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New Taunton housing development opens to public on revitalized property

TAUNTON — Carlos DeSousa has a new home.

On Tuesday, his front door was open to the public as the Taunton Housing Authority and their development partner, Trinity Financial Inc. of Boston, cut the ribbon on the Taunton HOPE VI revitalization project.

The Silver City's most distressed neighborhood, the Fairfax Gardens housing project, has been knocked down and in its place two innovative housing experiments have taken root.

DeSousa showed off his sparkling Bristol Commons duplex at 503 Fairground Ave. in the new 88-unit mixed-income development adjacent to 97 Kilmer Ave.

"The HOPE VI project represented a tremendous opportunity for the city of Taunton," said Taunton Mayor Thomas C. Hoye Jr. "It has taken two blighted properties within our community and turned them into viable and sustainable housing."

The project included two simultaneous construction phases, replacing the original 150 severely distressed public housing units at Fairfax Gardens with a total of 160 new mixed-income rental units on two sites, according to a Trinity Financial press release.

The former Fairfax site has a new name: Bristol Commons. The new neighborhood boasts 88 sparkling energy-efficient townhouse-style units, with front and back yards.

"Trinity couldn't be happier to have worked with its state and local partners on this complicated transaction," said Matt Zahler, Trinity's development project manager for Bristol Commons and Lenox Green. "It is so wonderful to have been able to watch the transformation of one of the state's most distressed public housing projects become what is now a new and beautiful neighborhood. This couldn't have been accomplished without the help of all the project's financial partners and the incredible vision of the Taunton Housing Authority."

The neighborhood will benefit from a community center with social service programming space, new pothole-free streets, infrastructure upgrades and community gardens, according to Trinity Financial.

"Support services are in place for this project to be sustainable," Hoye said. "This is a shining example of what a private/public partnership should look like and I'm grateful to all involved."

The city's other new development, Lenox Green, provides 72 new rental units and was constructed overtop a 6.4-acre blighted Brownfield site off of Mason Street, known as Parcel 6A.

"It's a great day, just to see this project come to fruition," said Colleen Doherty, Taunton Housing Authority's executive director. "The Taunton Housing Authority is extremely grateful to all of our partners who have made this project a reality. We have two beautiful developments that I'm proud of. They represent a new start for many deserving families."

The city's housing authority received a \$22 million HOPE VI grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in May 2011. The funding built 160 units of mixed-income housing, and funding was also provided for 30 "Soft Second" loans for first-time homebuyers to promote homeownership in Taunton, according to Trinity Financial.

"I am thrilled to see more housing opportunities become available to Taunton residents through partners working together at the local, state and federal level," said state Sen. Marc R. Pacheco, D-Taunton.

Public (federal, state and local) and private investments combined to fund the projects.

"I was pleased to play a small part in this effort to ensure more residents have a roof over their heads, which is an obvious human necessity, and I am pleased more residents will have a place to call 'home' with the revitalization of Bristol Commons, an important community asset in Taunton," Pacheco said.

The Taunton Housing Authority has pledged to provide new residents with a comprehensive array of services aimed at increasing educational achievement, employment opportunities, and permanent housing solutions through its Community and Supportive Services program.

"The delivery of new homes at Bristol Commons and Lenox Green represents a tremendous partnership effort that HUD is proud to be a part of," said Kristine Foye, acting regional administrator for HUD New England. "This is what our HUD programs are about — delivering hope by building communities of opportunity for those we serve."

Hoye took a moment to salute the leader of the city's housing authority.



PHOTO/ TAUNTON GAZETTE PHOTO | MIKE GAY

Taunton's new public housing development, called Bristol Commons, has been built on the site of what was once the Silver City's most distressed housing project, Fairfax Gardens.

“My hat goes off to Colleen Doherty,” Hoyer said. “Without her tenacity this project never would have gotten off the ground. Colleen is a tremendous leader that we are lucky to have in our community. This project gives us a look at what can happen when the federal, state, local government and the private sector work together.”

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Print Page