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Energy efficient affordable housing under construction

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West Elmwood Housing Development Corp.'s (WEHDC) newest affordable housing project, Westfield Commons, incorporates energy efficient features with the help of a grant from the RI Economic Development Corp.'s (RIEDC) Renewable Energy Fund. Westfield Commons is the second phase of a multi-phase redevelopment program for the former Rau Fastener Complex in the West End neighborhood of Providence and is anticipated to be completed in late 2010. The project renovates a former industrial building to create 16 affordable living units and 4,000 s/f of commercial space that will become WEHDC offices. The RIEDC grant monies are being used to install solar photovoltaic panels and the homes will meet Energy Star guidelines.

The West End neighborhood has voiced a need for adequate affordable rental family space. By undertaking this project, and constructing units with 3 bedrooms, 1-1/2 baths with up to 1,300 s/f of living space, WEHDC hopes to alleviate some families living in cramped conditions. By meeting Energy Star guidelines, WEHDC has created homes that are not only new, lead-safe, and affordable, but also energy efficient, to help with monthly expenses. The solar photovoltaic panels are expected to meet approximately 80% of the electricity demand for the common areas and commercial space.

WEHDC's redevelopment plan for the former Rau Fastener property is highlighted as one of five case studies in the Rhode Island Urban Design Manual for Urban Environmental Design. This Brownfields property consists of approximately five acres of vacant land and industrial buildings in the West End neighborhood of Providence. Phase 1 of the redevelopment, Westfield Lofts completed in December 2005, consisted of renovating the former mill industrial complex, which has contributed significantly to the revitalization of the community.

Because of the property's historic industrial use, environmental site investigations and remedial actions are being performed by Woodard & Curran in cooperation with the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). Although data from site investigations revealed that there is no completed vapor migration pathway and no groundwater samples exceeded the Remediation Regulations Upper Concentration Limits for any compound in either soil or groundwater, a subslab depressurization system (SSVS) is being installed under the entire building foundation as an extra level of protection. The project has received a Remedial Approval Letter and an Order of Approval from RIDEM.

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