

Saving grace

Wolseley housing co-op launches after reaching 'daunting' target



By: Murray McNeill

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Prairie Architects Inc. / WalTech Visualization

Old Grace Housing Co-op complex rendering

There were many times over the last four years when one of the driving forces behind a new Wolseley-area co-op-housing project wondered if it would ever be built.

One of the biggest obstacles that had to be overcome, said Old Grace Housing Co-operative president Sandra Hardy, was the need to pre-sell 54 of the 60 suites in the co-op's proposed new housing complex on the former Old Grace Hospital site.

"It was daunting... Even a condo (project) doesn't need to sell that many," she noted.

But those doubts were a distant memory Thursday as Hardy and other co-op officials members celebrated the official sod-turning for the long-awaited \$15.8-million project.

An elated Hardy told the more than 50 people who gathered to witness the event co-op members are expected to begin moving in in early 2018.



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"But for today, let's take a moment and savour how far we've come," she added to raucous applause.

The 60-unit, U-shaped housing complex will be built on Preston Avenue between Arlington and Evanson streets. As an intergenerational, mixed-income co-operative, it will fill a significant gap in the housing market. The suites will include a mix of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom units, with half of them being subsidized units for low-income families who qualify for assistance under the provincial Affordable Housing Rental Program.

Hardy said the provincial government is providing a \$70,000 subsidy for each of the subsidized suites, which reduced the cost for qualified buyers to between \$16,000 and \$28,000, depending on the size of the unit. The 30 non-subsidized units cost between \$90,000 and \$130,000.

Six of the suites will be fully accessible for people with mobility issues, as will the grounds, the parking area and the service and common areas. Two Peg City Car

Co-op vehicles also will be available on-site, and members will have ample secure bicycle parking.

The complex will be both energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable. Not only is it a registered Manitoba Hydro PowerSmart project, Hardy said the co-op also hopes to become the first non-profit housing group in Winnipeg to obtain gold certification under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.

She said the co-op members who have purchased suites include young families, seniors, empty nesters from the neighbourhood who are looking to downsize and people who require accessible housing.

She said the co-op had to pre-sell many of the units because it doesn't own the land and couldn't use that as equity. She said the province retained ownership of the land and leased it long-term to the co-op.

She told the crowd the project wouldn't have been possible without the help of the province and Assiniboine Credit Union, which provided the financing for the project. She also praised the support the co-op received from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, the Wolseley Residents' Association, local businesses and other not-for-profit organizations.

Wolseley Residents' Association president Cynthia Neudoerffer said the co-op will be a welcome addition to the community.

"Throughout the years... co-op members have actively engaged with our organization and other neighbours to ensure that their vision aligns with that of the greater community," she said. "We look forward to watching the construction over the coming months and welcoming new and old friends to the co-op and to Wolseley."

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Read more by Murray McNeill.