

ZBA seems pleased with Pine Woods affordable housing

Stockbridge project meets 'critical need,' backers say

By Shawnee A. Barnes

STOCKBRIDGE—The Pine Woods affordable housing development project is gaining momentum after getting a positive response at a recent hearing by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

ZBA board member Jack Spencer said he was "pleased at the thorough presentation of the project."

Construct, Inc., a nonprofit housing service agency based in Great Barrington, owner and developer of the project, will work in collaboration with the town's Affordable Housing Committee as well as other local organizations and conservation committees.

The development will sit on 18 acres of property set off Route 102 in West Stockbridge and will consist of 30 rental units, 24 for low to moderate income families.

The \$5.4 million housing plan, which lies adjacent to the

Housatonic River and near the town's waste management treatment facility, was developed by Construct, with assistance from the Stockbridge Housing Authority, the Stockbridge Land Trust along with architectural services provided by Clark and Green of Great Barrington and landscape architect Walter Cudnohovsky.

The rental units will be managed by the Housing Authority. With 3.6 acres being developed, the remaining wooded property and wetlands will be permanently preserved. A 125 foot "buffer" zone will be created between the road and the buildings, and according to local civil engineers, the development will not interfere with traffic congestion.

According to Cara Davis, executive director of Construct, the crucial need for affordable housing in the area was identi-

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fied a few years ago, and subsequently the organization created the Affordable Housing Stabilization fund to raise money to address the issue.

Research and feasibility studies were then conducted, the results pointing to a "critical" need for affordable housing in the Berkshires. "From the studies we did, we saw that there was a real housing shortage in South Berkshire County, and soon afterwards the town of Stockbridge jumped into action to address the need."

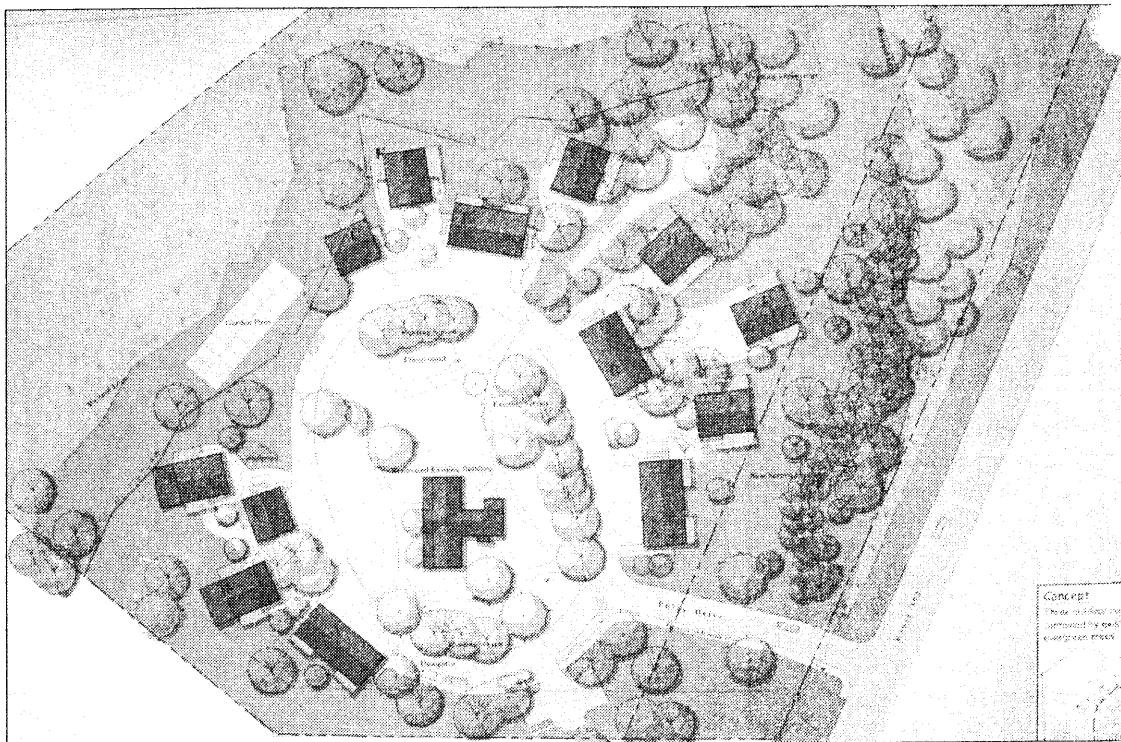
Last summer, Stockbridge town officials approached Construct to be the developer of the housing project. A site was chosen and through grants and money from Construct's Stabilization fund, the land was purchased from the town for \$253,000 last winter.

The plan includes the renovation of an existing building built in 1899, as well as the construction of 13 new modular buildings. The units will be made up of single, double and triple units, with one four-bedroom unit.

Tenants who qualify will be drawn from a lottery, with preference given to Stockbridge residents and those working in the town. The ZBA will vote on the project on June 24.

The income limits would range from \$21,000 to \$25,000 for a single person and for a family of four the median income limit would be \$28,000 to \$33,600, as established by the federal office of Housing and Urban Development.

The maximum income for a



Courtesy of Clark and Green

A perspective drawing of the building plan for the Pine Woods Community Housing Development to be located on Route 102 in West Stockbridge shows the 125-foot buffer zone of trees between the development and the highway. Of the 18 acres, 3.6 acres will be developed; rest will be preserved.

household is based on the median income for the area. The median income for a family of four in Stockbridge is \$56,000.

Sample rents would range from \$342 for one bedroom and up to a \$940 for a three bedroom.

"It's housing for the working people," exclaims Fred Bunker, President and member of the board of Construct, who volunteers his time. "It will be bank-tellers, school teachers, policemen...those who work in the community."

Under the Massachusetts Comprehensive Permit Law 40B, for which Construct is applying, if a town's housing stock

for affordable housing is less than 10 percent, a developer can apply for a comprehensive 40B permit, allowing developers to skirt certain zoning and density requirements, as long as 25 percent of the units are considered affordable.

This, says project manager Timothy Geller, makes towns vulnerable to developers. "It puts a lot of power in the hands of developers to build large developments in small towns," Geller said.

Bunker notes that, "none of the towns in South Berkshire County come close to 10 percent...the amount of affordable housing here is way under

the suggested amount."

With the Pine Woods development, Stockbridge would be the only town in South Berkshire to come close to the 10 percent threshold, raising their affordable housing stock to nearly 8.5 percent; making it more difficult for outside developers to build large settlements.

According to the town Selectmen, there has been no opposition to the project from residents of the town. "There's universal support for this project" notes Selectman Deborah McMenemy. "When it was first introduced, a few said it could bring an unsavory element to the town, but we're not seeing that now. The intention is to give young people who were born and raised here and work here the opportunity to live and work in town."

The goal, according to the involved, is to have people move in by the beginning of 2005, but according to Bunker, that's still a long way off. Efforts now lie in raising the money to fund the project on the ground.