; mortgage financing through Union Savings Bank
- Monthly rents will be capped at \$1,065 for one-bedroom units and \$1,614 for three-bedroom units
- The New Milford Affordable Housing Inc., the nonprofit development corporation affiliated with the New Milford Housing Partnership, developed the project in partnership with the Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development and the National Equity Fund
- Those interested in living in the complex can put their names on a waiting list. Call the town Social Services Department at (860) 355-6079.

Places where such housing might be suitable are being explored. However, Temple said, before the project is started, affordable housing leaders want to garner community support.

Kathleen Deschenes, executive director of Interlude in Danbury, said residents need to understand the supportive housing movement so they can embrace it as part of the local housing mix.

Interlude is a mental health organization that provides housing and services to adults in the greater Danbury and New Milford area.

Deschenes predicted the town will have concerns about the location, appearance and safety of a supportive housing complex. People need to be reassured there will be a screening process for residents and whatever is built will be designed to fit into the local landscape.

Deschenes said supportive housing is a win/win proposition as it promises safe, affordable housing to those most in need and protects the community because there are trained employees present.

What is supportive housing?

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING: The Corporation for Supportive Housing of Southern New England describes it as:

- Housing for individuals and families capable of being independent
- Well managed, with on-site support staff
- Can be a multi-unit complex, town houses, single rooms or single-family homes
- Designed to fit the area landscape

■ Affordable—tenants pay less than 30 percent of their income for rent

■ Has a track record of success: A national government study showed 85 percent of supportive housing residents remain housed and are good neighbors.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IS NOT:

- A group home or treatment program
- A welfare hotel or a government-operated housing program
- Temporary shelter

are any one of us away from homelessness?"

"So many people here have blinders on about this problem," longtime resident Jackie Alexander said.

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about New Milford Housing Partnership's next venture: supportive housing for homeless individuals and families.

"We hope when people see what we can do, it will just be the beginning," said Brooks Temple, chairman of the Partnership and vice president of New Milford Af-

fordable Housing Inc.

The Partnership's goal is to build a 10- to 12-unit complex, where people who have been homeless can live with on-site staff to help them with everything from their household budgets to mental health treatment.



David W. Hamble/Staff photographer
looks Temple, right, chairman of the Partnership and vice president of New Milford Affordable Housing Inc., explains the layout at Indian Field, an affordable housing complex on Fort Hill Road in New Milford, to Annette Field of Union Savings Bank.