

FAMILY FINALIST

Intergenerational housing creates stability

By Genevieve Rajewski

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Easthampton, Mass.—A new intergenerational housing model seeks to stop foster children from being bounced from home to home. The \$15.9 million, 60-apartment Treehouse at Easthampton Meadow development will offer a supportive community for senior citizens and families adopting children from the foster care system.

"Seniors—people with a wealth of experience and a lot to offer—are isolated in senior apartment buildings, and many want a more involved life," said Pamela Goodman, president of co-developer Beacon Communities. "Creating a community that serves two potentially vulnerable populations—seniors and children who are in need of adoption—seemed a real win-win."

Judy Cockerton, executive director of co-developer Treehouse Foundation, based the idea for the Treehouse community on Hope Meadows, a similar development in central Illinois that brings together foster families and surrogate grandparents. A teacher and toy store owner turned community developer, Cockerton has one adopted and two biological children. After becoming a foster mother, she realized that, alone, families have a difficult time making the adjustment and understanding how best to be a good foster or adoptive parent.

Therefore, the mission of Treehouse at Easthampton is to provide far more than just housing. Child and family casework and daily assistance to families will be provided by Berkshire Center for Families and Children, a licensed foster/adoptive care placement agency.

In addition, the development is designed to facilitate neighbor interaction. A community center will host neighborhood gatherings, community dinners, and education and support services for residents, and seniors will be offered the option to do volunteer training as well.

Master planned and developed in collaboration with the city of Easthampton, the 46-acre Treehouse at Easthampton Meadow will eventually have three components.

The affordable rental part of the development, completed in July, includes a community center and 60 one-, three-, four-, and five-bedroom apartments in 24 buildings. All units are targeted to households earning no more than 60 percent of the area median income (AMI). Three units are targeted to households earning no more than 30 percent of AMI and set aside for residents with Sec. 8 vouchers. Lease-up is expected to be complete by the end of the year.

The second phase of the project, scheduled to begin construction this fall, will involve building 33 homeownership units, nine of which will be affordable to moderate-income buyers. The third and final component involves seven lots that have been sold to a private developer to construct market-rate homes.

The developers also have plans for a "Big Red Barn," which will house rabbits and other small animals. "Many kids who've experienced trauma really benefit from caring for and being around animals," said Goodman. There will also be an animal therapy program off-site.

The rental initiative was financed with \$7.7 million in low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) equity, \$3.3 million in state LIHTC equity, \$1.7 million in MassHousing Priority Development funds, \$1 million in Massachusetts Affordable Housing Trust funds, \$750,000 from the state Housing Innovation Fund, a \$737,000 MassHousing first mortgage, and \$715,000 in state HOME funds.

"We are really proud to be involved in creating a community where seniors can be involved and adopting families can make permanent homes that have the stability that every kid needs and deserves," Goodman said.

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Treehouse at Easthampton Meadow

Developers: Beacon Communities LLC and Treehouse Foundation

Number of units: 60; all are affordable

Unique feature: A new housing model serving two unique populations: children in foster care and seniors seeking a more involved life.