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Officials break ground on affordable housing development in Orange

The Housing Authority for the city of Orange has received an enthusiastic green light to begin construction of a new 42-unit tax credit development in Orange for workforce housing.

Local, county, state and federal officials attended a groundbreaking on Tuesday, May 12, for the building of the Walter G. Alexander Village, Phase III housing complex, located on Parrow Street adjacent to the Oakwood Avenue Elementary School and its second building, located on Wilson Place.

The development is supported by a \$7.4 million tax credit award from the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency and \$3.5 million from the Community Development Block Grant Sandy Disaster Recovery funds.

The 54,300-square-foot project will comprise a 16-unit, three-story building on Parrow Street and 26-unit, four-story building on Wilson Place, as well as a shared 4,500-square-foot community room.

The new development is a much-heralded public-private partnership between the Alpert Group of Fort Lee, the Housing Authority for the city of Orange and the authority's development arm, the Orange Housing Development Corporation.

"Dr. Walter G. Alexander Village III is a continuation of our commitment to rehabilitate the East Ward," said Dr. Walter D. McNeil, Jr., executive director of the Housing Authority for the city of Orange. "We've already built 48 affordable housing units for seniors and 66 affordable housing family developments in the area. We are here now, with hats and shovels, ready to build another 42 units for seniors and local families who want a safe and an attractive place to live."

Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, who represents Orange, was amongst those who attended the event. "There are two things the residents of Orange prioritize: housing and employment," she said.



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"Envisioning this transformation is like a dream come true."

In the past, the city has experienced serious housing issues, with unsafe, dilapidated buildings as workforce housing. The housing authority is aggressively branching out from its daily management of public housing to tackle the issues affecting the overall quality of life for Orange residents.

Sen. Nia Gill urged residents to rally behind such projects so the community can see positive change. "We are creating here an atmosphere where we can be safe; where we can raise our children; where we

can further develop our commitment to this wonderful city," she said. "Affordable housing means houses but it also means moving people forward."

The Housing Authority and Orange Housing Development Corporation have studied 404 properties in the East Ward that are part of the Central Orange Redevelopment Plan. The study revealed that 33 percent of the properties were underutilized, with most of the properties abandoned, vandalized or vacant.

In response, Orange housing officials have steadily acquired and demolished blighted properties and redeveloped scat-

tered sites throughout the city's East Ward.

The Dr. Walter G. Alexander Village was a public housing complex built in 1952. It has since been demolished, replaced with attractive, modern, low-rise construction. The "new" Dr. Walter G. Alexander development is the city's largest expansion of workforce housing. Located between Parrow Street and Wilson Place, the new construction has come to symbolize tremendous turnaround and investment in the city's East Ward.

The project is slated for completion by early 2016.