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WinnDevelopment breaks ground on \$85m affordable housing project

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New Britain, CT City officials joined WinnDevelopment executives to break ground on an \$85 million project to transform an historic manufacturing complex near the city's downtown into a 154-unit apartment community for affordable housing and workforce households.

The adaptive reuse project will convert the four remaining buildings in the 115-year-old Landers, Frary & Clark plant into 79 one-bedroom, 59 two-bedroom and 16 three-bedroom apartments geared toward young professionals, middle-income households and fixed-income seniors. The historic exterior of the brick buildings will be preserved, while the interior space is adapted into apartments for households earning 30, 50, 60 and 80% of Area Median Income.

Located within walking distance of the city's downtown and mass transit services, the site consists of a six-story structure and a single-story wing. The structure is connected by a closed skybridge to an adjacent building that is part of the same historic complex.

The completed building will feature a 150-kilowatt solar array to provide energy for the community, as well as electric vehicle charging stations. To enhance the project's ongoing energy efficiency and significantly reduced carbon emissions, thoughtful design will ensure improved thermal performance, through new windows and insulation, and a healthy and comfortable place to live, with high performance ventilation, Energy Star appliances, low-flow plumbing and high-efficiency heating and cooling systems.

Amenities will include a fitness room, community room, game room, flex workspaces, outdoor

seating areas, 230 parking spaces, and on-site leasing, maintenance, and management offices.

Keith Construction, of Canton, MA, is the general contractor, with JCJ Architecture of Hartford, serving as the architect. Collective Design Associates, of Westport, CT, and Langan Engineering and Environmental Services, of New Haven, CT, are providing engineering services.

Numerous public and private partners are providing financing for development of the 200,000 s/f complex, which will be known as Ellis Street Commons when it is ready for occupancy in early 2025. The construction effort will generate an estimated 196 jobs and \$33 million in economic impact in the area.

The Connecticut Department of Housing (DOH) provided \$4 million in funding through the FLEX Funding Program and an additional \$3.85 million in federal funds through the National Housing Trust Fund. DOH will also provide 11 Section 8 vouchers for future residents. “The Department of Housing is thrilled to support this project that will provide 154 units of much-needed affordable housing in New Britain,” said DOH commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno. “Transforming a historic manufacturing building into affordable housing helps maintain the character of the city while meeting the housing needs of its residents.”

The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) provided tax credits, tax-exempt bonds and Opportunity Funds for the project. “This property is an outstanding example of the power of state and federal investments in our communities,” said Nandini Natarajan, CHFA’s CEO-executive director. “With these important investments, hundreds of Connecticut residents will have access to attractive, affordable places to live in the city of New Britain. I am proud that CHFA was able to serve as partner in this remarkable effort.”

In addition, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development provided a Brownfield Loan to support environmental remediation work at the former industrial site.

The U.S. National Park Service and Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) provided federal and state historic tax credits. “The adaptive reuse of the Landers, Frary & Clark plant is a tangible real-world example of how important historic preservation, and the historic rehabilitation tax credit, in particular, can be to solving issues such as affordable housing and underused industrial building stock that are common to most Connecticut municipalities. SHPO is so proud to see these character-defining buildings in New Britain repurposed to serve the needs of the community,” said Elizabeth Shapiro, Director of Arts, Preservation and Museums for SHPO.

The City of New Britain Department provided \$950,000 in HOME Funds to support the development. “The redevelopment of this historical Landers, Frary & Clark factory building into housing for elderly and disabled residents is helping fill a critical need within our community,” said mayor Erin Stewart. “This building is a symbol of the manufacturing industry that helped build our City’s past but will now be transformed into a beautiful housing option for some of our most vulnerable populations, allowing

it to serve as a critical piece of building our City's bright future for all our residents.”

Bank of America is providing a construction loan and more than half of the project's funding through its investment in the federal low-income housing and historic tax credits generated by the development. “Ellis Street Commons is tangible evidence of the important impact that affordable and middle-income housing can have on the residents and neighborhoods of New Britain,” said Joe Gianni, president of Bank of America Greater Hartford. “WinnDevelopment had a vision to create a unique housing experience for resident while contributing to a growing, vibrant community.”

BlueHub Capital, a non-profit community development financing organization based in Boston, has provided a bridge loan, while Eversource, an energy provider for Connecticut, is purchasing the state historic tax credits involved in the development, as well as providing energy rebates related to its environmental sustainability features.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2022, the development site was once home to Landers, Frary & Clark, one of the first manufacturers of electric appliances in the United States, including the popular “Universal” brand of appliances, as well as percolators, irons, and waffle irons. During both World Wars, production swiftly shifted from housewares to military items, including gun mounts during World War II. The company ended production in 1965 and the current development site has remained largely vacant for decades.

“This year marks our 40th anniversary of developing affordable housing in Connecticut, so the start of work on this development is a great way to celebrate that milestone,” said Larry Curtis, president and managing partner of WinnDevelopment. “We’re pleased to partner with state and local officials, as well as private funders, to preserve and convert this historic remnant of New Britain’s industrial past into a modern apartment community that will serve the working households fueling the city’s future.”

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