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Fresh start for rehabilitated building

By *PATRICK MEIGHAN* Staff Writer

NASHUA – A building that once was the city’s first orphanage has itself been adopted and converted into six apartments as part of a city agency’s fight against homelessness.

The stately home at 76 Kinsley St. had fallen into disrepair and was in foreclosure when it was bought by Harbor Homes Inc. through a federal Neighborhood Stabilization grant.

From 1906 through 1926, the house was an orphanage run by the King’s Daughters Benevolent Association. It had other owners in subsequent years until it ended up in foreclosure and in disrepair.

Then in March, it was purchased by Harbor Homes Inc. for \$250,000 through the Neighborhood Stabilization grant. Harbor Homes invested another \$300,000 of the grant money into rehabilitating the building and converting it into four one-bedroom and two two-bedroom apartments, with work expected to be completed this fall.

The money was part of a \$2.09 million grant that Harbor Homes received for this purpose. Two buildings have been finished, one other in addition to the Kinsley Street home is now undergoing work and Harbor Homes expects to close on a fifth property by the end of August, said Scott Slattery, who manages the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

“I’ve obligated just about every dime,” Slattery said of the grant, issued through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Harbor Homes expects to reapply for additional money next year, Slattery said.

The properties must be either condemned or abandoned.

“We don’t have a lot of abandoned houses in Nashua, but we do have a large foreclosure problem,” Slattery said.

The city of Nashua also received Neighborhood Stabilization money, using its grant to purchase the fire-damaged Lebine Building on Pine Street. The city plans to raze the building and establish a park at the location.

Harbor Homes will maintain ownership of the buildings it bought and rent out the 13 units to low-income families and individuals. Under terms of the grant, Harbor Homes is required for 25 years to rent the units only to people who make 50 percent or below the average medium income for the area. The average varies depending on the size of the household.

However, Slattery expects the renovated properties to be rented out to low-income people long

after the 25-year period expires.

"We're keeping these buildings in perpetuity," Slattery said, noting the long waiting list in Nashua of people needing assistance for housing.

"We'll continue to put our clients in them," Slattery said.

Harbor Homes clients pay rent based on 30 percent of their adjusted gross income, Slattery said. Some clients use Section 8 vouchers for rent, he said.

Through the grant, Harbor Homes targeted properties in the distressed Tree Streets and French Hill neighborhoods.

"We're investing in these neighborhoods. We're investing in these old houses," Slattery said.

Other properties are at 114 Palm St., bought for \$177,900 and renovated with \$125,000; 123 Palm St., bought for \$114,900 and renovated with \$125,000; and 4 Hamilton St., bought for \$225,000 and renovated for \$100,000.

Harbor Homes is scheduled to close on a house at 17 Orange St. on Aug. 31 for \$152,000. The house needs extensive structural work, and Slattery estimates that it might cost \$200,000 to renovate.

Work on properties have included installing siding, insulation and sprinkler systems and completing redoing electrical work. Units have hardwood floors because the grant prohibits carpets. The extent of renovation needed varied. The home on Orange Street, for example, had recently been remodeled inside and only needed exterior work, Slattery said.

"These are the perfect apartments for my clients," Slattery said of the units in general.

The units don't require a lot of maintenance and are safe, secure and clean, he said.

On July 30, Gary Dube and his four children moved into 123 Palm St., which had been renovated for a single-family home. They had been living in an apartment on Bower Street that was 22 feet by 24 feet, he said.

"That's the size of a two-car garage," he said. "We were on top of each other."

Dube said of renting the home, "This is like night and day."

"My 16-year-old was at the end of her rope, She has calmed down immensely since she moved in her," he said.

Dube said he is disabled and has worked for the past three years as a school crossing guard, earning less than \$100 a week.

Some of the homes have historic value, and Slattery has worked with the state Historic Preservation Office.

The interior of the former orphanage had little historic value because it had been redone so many times, Slattery said. However, the state agency asked that its front porch facing Kinsley Street be restored, even though that meant sealing lead paint and other work, he said.

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