

Avondale housing projects gets tax credits

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Jun. 12, 2013 |

cincinnati.com

AVONDALE — Avondale's redevelopment momentum received a two-pronged push Wednesday when a pair of housing projects received coveted low-income-tax credits.

The plan to build almost 100 units of permanent assisted housing on Alaska Avenue, which created protest from some homeowners in the immediate area, received \$1.235 million in credits from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency.

The agency announced dozens of awards statewide, including some additional ones in Hamilton County. The other Avondale project to receive tax credits is The Community Builders' effort to create or improve 200 units of affordable housing in the Reading Road corridor.

The competitive tax-credit program, created federally in 1986, is an incentive that provides a dollar-for-dollar tax exemption to developers that create quality affordable housing.

On Alaska Avenue, Columbus-based National Church Residences will build 99 units of housing for people with mental, emotional or physical disabilities, many of whom who have struggled with homelessness. Construction of a the planned three-story apartment building is expected to begin as early as summer 2014 on the site of the former Alaska Acres Care Center, 3584 Alaska Ave. The center, closed in 2009, was razed earlier this year.

"National Church Residences is still reviewing the details, but we did receive the tax credits that we asked for," the agency said in an email to The Enquirer. "The development will go forward. We will continue to work with the community leaders and develop our good neighbor agreements."

A local homelessness expert, Kevin Finn, executive director of Strategies to End Homelessness, called the award for the Alaska Avenue project "a huge win for our community" and said the new housing will help the city of Cincinnati advance its 2009 Homeless to Homes plan by reducing homelessness.

Homeowners on Alaska and adjacent Forest Park Drive said the project would reduce their property values, The Enquirer reported March 21. Linda Thomas, a homeowner on Alaska Avenue who organized the opposition group Avondale 29, said Wednesday morning that she had no comment on the funding decision.

Yet Ozie Davis, executive director of the Avondale Comprehensive Development Corp., the nonprofit charged with coordinating projects and stimulating development in the neighborhood, called Wednesday "a great day for Avondale."

In its portfolio of nine Avondale buildings, Boston-based Community Builders will use the new tax credits toward redeveloping 81 units in two historic buildings on Reading Road – the Poinciana and Crescent Court – whose rehab will begin in mid-2014. Work on seven other buildings that contain 119 units will begin in the first quarter of next year.

Residents of those buildings receive social services, to include job readiness and mental health and

addiction treatment, organized by the Urban League of Greater Cincinnati and paid for by money from the \$29.5 million federal Choice Neighborhoods grant received by Community Builders in December. Some of The Enquirer's "Saving Avondale" series was part of the grant application of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Throughout the rest of 2013, Avondale residents can expect to see "a blitz," said Jeff Beam, Community Builders' Avondale senior project manager. "You'll see us addressing capital needs in buildings and doing a lot of knocking on doors and grill events to get people involved," he said.