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EDITOR'S PICK

Ground broken for affordable senior housing project

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METHUEN — A groundbreaking was held Friday for an affordable housing project for seniors at 14 Ingalls Court in Methuen.

The facility will feature 48 one-bedroom units for the lowest income senior households, aged 62 and over, who are eligible for a nursing home level of care.

The project is being developed by YWCA of Greater Newburyport with \$500,000 in funding from the city of Methuen, along with contributions from Eastern Bank, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston, the Mass Housing Partnership, the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation and several others.

“Homelessness is a crisis in the country, not just in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,” said Mayor Neil Perry. “Projects like these are so important.”

Amanda Roe of Mass Housing Partnership said that statistics showed that there are 4,600 people in the surrounding community that would qualify for residency at the site, demonstrating the intense need for such projects.

“It’s a statistic that I got out of a marketing study that is looking at the demand analysis, and they look at the income-qualified people that are housing challenged,” Roe said.

The facility will provide comprehensive medical care from Element Care PACE, which provides home health services and will be located on the first floor. Residents will also have access to Nevins Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Centre, which is located next door.

Robert Wakefield, CEO of Element Care PACE, said this project in Methuen is unique in providing a continuum of care for low-income people.

“We’ll have the PACE site, the medical and social care, but also we have the nursing home, with its rehabilitation component,” he said. “But what we’ve been able to do is we’ve created some very creative programs on behalf of our participants, so we don’t use it as a regular nursing home but we’ll bring them back. As you can see, it’s only 300 feet apart. It’s really going to be a continuing care community.”

The housing has been in the works for at least three years, said Jack Wilson, director of economic and community development in Methuen, and it’s only the first phase of a project that will eventually produce 96 units of housing.

Wilson said construction on the second phase should begin in 18 months, when the first phase is done.

“It’s the spectrum of the support of services that really make this something that’s an asset to the city,” Wilson said.

Along with the mayor, State Rep. Estela Reyes and State Sen. Pavel Payano were present at the event and addressed the crowd.

The YWCA of Greater Newburyport has been involved in developing affordable housing for 135 years, beginning with single-room occupancy units at their YWCA Women’s Residence on Market Street in Newburyport, which is one of the oldest SRO programs in the country.

In 1998 they started serving homeless, and very low-income families and individuals, and currently oversee 86 units of affordable housing in their service area.

“Although we currently have seniors in our affordable housing units, YWCA Residences at Ingalls Court represents our first dedicated elderly housing endeavor,” said Ilene Harnch-Grady, marketing director for YWCA.

She said that, although Methuen is outside of their service area, they have a longstanding partnership with the Element Care Pace program, which led to YWCA’s involvement at Ingalls Court.

“This is an example of what can happen to benefit a community when people of like minds work together, instead of finding a million reasons why you can’t get something done,” said Mayor Perry.

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