

## FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP HOUSING AUTHORITY REDEVELOPMENT OF PARKSIDE VILLAGE

A small determined housing authority in central New Jersey has completed an improbable housing transformation--from obsolete public housing to open opportunity in a new affordable housing development. A courageous and fearless board of commissioners and its visionary executive director elected to eliminate its only public housing project and put itself out of the direct property management business. The forward-thinking executive director collaborated with the FTHA's progressive board of commissioners on a strategy that it was better to demolish its only public housing development built in the last century and start over with new energy efficient affordable housing designed for this century.



Through extensive planning with community leaders, residents and Township officials, the FTHA was able to design an affordable housing complex that addressed the most crucial concerns inherent in the old design. Several overarching goals were delineated in the beginning of the process: remove the super-block design of the last century by reopening three streets to allow access to the eight-acre community park; reclaim closed streets to open safe pedestrian thoroughfares that promote neighborhood interaction; eliminate the blight of obsolete and isolated public housing with attractive two-family duplexes and new generation senior housing; replace small inefficient unit interiors for larger attractive and energy efficient apartments to promote family pride; and reposition common area space that is not user friendly for recognizable space open to the community. All of the above goals were achieved by insightful planning under the direction of the aggressive task master and executive director, Hazel Burnett Davis.

Ms. Davis recalls that the biggest obstacle was in realizing that “for 50 years the housing authority had managed its only public housing project and we would be giving that up to provide better housing for its residents”.

Ms. Davis further offers that her dedicated Board embraced the idea that their primary mission was to provide the best housing possible for the residents. Putting the housing authority out of the business of directly managing public housing and transitioning to asset management would complete the mental transformation of the agency.

The physical transformation of the original 100-unit Parkside Village took three years to achieve because the Authority made a conscious decision not to relocate the forty (40) original senior households. On behalf of the Board, the current Chair, Ms. Helen Verhage promised Parkside seniors that they would not have to move while the senior building was being constructed. As a promise kept, Ms. Davis ensured that each senior only moved once and that was into the new 70-unit senior building.

The old public housing development was a traditional configuration of attached two-story, row houses with sixty percent of the units allocated for families and forty percent allocated for seniors. Franklin Township, Somerset, New Jersey became one of the first progressive municipalities to build affordable housing for its residents in the late 1950s. Construction of the 18 buildings, complemented with one administration and one community building, was completed and occupied in 1960. In the 60s, it was known as low rent housing and built on abundant farm land.

When Parkside Village was built, there was plenty of land for housing and the Township developed around the “Project”, as it would later be known. The size and scale of the project helped to usher in an era wherein public housing was the solution for the housing needs of working families. Built on eight acres with a density of twelve dwelling units per acre, the scale of Parkside Village seemed disproportionate to the single family homes built in later decades. The era of massive public housing built on “super blocks” spread throughout the country.



With the success of the FTHA’s bold move, it has proven that even small housing authorities can replace obsolete housing with desirable, affordable housing built on a scale that compliments the community. By demolishing its only public housing in favor of affordable housing that will better serve the needs of Franklin Township families and seniors, the agency has established a worthy precedent for other housing authorities. In one unprecedented move, the FTHA provided forty percent more affordable housing units and increased its Housing Choice Voucher Program seventy percent.



The FTHA and RPM Development Group (RPM) partnered to develop Parkside Senior Housing, which was the first phase of a comprehensive and collaborative revitalization program designed to include 140 affordable housing units in two phases: a 70-unit Senior Development and a 70-unit family development.



Phase I, a 70-unit senior development named Parkside Senior Housing, is a \$19.5 million, 3-story, ENERGY STAR and LEED Certified low-rise building that provides 60 one-bedroom units and 10 two-bedroom units for eligible residents 55 years of age or older. Seventeen of the building's one-bedroom units are public housing (ACC) units set aside for public housing tenants and applicants, and forty-three are Low Income Housing Tax Credit-only (LIHTC) units. Of the 10 two-bedroom units, there are 3 ACC units, 6 LIHTC units, and 1 unit that houses the property superintendant. The Parkside Senior building also includes a 2,500 square foot community gathering room and 2,900 square feet of new office space for the FTHA.

Phase II is a 70-unit LEED certified family development named Parkside Family Housing. Parkside Family is a \$24.3 million project that will result in 35 duplex, two-story residences comprising a total of 4 one-bedroom units, 10 two-bedroom units, 52 three-bedroom units, and 4 four-bedroom units, all available for tenants making at or below 60% area median income.

The project also features a 2,500 square foot free-standing community center that provides space for social services and activities for family residents of the new complex, as well as laundry facilities and a management office. All rental units and the community center will be ENERGY STAR and LEED-certified.



The primary sources that financed the Parkside Redevelopment were equity from the sale of 9% low-income housing tax credits, a 20-year permanent mortgage from the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), funding from the NJHMFA Tax Credit Assistance (TCAP) and Tax Credit Exchange Programs, FTHA HUD Replacement Housing Factor Funds, and a construction loan from RPM Development II, LLC. The RPM Development Group is an experienced LIHTC developer with a depth of experience in public affordable housing development.

Ms. Davis states that “the transformation was long and risk laden but a shared vision with the Board and stakeholders coupled with an extraordinary amount of work produced affordable housing that we are proud to offer our residents—and transforming the surrounding community is a plus.”

Additionally Ms. Davis suggests that “thanks to our partners at HUD, we will be housing twice as many families and seniors as we did at the beginning of this decade, and I am able to fulfill my personal commitment to provide this community with new housing to raise families, raise spirits and raise excellence in community service.”

Finally FTHA’s Chair offers, “This development is indeed a “New Beginning” for the Franklin Township Housing Authority and the many seniors and families who call this new development, “home”.

Franklin Township Housing Authority Pictures Shown:

- Page 1           Aerial view of original Parkside Village site showing streets
- Page 2           Original Parkside Village building (1 of 20 obsolete structures)  
(1 Parkside Street, Somerset, NJ 08873)
- Page 3           Newly constructed Parkside Senior Building (70 units)  
(25 Parkside Street, Somerset, NJ 08873)
- Page 4           Phase II-Parkside Family Housing units (70 units total)