

Lowell Sun

Ground broken for Billerica elderly housing: Archdiocese-run complex will provide 40 affordable homes

By Chris Camire

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BILLERICA -- After five years of planning, officials broke ground yesterday on a 41-unit affordable elderly-housing complex behind St. Theresa of Lisieux Parish on Boston Road near the Billerica Mall.

The project, known as Rose Hill Manor, is being run by the Boston Archdiocese's Planning Office for Urban Affairs. It will be built on 3.2 acres formerly owned by the parish for a total cost of \$8.3 million.

Construction is scheduled to begin next week in hopes that residents will be able to move in next fall.

Cardinal Sean O'Malley, the archbishop of Boston, attended the ceremony and spoke about the importance of building affordable housing throughout the state.

"As Catholics, we believe a home is essential to a person's personal dignity," said O'Malley. "Working for better housing is indispensable for the health of a community's people."

Originally intended as a four-story, 56-unit building, plans were scaled back to three stories and 41 units -- 40 one-bedroom units for people aged 62 and over, and a two-bedroom manager's unit.

The project, being built under the state's Chapter 40B affordable-housing law, will move the town closer to having 10 percent of its housing stock designated as affordable, as required by state law. Six percent to 7 percent of the town's housing is currently affordable, said Rich Scanlon, Billerica's chief assessor.

This project will push that number above 7 percent, he said. When the plan was approved in April 2005, Billerica's affordable-housing stock stood at just 3.2 percent, one of the lowest in the region.

The development has received \$5.6 million from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is also being funded with more than \$2.5 million from a variety of state sources, as well as \$225,000 from the town of Billerica.

Lisa Alberghini, president of the archdiocese's Planning Office for Urban Affairs, said the project will help meet the high demand for senior housing in the area. The units will

be made available via a lottery, with local residents being given first preference for 70 percent of the units.

To be eligible for the lottery, a person or a couple must make either 50 percent or 60 percent below the state's median income, depending on the unit. Residents will be charged 30 percent of their incomes for rent.

Rose Hill Manor will include a community room, kitchen facilities and other ancillary spaces. The parish is doing additional fundraising to provide amenities that the development budget will not cover.

The Rev. Eugene Tully, pastor of St. Theresa of Lisieux Parish, said there were times he worried the project would not happen due to complications with funding. But he always kept faith.

"I always knew I had faith in the project, even if it was the size of a mustard seed sometimes," said Tully. "The support for the project townwide has been incredible. Sometimes I got down a little bit along the way, but now it's really happening."

For more information on Rose Hill Manor, call 617-209-5229.