

IMPLEMENTATION
OF
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT
SMALL CITIES PROGRAM
FOR
32 UNIT CONGREGATE ELDERLY HOUSING COMPLEX
FOR THE
TOWN OF POMFRET

PETER HUCKINS

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Pomfret has a population of about 3,000 people, with about one third of that population being over 62 years of age. In 1989 a group of senior citizens approached the Town government expressing their concern over the lack of elderly housing in Pomfret. Showing a strong desire to remain in the Town of Pomfret and the realization that there is a two to three year waiting period of acceptance to public assisted elderly housing in surrounding towns, they asked the Town's First Selectman to help them with the situation.

The Town did some research to discover, through property tax records, that indeed over thirty percent of the community was over 62 years of age. They proceeded to conduct a random survey of senior citizens to find out if there was enough interest in an elderly housing complex and senior center. The results of the survey showed an enthusiastic response in the affirmative for both projects. The Town approached Northeast Connecticut Community Development Corporation (NCCDC), a CDC that serves their Town along with nineteen others in the area, to explore the possibility of applying for State and Federal aid to make such a project a reality. Pomfret with professional and technical support from NCCDC applied for and was awarded a two year grant from the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program - FY90/91.

NCCDC is administering the Town of Pomfret's Small Cities Community Development Block Grant that has been awarded for the acquisition of a site that is suitable for the construction of a thirty-two unit elderly congregate housing complex as well as

senior center. The Block Grant funds will also be used to facilitate the creation of a scattered-site community land trust of five to ten single family houses acquired from the housing vacated by elderly persons who move into the new elderly housing complex. These land trust homes will be made available as rental and ownership opportunities for low to moderate income families.

The two year grant will total \$880,000 of which in year one \$320,000 will be allocated towards acquisition of a 21.3 acre site on which the housing complex and senior center will be built. Also part of the first year award will be allocated to obtain the services of professional engineers and architects during the predevelopment stage of the project. The remaining funds from the first year will go to write-down the cost of the five to ten scattered-site community land trust.

I joined the staff at NCCDC (internship) that provided technical assistance to the Pomfret Community Housing Corporation (PCHC) on Board Development and administrative process for developing a 32 unit Elderly Congregate Housing Facility. My duties included; assisting in establishing the PCHC by helping with the Certification of Incorporation, preparing application for 501 (c)(3) status and adopting By-Laws; CDBG project implementation including preparation of Environmental Review and Assessment, pro forma development and operating budgets, market research, architectural RFP and selection process as well as community outreach.

It was quite clear after being involved six months with this project that things were not going to move smoothly as I had

anticipated. We had hoped to close on the land by April, 1991 because PCHC had purchased a six month option on the proposed site in November, 1990. But the Connecticut Department of Housing would not release the acquisition funds until construction financing for the project was secured. At this point in time construction financing is still not secured and acquisition funds have not been released. Thus far about thirty thousand dollars has been spent on predevelopment services such as architectural and engineering. PCHC has a real chance of losing the property to another developer and will consequently lose those funds.

There are several reasons why construction financing has been continually delayed. All applications for grants have been delayed in Connecticut during 1991 because of the fiscal problems of the State of Connecticut. The State realizing an acute shortage of revenue, due to the economic situation, delayed bonding for the first six months of the year. This pushed back all projects for at least that amount of time. On top of that, the State of Connecticut could not reach an agreement on the budget by June 1991 and the State went without one until September. The Department of Housing, uncertain about their jobs and their future, did very little to process things along during this period. This lack of action further delayed funding for housing development.

Even without the State's fiscal problems, trying to get funding from DOH is a slow painstaking process. The reviewing process for Housing projects is inefficient at best. They had one division of Architectural reviewers that would handle all the plans submitted to the Department. A reviewer would see plans for an elderly housing

project on one day and a single family development on the next. There was no sense of consistency with this system. Architectural Firms hired by the Towns would get different types of comments in respect to their submitted plans, depending on which reviewer was assigned to them. Each reviewer would scrutinize the architectural plans in a different manner. This inconsistency caused many delays and frustration between Towns and the Department of Housing.

The Department of Housing has realized the inefficiency and has begun, at this point in time, to change its ways. They now have several different divisions for reviewing plans, with each division concentrating on one type of housing development. They have a elderly division, day care division, single family housing division, etc. The new system should help reduce problems which in turn will hopefully reduce delays.

Because of such delays and the uncertainty of getting any funding at all, the creation of the community land trust was put on the back burner. I regret not having a chance to work on this phase of the project, but due to the circumstances it was out of my control.

At this point in time we are still waiting for the acceptance of the preliminary architectural plans for the project. Upon acceptance the Architects will submit basic drawings to DOH. If the basic drawings pass this phase the project is assured funding and the project will take a significant step forward to becoming reality.