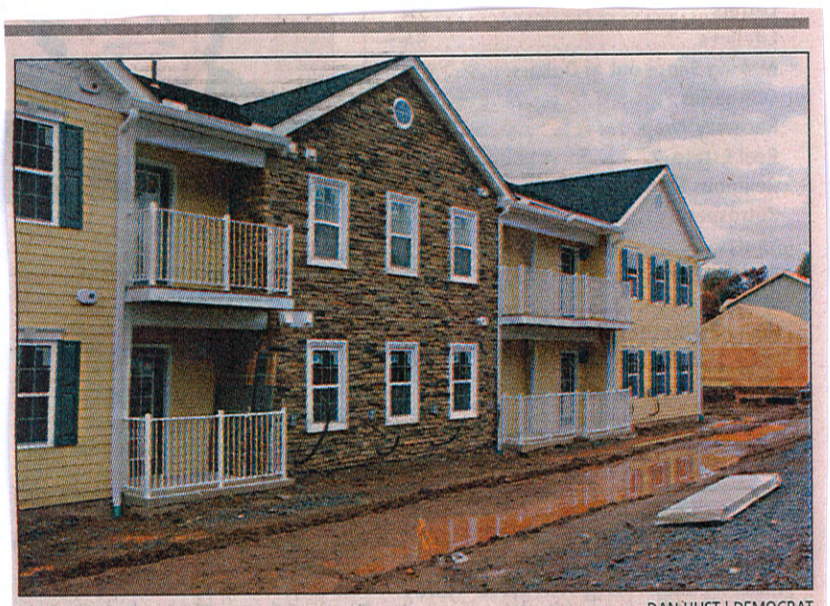
SULLIVAN COUNTY
Democrat
www.sc-democrat.com
WEEKENDER EDITION
Published twice-weekly
VOL. CXIX NO. 29 2 SECTIONS | 24 PAGES | 1 INSERT
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2009 ONE DOLLAR



DAN HUST | DEMOCRAT

The senior housing at Liberty Commons is getting ready to open in December, while the townhomes seen in back of it are expected to be open around March.

Affordable housing opening in Liberty

BY DAN HUST

LIBERTY — Housing for 72 families – including at least 24 senior citizens – is arriving this winter in Liberty.

With the encouragement and help of NYS Senator John Bonacic, Ken Regan, the builder of Horizons senior housing in Wurtsboro, and Ken Kearney, a Westchester County real estate developer, teamed up two years ago to bring to the area what many locals agree is most needed: affordable apartments.

They purchased 15 acres along Barton Road, just inside the Village of Liberty and its water/sewer districts, and set about gaining the necessary permits and financing to construct five rows of low-cost rental units.

Thanks to help from the Liberty Community Development Corporation (CDC) and state and federal financing, Regan and Kearney are nearly ready to open the $15 million complex, called Liberty Commons.

In fact, they're already taking applications.

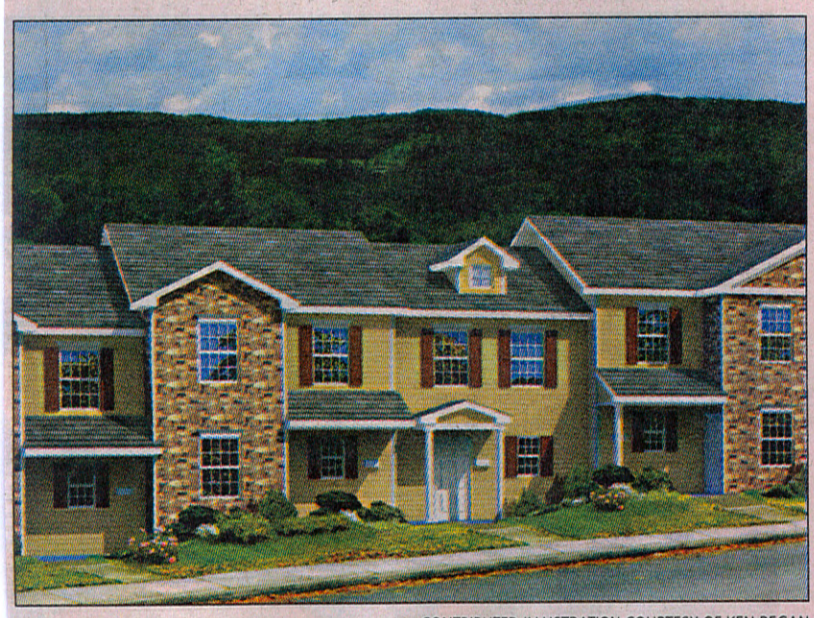
Tuesday's open house was the kickoff for that application drive, even though the complex remains under construction. And in the next two weeks, Regan expects applicants to exceed the 72 apartments available for rent.

That's heavily due to the rents: $201-$417 a month for the seniors-only apartments (55 years old and up) and $587-$666 a month for the any-age townhomes. (Utilities, which include propane forced-air heat and central air-conditioning, are a separate expense paid by the renter.)

"The best time to apply is exactly now," Regan told the attendees of the open house. "At these rents, they are going to go very quickly."

Since it's government-aided affordable housing, there are a few guidelines. To gain a one-bedroom apartment in the senior housing area (there are no larger apartments), a single senior citizen's income cannot exceed $20,700 a year, $23,650 for two people, or $26,600 for three.

PLEASE SEE **HOUSING**, 3A



CONTRIBUTED ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF KEN REGAN

When complete early next year, Liberty Commons will look like this, set amongst the woods lining Barton Road in the Village of Liberty.

HOUSING: Something affordable in Liberty

FROM FRONT PAGE

The two- and three-bedroom townhomes (there are no smaller apartments) in the rest of the complex will only be rented to people with a yearly income beneath $24,840 (1-person household), $28,380 (2-person), $31,920 (3-person), $35,460 (4-person), $38,280 (5-person) or $41,160 (6-person).

Section 8 and public assistance participants will be welcome, said Regan, but everyone will be subject to a lottery process whereby applications will be picked at random for consideration.

Those not picked in the first lottery will have priority in a second lottery a few months later, if there are vacant apartments.

Once an application is chosen for consideration, the applicant(s) will be screened via not just income verification but credit status, landlord-tenant history and criminal background check.

"We want you to get that pride in where you live," Regan explained. "It's going to be the kind of place that fosters a sense of community."

And tenants will be comfortable, too, he added. A tour of the more finished portions of the facility showed handicapped-accessible rooms throughout the senior housing area, plus decks and laundry rooms on both the first and second floors. Entry will be by a buzz-in system for security.

The non-age-restricted townhomes that will occupy the rest of the 15 acres will surround a community building and feature on-site laundry and computer facilities. Both the two- and the three-bedroom apartments will occupy two floors with wall-to-wall carpeting and possess a concrete patio offering access to a communal back yard.

Kearney's Tern Construction, through which Kearney has overseen 10 of these kinds of projects, is building the complex, with the senior housing scheduled to open in December and the townhomes sometime in mid-winter. By that time, Liberty Commons will employ two full-time and two part-time workers to oversee and maintain the facility.

If casino gaming comes into the county, Kearney said to expect more of these efforts.

"For the area to grow, the best chance it has is through gaming," he remarked.

But he's betting on the belief that right now, people are eager to find affordable housing in the area, and locals think he's right.

"I think it sets a new standard for housing in the community," observed Heinrich Strauch, executive director of the CDC, who also sees it as a springboard for tenants to eventually purchase their own homes.

"It's really a marvelous place," added Priscilla Bassett, who took the tour as a member of SLAC (Senior Legislative Action Commission) and the county's Office for the Aging Advisory Board. "It's a very impressive design, and the community it will serve is very much in need."

She did worry that transportation will be an issue for some, since businesses, doctor's offices and pharmacies are about a mile to the north and east, and the roads in between are hilly and void of sidewalks. But the developers and Strauch indicated that a solution is being worked on.

And Bassett felt it didn't dampen any potential.

"This means people can move into a safe and beautiful location," she noted.

DAN HUST | DEMOCRAT

Ken Regan, in the back, and Ken Kearney, at right, show visitors on Tuesday the amenities and space to be offered inside their new affordable housing development, Liberty Commons.