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Hill residents celebrate renewal of apartments

By Natalie Missakian
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NEW HAVEN — For 19 years Ann Boyd watched the West Street Apartments where she lived deteriorate.

Built in 1983 for low-income residents, the apartments fell to disrepair under a neglectful landlord whose large debts nearly led to a HUD foreclosure in 1998, residents said.

But Boyd and a determined group of neighbors rallied to save their homes, lobbying city and federal officials for help.

"I ran to Hill Development Corp. and said, 'you've got to save us. We're on a sinking ship'," Boyd recalled.

Those pleas led to a telephone call from Mayor John DeStefano Jr. to U.S. Rep. Rosa

DeLauro, D-3, who contacted then-U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo seeking a few weeks' extension on the foreclosure.

What resulted during those weeks was a public-private partnership between government, developers, banks and others to turn the units into a tenant-owned cooperative with the goal of increasing homeownership in the Hill.

The residents celebrated the fruit of their efforts Friday morning during a construction kickoff for the new Columbus West Apartments, staged outside a freshly renovated unit.

The 65 units are undergoing a \$4.5 million renovation, with

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a \$1.8 million HUD grant and \$910,000 in city funds contributing to the cost of the project, said Ken Regan of Regan Development Corp., the contractors working on the rehabilitation.

Tenants will be able to own the homes with no money down and the same monthly payments as their previous rents, which was 30 percent of their income, Regan said.

Photographs taped to a bedroom wall in one of the freshly renovated apartments revealed the transformation. Images of previous conditions that included holes in the walls and doors hanging off their hinges stood in stark contrast



Mia M. Malafronte/Register

Two-year-old Brianna Harris looks around one of the new apartments on Congress Avenue in New Haven Friday. Brianna and her great-grandmother Blanche Clark will be moving in to the complex when it is finished.

to the bright white walls and sparkling new appliances in one of the renovated apartments, which will undergo exterior renovations

in coming weeks.

"It really gives us something to look forward to continue our lives in the Hill," said Boyd.