

# Athol Daily News

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Athol

By Greg Vine

## Athol housing project receives \$600K as part of state program



*The Ellen Bigelow School is currently undergoing renovations to become new rental housing, as is the former Riverbend School. FILE PHOTO*

ATHOL – NewVue Communities, the Fitchburg-based non-profit leading the redevelopment of the former Bigelow and Riverbend schools, has been awarded a \$600,000 predevelopment loan by the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC).

The loan is part of an \$18.6 million package of financing to help propel six projects statewide that are aimed at creating new rental housing units. According to CEDAC, 352 of the new units will be designated for low-income households, with 164 set aside for extremely low-income individuals or households. Awarding of the loans was overseen by the state Executive Office of Housing and Liveable Communities.

In announcing the awards, CEDAC Executive Director Roger Herzog said, “We remain committed to helping to create new, quality affordable housing at a time of dire need and look forward to continuing to work with Governor Healey and her administration as she makes this issue a top priority in her agenda.

At Residences at the Park—as the Bigelow/Riverbend project is now known—NewVue will renovate the two abandoned historic elementary school buildings and connect them with an addition that will create a total of 53 units of mixed-income and intergenerational housing. Thirty-three units will be reserved as

family units, and 20 one-bedroom units will be for residents age 62 and older. The development will help Athol meet the state requirement that 10 percent of its housing stock consist of affordable housing. At present, only about 5 percent of all housing in Athol is classified as affordable housing.

According to NewVue Executive Director Marc Dohan, the loan will be used to cover the cost of “the architects, the engineering, environmental work, everything we’ve done so far to get the project funded.”

The loan, said Dohan, fits into “a big, giant jigsaw puzzle of all the different funding sources. Congressman McGovern helped to get us \$1 million in funding for this project. We also got some funding from other state sources. So, this is all part of the jigsaw puzzle that goes to put together the project.

“The reason CEDAC is so important,” he continued, “and why we really appreciate them is almost all the other funding sources say, ‘Here’s the funding, we’ve committed the funding, but you can’t spend any of it until we know you have enough to do the whole project.’ They don’t want to give us a million dollars to do something and not have us do it. Why CEDAC is so important for us in the predevelopment funding is they give us a loan that allows us to pay the architect and do all the other things so that we can then line up the total cost of the funding for the project.”

Much of the estimated \$30 million price tag for the project will be paid for in the form of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits provided by the state. Last fall, as part of a \$1 billion tax relief package signed by the governor, the Healey Administration raised the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit to \$60 million annually – a \$20 million increase over the previous year. In late January, Gov. Maura Healey committed those resources to support the production and preservation of more than 1,900 housing units in 19 communities across the state, including Residences at the Park.

“These housing projects are a great example of why we expanded the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit in our tax cuts bill,” said Healey in a statement. “We look forward to continuing to work to pass the Affordable Homes Act this year to create much-needed housing across all income levels in the state.”

Next steps, Dohan said, include finalizing the architectural drawings, soliciting bids from contractors, and “hope that interest rates don’t move too much – or if they do move, that they move down – so that we can actually pull the whole thing together.”

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