



Safe, Efficient Housing

Ann Arbor Housing Commission dedicates efforts to the long-term sustainability of affordable housing stock

The Ann Arbor Housing Commission, serving a community of just over 100,000 people in southeastern Michigan, is in the middle of an ambitious effort to rehab all of the agency's 355 affordable housing units in the next five years.

The agency, which is taking on the initiative in the middle of rising costs due to a competitive local market, aims to reinvest in the city's affordable housing sector. Central to these efforts is the incorporation of energy-efficient and long-lasting components to ensure greater sustainability for the housing commission and its residents.

"In the world of affordable housing, if you want to have a sustainable project, you really have to look at your long-term operating costs," says Jennifer Hall, Executive Director. "One way to do that is to have lower energy costs and more durable, less toxic materials that will last longer. A challenge in doing affordable housing is funder restrictions on the per-unit development costs. You have to use cheaper, less durable materials, and it increases costs down the road when you're trying to do maintenance."

The Ann Arbor Housing Commission has 18 projects in the works at this time, and was just one of 10 agencies in the United States to have its entire portfolio approved for conversion to Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) units by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The RAD program offers various financial tools to help rehab at-risk affordable housing.

"We're looking at expanding and diversifying our portfolio as far as the types of housing we provide," Hall says. "About two years ago, we were approved to convert our units to RAD project-based vouchers, so hopefully five years from now, we will no longer have any public housing. We will have affordable housing that has different revenue streams than what we have right now. Our goal is to add a minimum of 50 units in the next five years, but in the long term, we are looking at adding hundreds of units to the portfolio."

Under the RAD program, agencies such as the Ann Arbor Housing Commission can receive funding from the private and public sectors to renovate, demolish or build new affordable housing.



Ann Arbor Housing Commission

Executive Director :: Jennifer Hall | Location :: Ann Arbor, Michigan

"Through this program, [we] will continue to serve low-income tenants and they will continue to pay 30 percent of their income on rent, but the subsidy, instead of coming from the public housing line item in HUD's budget, will come from the voucher line item," Hall says. "That has historically been better supported by Congress."

SUSTAINABILITY AND ENERGY SAVINGS

The agency has gone a step beyond simply rehabbing its properties, however. The agency has received \$300,000 in funding for a "green demonstration" to showcase some of the eco-friendly technologies available for affordable housing today.

"We're trying to incorporate as much energy-efficient and green products into our units as possible," Hall says. "In particular, we have a new construction project, which is in the siteplan phase, and we received a community challenge planning grant to work with architects, engineers and consultants to help us design as green as a project as we can within our budget. We are really concentrating on lowering the energy costs and including things like a 50-plus year metal roof."

For this project, its team is incorporating sustainable components that exceed the Enterprise Green Communities standards.

"We are looking at putting different materials into the building," Hall says. "For example, we're probably going to do three different kinds of flooring materials and then track their durability over time to see which ones are the best. We've hired a local environmental consultant at the [local nonprofit] Ecology Center, who's helping us work through what we can do and what the impacts are, making certain changes to our building."

According to Hall, the success of these efforts also depends on buy-in from residents.

"You can put whatever products you want in your units, but if it's the middle of winter and the tenants have the heat on and the windows open, it really defeats some of the things that you're trying to do to lower energy costs," she says.


COMMUNITY-BUILDING EFFORTS

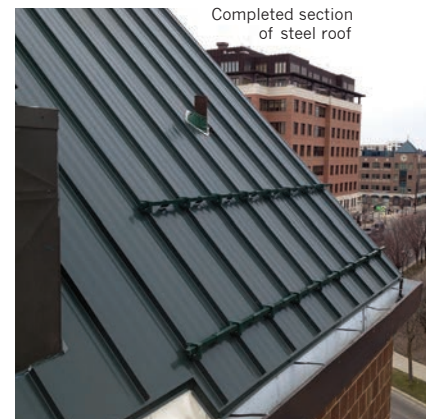
In another initiative, the Ann Arbor Housing Commission is partnering with the Arts Alli-

ance, a local group that advocates for the artistic community, to salvage materials from a demo and new construction project and turn them into artwork.

"We would like to be able to use some salvage materials, whether it's because we had to take a tree down or we salvaged the roof trusses, and do some community art with the residents and surrounding neighborhood," Hall says.

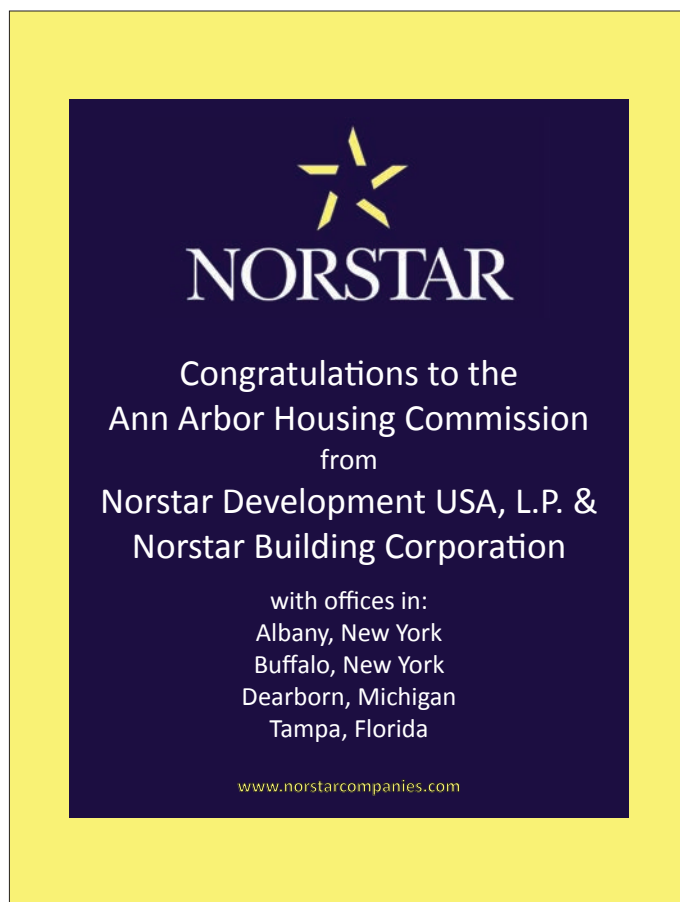
This is actually part of a larger effort on the part of the housing agency to encourage its residents to better interact with each other and their surrounding neighborhoods.


"We're trying to figure out how to do some more community building, whether it's through rain gardens or vegetable gardens, permaculture, having fruit trees on the site and having other kinds of things for the tenants," Hall says. "We really want to make it more of a community, where we don't have neighbors who are afraid of the people living on the site. We are trying to bring the neighborhood together with the tenants." 



Completed section of steel roof

NORSTAR DEVELOPMENT USA, L.P.
Norstar Development USA, L.P. is honored to be the development partner of the Ann Arbor Housing Commission in the redevelopment of their public housing portfolio under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Program. The first phase, which includes renovation of 251 units, began construction in September of 2014 and will be complete by December of 2015. The second phase which includes new construction is planned for 2015.




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