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Placid apartment builder gets state aid it was waiting on

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This conceptual rendering shows an apartment building Regan Development plans to build on Wesvalley Road, Lake Placid. (Photo provided)

LAKE PLACID — The state of New York is giving a Westchester County developer a big boost of capital to help build 60 apartments deemed affordable for local workers — something identified as being in critically short supply here.

The Wesvalley Road project is the only one in the North Country included in a new round of grants meant to fund 1,054 affordable housing units statewide. Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced the news Wednesday. This latest round, which the

state said totaled \$98 million, is part of the five-year, \$20 billion Housing and Homelessness Plan the state Legislature passed in 2017.

The state said \$3.9 million will go to the MacKenzie Outlook project, just outside the Lake Placid village line in the town of North Elba. Its apartments would house some of the estimated 2,500 athletes visiting Lake Placid for the 2023 Winter World University Games, and then would become long-term housing that Lake Placid's many hotel, restaurant and retail workers could afford.

It's being built by Regan Development of Ardsley, a company that owns about four dozen housing developments in southern New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. President Larry Regan said this state funding award is what they were waiting for in Lake Placid.

"Everything's ready to go," he said. "We're very excited."

"We're thrilled," said town Supervisor Jay Rand. "The town board is, of course, 150% behind this. We need affordable housing, and it's a great location."

Regan said the state aid, plus some private assistance, will make the startup cost low enough that Regan can charge affordable rents. The company currently expects the total development cost to be \$16.55 million, Regan's son Jeremy said Wednesday. That's down from the \$18.1 million Larry Regan estimated last year.

A housing needs assessment study last year found the town of North Elba and village of Lake Placid needed 1,534 *"workforce and affordable"* housing units. About two-thirds of that, 1,013 units, was for people who cannot afford more than \$879 per month for an apartment.

Jeremy Regan said monthly rent would range from \$528 to \$900 for a one-bedroom apartment, plus an \$87 utility allowance, and from \$633 to \$1,045 for a two-bedroom, plus a \$108 utility allowance.

"The problem with affordable housing is the land is so expensive, the cost of materials has gone up, and anything that can help the cost to make it truly affordable is a good thing," Lake Placid village Mayor Art Devlin said Wednesday.

The Lussi family, which owns the nearby Crowne Plaza hotel, is donating the 3 acres of land the MacKenzie Outlook apartments will be built on. The deed transfer will take place soon, Regan said. He said the Lussis are doing this because they, like other hospitality business owners, know how badly local housing is needed for their workers.

In the last week-and-a-half or so, Art Lussi arranged for a logger to clear trees on the lot. Regan said this was done during a seasonal window so as not to damage new spring growth.

Regan said plans for the project are done and will be filed with the town shortly. The only other thing that needs to happen before construction starts is that the state Office of Housing and Community Renewal has to do an environmental assessment. Regan said this should go quickly since much of this environmental work was already done to gain approval from the state Adirondack Park Agency and town Review Board.

Regan questioned the \$3.9 million figure the state put on the award, saying it is more complicated than a simple dollar figure, combining tax credits and a low-interest loan.

Still, he said he is grateful to all the public and private supporters of this project. He singled out the now-retired Betty Little for thanks, saying it was her idea, when she was still a state senator, to push for affordable housing in Lake Placid that could also be used for athletes competing in the University Games.

The governor's office said all the housing built with this funding will have to also provide affordable internet to low-income households and meet goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act with high energy efficiency and reduced carbon emissions.

North Elba code enforcement official Michael Orticelle said the developers still have some site preparation to do with power lines and sewer infrastructure, but the thing holding them up was waiting for the state money.

“They could get started (on construction) within a week or two,” Orticelle estimated. “These people are professionals. This is what they do. I don’t foresee any glitches in the permitting process.”