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Urban Edge renovates fire damaged Wardman Apartments; pursues LEED for Homes certification

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A six-alarm fire on October 17, 2011 devastated Wardman Apartments, one of 16 affordable housing developments developed and co-owned by Urban Edge. There were no fatalities due to the courageous actions of residents and firefighters. But 13 people were injured and more than 75 residents became homeless.

Urban Edge was able to clean up some of the affected units to allow for a number of families to return to their homes by the end of 2011. However, because the fire required immediate demolition of the 71 Westminster Ave. section of the building where 12 families lived, those families were temporarily housed in other units elsewhere.

The reconstruction of 71 Westminster Ave. is now complete and the families have returned. In keeping with Urban Edge's sustainability standards, the new building exemplifies the best in green affordable housing.

Urban Edge made a concerted effort to minimize the environmental impact of the reconstruction, electing to pursue a certification for the building under the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Homes program. This program addresses many components that contribute to a high-performance, sustainable building including location and access to amenities, overall site and landscape design, energy and water efficiency, selection of building materials, indoor air quality, occupant comfort, and holistic green living. The design and construction team involved on this project is pursuing a platinum level certification under the LEED for Homes program- the highest level available.

The LEED for Homes (LEED H) rating system was initially developed and released in 2008 and is tailored to the design, construction, and operation considerations for residential buildings. LEED H provides guidance to project teams in their effort to design and build greener homes. A unique component of the LEED H program is the third-party verification that every project receives, to ensure that the building is actually being built to the LEED standard it was designed to. This is an important quality control measure and results in a higher performing, greener building. To learn more about the LEED for Homes program, visit <http://www.usgbc.org>.

71 Westminster Ave. is located within walking and biking distance to public transportation and a number of other local amenities that tenants can take advantage of without a car, which encourages both healthier living and reduction in overall vehicle use.

The environmental impact of all construction-related activities was minimized. The waste management plan resulted in over 75% of construction waste being recycled, while the panelized wall design allowed for off-site construction to reduce installation time, minimize field-constructed deficiencies, and reduce waste produced onsite. All stormwater inlets within the project vicinity were protected from sedimentation and pollution from site-generated debris.

The building's green design features encompass building systems and components and reduce energy usage, provide a comfortable, healthy indoor environment, and facilitate greener living for tenants. Features include increased air sealing to the exterior and between neighboring units, high efficiency heating equipment, filtered and tempered supply air provided through an Energy Recovery Ventilator, water-efficient plumbing fixtures, energy efficient appliances, high-efficiency lighting, local and recycled content materials, and interior finishes with low-VOC content. The building's landscaping is composed of plantings native to the northeastern climate and classified as "drought tolerant" to minimize the need for excessive watering. When water is required for irrigation, it is supplied from storm water collected in a catch basin in the basement, removing the burden on city water systems.

Two years after a devastating and traumatic fire, 12 families have sparkling new homes and the community has an attractive new asset that sets the standard for green affordable housing. On November 16 the Wardman community, Urban Edge, elected officials, first responders and other guests gathered for the ribbon-cutting.

The mission of Urban Edge, now in its 40th year, is to help develop and sustain stable, healthy and diverse communities. Urban Edge accomplishes this mission through the development and preservation of high quality, affordable rental and ownership housing. Urban Edge's educational and recreational facilities and programs increase opportunities for families and individuals to own or rent homes they can afford, to improve their quality of life, and to build generational wealth. Green Housing at Urban Edge (GreenHUE), a strategic effort to design and implement green affordable housing development and operations at Urban Edge, is an important part of this mission. Urban Edge is an affiliated agency of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley and is one of 240 member organizations nationwide that make up NeighborWorks America.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540