

The Berkshire Eagle

Main menu



\$15M boost for affordable housing at Great Barrington brownfield



BENTLEYSITE-T5_14286.jpg)

The contaminated 100 Bridge St. site in Great Barrington, looking west from Bentley Avenue. The state has awarded the Community Development Corp. of South Berkshire \$15.4 million for a 45-unit affordable housing complex on the site.

HEATHER BELLOW - THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Posted Saturday, July 28, 2018 12:39 pm

By Heather Bellow, The Berkshire Eagle

GREAT BARRINGTON — It is still a fenced-in, overgrown toxic field. But by 2020, it will be all cleaned up and ready for low-cost living in the heart of town.

The developer of a long-envisioned affordable housing complex scheduled for a 2.2-acre section of a brownfield has just received a significant state grant to build 45 rental units at 100 Bridge St. and Bentley Avenue.

The Community Development Corp. of South Berkshire on Thursday announced that it has been awarded a \$15.4 million grant, which also will help pay for remediation of the entire 8-acre site.

The Bentley Apartments will include one-, two-, and three-bedroom units for households that make up to \$48,000 per year, according to the corporation's statement.

Of those, 21 will be low-income housing, for those who make 30 percent of the area median income, according to a statement from Gov. Charlie Baker's office.

"It will mean the difference between paying \$650 or less for a one-bedroom, and \$1,000 for a one-bedroom, which is the low end of the market in Great Barrington," said Timothy Geller, executive director of the corporation. "It's less than half of what rents will be in the market-rate developments that are going up [in town]."

Geller told The Eagle that construction could begin as early as early summer 2019 and will take about 15 months to complete.

The \$17.2 million project is one of 19 across the state awarded a share of \$57 million from the Department of Housing and Community Development for affordable rental housing projects.

In a statement, the administration said it wants to see even more low-cost rental housing built by 2025, and has drafted legislation to support the creation of 135,000 rental units across the state.

The Baker administration also said the state would use low-income housing tax credits and subsidy funds to support the new apartments in Great Barrington.

The grant money will help begin a renewal at a site that long has been regarded as an eyesore and a potential health hazard from the remaining dioxins and pentachlorophenol, used over the years by the New England Log Homes Co., which went bankrupt in the mid-1990s.

The corporation acquired the site in 1999, but contamination levels made for years of struggle to clean it up and attract developers.

The parcel straddles the business district and a residential neighborhood, and borders the Housatonic River to the west. Its southern border backs up near the town's sewer plant, something that, when the housing plans were unveiled in 2016, raised the ire of locals who decried such a location for low-cost family housing, and worried about toxins remaining in the ground.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection approved the final plan for site cleanup in January 2017, Geller said, noting that, after a full remediation, the apartment area will be completely uncontaminated soil. The area has to be remediated to MassDEP's highest standard.

Likewise, the riverfront also will be toxin-free, he added, while on the rest of the site, contaminated dirt will be capped. What will be built on this section is unclear; Geller said the corporation is having conversations with companies that develop continued care and assisted living facilities.

Geller said his group got the state funding after two application rounds in partnership with the Berkshire Housing Development Corp., co-sponsor of the project. The grant is supplemented by \$750,000 from the town's Community Preservation Act fund, which is designated, in part, for affordable housing and open-space projects like the riverfront redo.

"It's a very important contribution from the town," he said, for what he calls a "complicated site."

Geller said affordable housing always has been part of the vision for 100 Bridge St.

"It's been a long time coming," he added. "That site's going to be an extraordinary asset for the town."

Heather Bellow can be reached at hbellow@berkshireeagle.com or on Twitter [@BE_hbellow](https://twitter.com/BE_hbellow) and 413-329-6871.
