

## Program to renovate neglected housing complex

By Marc Wiznia  
YDN Staff Reporter

When Ann Boyd moved into Columbus West, then known as the West Street Apartments, in 1983, it was a spacious, brand-new complex. But as the buildings fell into disrepair and a negligent landlord fell into debt, Boyd started considering other options.

**Columbus West has become the first housing complex in the state to convert from rental units into cooperative-ownership housing for existing tenants.**

"It kind of deteriorated — the interior particularly — in terms of the appliances and the floors," Boyd said. "Hopefully, it will come back up to decent living standards."

Now, Boyd hopes to eventually buy her apartment, thanks to a redevelopment program sponsored by the Regan Development Corp. and the Hill Development Corp., two anti-blight groups in the city. The 15-month, \$3.2 million project, which began last month, will restore the dilapidated 65-unit housing complex to living standards and provide current renters such as Boyd with a chance at first-time home ownership.

The complex first attracted the interest of developers in 1998, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development began foreclosing on the property because of the landlord's debts, Boyd said.

Boyd, then the president of the Columbus West Tenant Association, said she approached the Hill Development Corp. and several elected officials, looking for help.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro contacted Andrew Cuomo, who was HUD secretary at the time, and secured a three-week extension on the foreclosure, said Ashley Westbrook, a spokeswoman for DeLauro.

During that period, local development

groups, several banks and the city of New Haven joined together to lay the groundwork for turning Columbus West into a tenant-owned cooperative — in keeping with the city's priority of increasing homeownership in the Hill.

FleetBoston Financial provided an \$866,000 loan and arranged for a \$1.2 million loan from the National Cooperative Bank. The city of New Haven contributed \$955,000 in grant funds for the construction project. Additional groups, including the State of Connecticut, are reviewing further financial assistance.

That year, the Regan Development Corp. purchased the complex from the HUD for \$1 and tenants began receiving Section 8 vouchers, said Ken Regan, president of the Regan Development Corp.

Section 8 is a national HUD-administered program that offers housing aid to low-income residents.

With financial backing from regional banks and the city of New Haven totaling over \$3 million, and the support of the Regan Development Corp. and the Hill Development Corp., Columbus West has

become the first housing complex in the state to convert from rental units into cooperative-ownership housing for existing tenants, Regan said.

The first step of the four-phase project officially kicked off March 23. Five units have been completely restored to comply with current building codes, and a second block of 11 units is in the midst of renovations.

The complex will also gain three playground areas, a security system, new walkways, perimeter fencing and a resurfaced parking area.

Residents will remain at Columbus West during the work, officials said.

When construction is finished, tenants will have the option of acquiring ownership of their units by paying 30 percent of their monthly income for the maintenance of their apartments. Section 8 vouchers will pay the remainder. No down payment is involved.

"We can own our homes for the same price we were paying to rent them," said Linda Reeves, a resident of Columbus West and current president of the Columbus West Tenant Association.