

Conway Pines groundbreaking 'a great start' in affordable housing effort

By [Tom Eastman](#)

Dec 06, 2011 6:05 pm

CONWAY — “This marks an exciting day for us, a great start,” said Theresa Kennett, program director of the non-profit Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition, following the groundbreaking ceremony held Nov. 28 for the new Conway Pines affordable rental housing project.

Located on Poliquin Drive, off Route 16 across from the Shurfine Marketplace in Conway, the new facility will consist of 32 workforce housing units.

The three-story building will include 23 two-bedroom apartments, six one-bedroom apartments and three three-bedroom apartments, with a planned opening by late August.

It will feature a playground and off-street parking, with the site screened from Route 16 by trees. Laundry facilities and common areas are also part of the design.

As a “green” project, the building will feature photovoltaic solar and geothermal.

Affordable — and adjustable — rates

The facility will offer rental prices set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at less than the median income wage level for the valley, according to developers Gary Davies and William Caselden of Great Bridge Properties of Manchester.

Rental rates — which will include heating and electricity — for Conway Pines are expected to be \$675 for a one-bedroom apartment, \$775 for a two-bedroom, and \$910 for a three-bedroom.

While some have argued that those in the service industry only make \$10 to \$11 per hour, officials said further assistance may be available.

“We do have some rental assistance through Rural Development so if people cannot pay that pro forma rate, we can lend some assistance,” said Caselden.

Filling a need

The rental housing project is the first affordable housing venture in the Conways since the late 1980s.

At a post-groundbreaking reception held at the MWV Technical Center, Davies said the project has been seven years in the making, with the Conway Planning Board having granted conditional approval two and a half years ago, and the final aspects of the financing package having been obtained in June.

Funding for the \$6.6 million project came in the form of a \$1 million first mortgage from U.S.D.A. Rural Development; \$600,000 from N.H. Housing Authority, (\$200,000 of which is for the Greener Homes incentive for the geothermal and solar); and \$5 million through the sale of tax credits to the project's investor, Boston Capital of Boston, Mass.

Among the elected officials on hand for the post-groundbreaking were state Sen. Jeb Bradley, executive councilor Raymond S. Burton of District 1, and representatives of U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen and Rep. Frank Guinta's offices.

Davies spoke of the threat to the tax credit program in the budget-cutting climate in Congress. He said it was key to let elected officials know how important that program is to affordable housing projects similar to Conway Pines. Chuck Henderson, liaison for Shaheen, said he would pass those comments along.

Burton said the project represents what can be done in the state when the government and private groups work collaboratively. He also said building an affordable rental housing project shows that Conway is growing in a well-planned way.

“Conway has welcomed and guided growth. Conway has not built a fence around it — so I commend the people and the elected officials,” said Burton.

Also in attendance were representatives of USDA, N.H. Housing, Boston Capital, the Conway Board of Selectmen, the town of Conway, the N.H. Charitable Foundation, the MWV Housing Coalition, the MWV Chamber of Commerce and MWV Economic Council.

General contractor for the project is Gary Chicoine of Chicoine Construction of Weare. Ed Poliquin, formerly a co-owner of Glen Builders, was also present. Poliquin is the former owner of the property. David Miller of Glen Builders was also at the groundbreaking as that local company is doing the site work.

Ed Butler, current board member and past chair of the MWV Housing Coalition, said the project will create jobs during the down economy while also helping local workers find affordable housing.

With more affordable rates, that in turn could open up time for workers, as perhaps they would not have to work a second or third job to meet living expenses, Butler supposed.

“Once rented,” said Butler, “occupants will be able to volunteer and give back to the community, maybe for the fire department or even the local housing coalition. I am pleased to be in the company of [those] who recognize the need.”

Tourism economy's impacts

Kennett said a recent study in New Hampshire showed as many as 40 percent of workers in the tourism-dependent economy of Carroll County cannot afford to buy a house or pay rent.

She said as a tourism region, prices are elevated because of the demand for vacation properties.

While it's true that this is a single building, Kennett is hopeful that other projects will follow to meet the needs of working families throughout the valley.

“Again, this is only 32 units, but it will provide quality housing for people who are doubled up or who live outside Mount Washington Valley,” said Kennett.

Long time coming

The project has been seven years in the making, with the project having received conditional approval from the Conway Planning Board two and a half years ago, said Davies.

“We originally started looking at the property behind [T.J. Maxx, the old North Conway Drive-In Theatre],” said Davies, noting that that site at one time was to become a retirement community, but only one structure was ever built as financing was not obtained.

He praised Poliquin for making the property available, and the town of Conway's zoning for providing greater density allowances for properties that are furnished with community water and sewer.

“This is a great site,” said Davies.

Track record of affordable units

Great Bridge was created in 2000 to build and renovate affordable housing projects. The company has built medium-size and large apartment units in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, according to Davies and Caselden.

Past projects include Ossipee Village Apartments, Brookside Place in Rochester, Bellamy Mill Apartments in Dover and Parker Village in Littleton. In addition to new facilities, such as

Conway Pines, the company has also renovated old mills, schools and other structures to create apartments.

The Conway Pines property will be managed by Stewart Property Management of Bedford, a company that has managed several of Great Bridge's properties, Davies said. The company manages more than 110 properties in New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and Massachusetts.

The MWV Housing Coalition was formed in 2006 by representatives from small business, state government, the non-profit community and private citizens who were concerned that housing stock, both units for rental and purchase, was unaffordable for local residents, according to Butler and Kennett.

Additionally, they said the founders were concerned that affordable and accessible housing was becoming increasingly scarce for the fastest growing segment of our population – the aging and elderly.

How to apply

Kennett encouraged prospective applicants to contact Stewart Property Management as soon as possible, as the company will process applications on a first-come, first-served basis.

“They will begin processing applications 90 days before the project is completed,” said Kennett, adding the company will do credit checks and criminal checks and will also be seeking references.

For more information, visit www.stewartproperty.net or [/www.mwvhc-nh.org](http://www.mwvhc-nh.org)., or call Kennett at 387-2524.



Participating in a groundbreaking held Monday for the 32-unit Conway Pines affordable rental housing project in Conway were (from left): Theresa Kennett, program director of the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition; Conway town manager Earl Sires; selectman Mary Seavey; Ed Butler, board member of the MWV Housing Coalition; developer Chris Davies of Great Bridge Properties; executive councilor Raymond S. Burton of District 1; MWV Housing Coalition board member Bob Magoyn; Dean Christon, director of N.H. Housing Authority; and MWV Housing Coalition board member Maureen Westrick. (JAMIE GEMMITI PHOTO)