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Omni Development, Wingate Cos., and RIHousing break ground on 79-units at Joseph Caffey Apartments and Jordan Caffey Townhomes

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Providence, RI U.S. senator Jack Reed, governor Dan McKee, lieutenant governor Sabina Matos and mayor Jorge Elorza joined Omni Development Corp., Wingate Companies, RIHousing, funding and community partners for a groundbreaking to celebrate the development of 79 new rental homes at Joseph Caffey Apartments and Jordan Caffey Townhomes.

The project includes the redevelopment of the former Barbara Jordan II development into a total of 79 units of affordable housing. The former Barbara Jordan II development included 26 blighted and vacant, two- and three-story apartment buildings situated on scattered sites. The development was foreclosed upon by the U.S. Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

and the property was transferred to RIHousing in 2018; buildings had been vacant since 2015.

“We’ve got an older housing stock in Rhode Island, and this project demonstrates that great things can happen when we’re willing to invest in the future of housing, all while maintaining historic affordability and bringing new amenities to the community. This development will not only create more affordable units in the neighborhood, but also bring in energy efficiency, community service providers, central laundry, community meeting space, and on-site management,” said senator Reed.

“I am excited to see this type of momentum in expanding our housing stock in Rhode Island,” said governor McKee. “This development project will transform vacant space into a home for 79 families, helping us meet the housing needs of our residents. As we know, access to housing means more than just having a roof over our heads – it leads to increased opportunities for educational success, career pathways, and overall quality of life. I am grateful to senator Reed, RIHousing and all of our partners who helped secure this investment to boost our affordable housing supply, transform the Upper South Providence neighborhood, and reinvigorate our economy.”

RIHousing and community partners kicked off an eight-month community engagement process, beginning in July 2018. Local residents, anchor institutions, neighborhood organizations and other stakeholders participated in a full range of public engagement activities over the eight-month period. Participants worked together to create a vision for the redevelopment of the properties and surrounding area.

“These apartments and townhouses will not only provide our capital city with much needed new affordable housing inventory, but also revitalize a once vibrant neighborhood in the heart of upper South Providence,” said lieutenant governor Matos. “I applaud the efforts of everyone involved to get us here, especially councilwoman Mary Kay Harris who has long championed the need to revitalize this area for low-income housing.”

The community engagement process sought to engage in a meaningful dialogue about how the redevelopment of Barbara Jordan II properties could improve the community; develop a vision that will improve the quality of life for future residents, as well as current residents of Upper South Providence; prepare a Developer Request for Proposals (RFP) that incorporates feedback from the Community Engagement Process; and solicit a developer to successfully implement the redevelopment of Barbara Jordan II. Key takeaways from the engagement process were used to craft a Request for Proposals for redevelopment of the site.

“Barbara Jordan II is perhaps the most meaningful redevelopment that we have worked on during my time in office,” said mayor Elorza. “It had been a blight on our city for too long, and now it will be a model for what is possible when you take a holistic approach to neighborhood revitalization. This project has been a priority of mine and I am thankful that RIHousing and other stakeholders have prioritized it as well.”

Following completion of the community engagement process, RIHousing released an RFP to designate a qualified developer for the redevelopment of Barbara Jordan II. Following rigorous staff evaluation of developer proposals and the review and unanimous approval from an outside advisory committee, final developer selection took place at the June 2020 RIHousing Board of Commissioners meeting. Omni Development and Wingate Holdings (an affiliate of Wingate Companies) were selected as co-developers of the site.

Providence deputy majority leader Mary Kay Harris said, “I want to thank RIHousing for listening to the needs and desires of my community. For too long, developers would come into our neighborhood and not ask us – the residents – what we needed or what we wanted to see. I believe

that our community has had a chance to share our voices, and I look forward to this next chapter. This project is going to be a beautiful representation of what our community needs and will change the quality of so many people's lives."

"There's no place like home. safe, suitable, warm affordable and finally yours," said representative Anastasia Williams.

Financing for the redevelopment project includes an array of funding sources, including both 4% and 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) issued by RIHousing that were acquired by the National Equity Fund (NEF) to generate the equity necessary to build the development. In addition to the equity, construction and permanent financing were provided by RIHousing, Citizens Bank, and the Providence Redevelopment Authority. This financing will support the construction of 79 affordable rental units in 11 buildings.

"In order to address the housing crisis in the State of Rhode Island, we must be willing to develop properties are not always easy," said Sharon Morris, executive director of Omni Development. "We are proud to have worked with the community and our partners to get to this point, and we look forward to delivering much needed affordable housing. Where a person lives effects their quality of life and it is my hope that this transformative development will have a positive impact on our families and the entire neighborhood."

"Wingate is proud to have been selected, alongside our long-time client, Omni Development Corp., to complete this development. It will be a transformational affordable housing community, designed to the most current standards of energy efficiency, injecting new life into the neighborhood where our residents will raise their families," said Mark Schuster, CEO of Wingate.

Demolition of vacant buildings has begun as the developers work to clear the site for the new construction. Once the sites are cleared, buildings will be replaced with a new four-story mid-rise building containing 54 units and a series of two-story townhouse-style buildings containing 25 units. The development will feature a combination of one-four bedroom rental units ranging from 587 s/f to 1,433 s/f. Future residents will enjoy a community center featuring a computer lab intended to provide technology resources and training for its residents.

"Today is a celebration of hope, of brighter futures and dreams for the residents that will call Caffey Apartments and Townhomes home," said Juana Matias, HUD New England regional administrator. "HUD is proud to join our Rhode Island partners in helping to deliver healthy, affordable housing for Providence families."

Construction will soon commence on new buildings in Upper South Providence, which will provide safe and comfortable housing opportunities for families and have a transformational impact on their lives and on the broader community.

"This momentous groundbreaking epitomizes how government and developers like Omni and Wingate can successfully work with communities to start addressing past housing practices and

disinvestment that have resulted in long-lasting inequities for communities that call the south side home," said deputy secretary for housing Josh Saal. "We need not accept history as a set of immoveable barriers or the challenges before us as insurmountable. I look forward to continuing our work with RIHousing, our development partners, and communities across the state to create a future where all Rhode Islanders have access to secure, safe, and accessible housing."

Once completed, Jordan Caffey Townhomes will have 40 rent-restricted apartments, which will serve households earning at or below 60% of area median income (AMI). Joseph Caffey Apartments will be comprised of 39 rent-restricted apartments serving households earning 50%-80% AMI. In addition, Providence Housing Authority will provide a rental subsidy for 16 units, serving households earning below 30% AMI.

"As we break ground on these new homes, we are beginning a new chapter for South Providence and the residents that live here," said Carol Ventura, executive director of RIHousing. "We are building on a process begun several years ago to transform this neighborhood and bring the vision created throughout the community engagement process to life. The demand for affordable housing in Providence is extremely high and these units will be indispensable for the community and a fitting legacy to the leaders they are named after."

The development is named for Joseph Caffey, who served as the president and CEO of Omni Development Corp. for 24 years. He was the former director of Housing Rehabilitation for the city of Providence and was the president of the National Leased Housing Association based in Washington, D.C. In naming this project, the development team also wanted to preserve a link to Barbara Jordan for whom this project was originally named. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan was one of the first U.S. Congresswomen, a leader in the civil rights movement and a passionate advocate for all Americans.