

## At Windrush Commons in Great Barrington, the units are full and the waiting list is long

By Heather Bellow, The Berkshire Eagle  
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Visitors take a tour of one of the units at the Windrush Commons housing complex in Great Barrington after an official ribbon cutting ceremony for the development.  
STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

GREAT BARRINGTON — At the town's newest affordable housing complex, every front door opens to the outside, and a central green common at the edge of a fairytale woodland is about to sport a natural playground for the little ones.

It's looking good here at Windrush Commons, declared a few dozen community members, town and state officials who attended a ribbon cutting celebration on Friday morning for the 49-unit complex off South Main Street.



The Windrush Commons' 49 affordable housing apartments are all spoken-for, after the complex had over 300 applicants before construction was complete.  
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They admired its design of a dignified home for those struggling to make a living. It's not surprising, then, that all the units are full, and a waiting list of 163 people and families is pressing.

It's a story playing out across much of Berkshire County amid a housing squeeze and high rent and home prices.

Built by Allegrone Construction, Windrush has one- to three-bedroom apartments and townhomes spread over two acres, with some being accessible to those who use wheelchairs. Ten of the apartments were reserved for families who find themselves without a place to live or who are about to lose one.

The \$19 million project was jointly spearheaded by the Community Development Corp of South Berkshire and Way Finders Inc. a Springfield-based nonprofit dedicated to housing needs.

Building affordable housing isn't easy during the best of times, Way Finders CEO Keith Fairey told The Eagle, and this one was well-shaken by the pandemic.

But now tenants, some of whom moved here on Friday, are moving here in waves as groups of units are finished.

Kim Soules moved here from Pittsfield two weeks ago with her fiancé and four children, who attend schools in Sheffield.

“I was driving 45 minutes each way to take my kids to school,” Soules said as children poured out of her car in the parking lot after arriving home. Soules grew up in the area and has family here, and now she can afford to live in South County once again. “It’s gorgeous,” she said of Windrush. “We love it.”



Mickey Maki, right, owns a home next to the new Windrush Commons affordable housing complex in Great Barrington where her mother, Marguerita Millar, is on the waiting list for an apartment.

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Marguerita Millar, who also said she likes the looks of things, has her name on that waiting list for a unit. She toured one of the townhomes during the event and is hopeful but not unrealistic. “I’m on the bottom,” she said she suspected of her position on the list.

Right now she is living in a home next door with her daughter’s family and taking care of her grandchild. The whole family moved to town from Brockton looking for a better place to live and work, for green grass under their feet and a garden to grow.

“I can go outside all by myself and pick kale,” said Wyla Maki, 3, leaning on her mother, Mickey Maki. Mickey Maki says she feels “blessed” by the entire situation and a future where her mother can have a lovely and safe place to live next door.



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Those who made all this happen said they aren't going to stop creating more housing that will lift people up.

Carol Bosco Baumann, the CDC's executive director, said the nonprofit will be scattering affordable housing around, varying the type and scale. Board President Jim Harwood, echoing this, said the CDC is on the cusp of buying a bed and breakfast, for instance, to convert to workforce housing. While community generosity has been key, Harwood said, so has Town Hall.

Indeed, homes could not have been built here without a zoning change that would allow families to live here, said Christopher Rembold, town planner and assistant town manager. This used to be designated a general business area.



A ribbon cutting ceremony is held for the Windrush Commons housing development, which is an affordable housing complex in Great Barrington.  
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"Who wouldn't want to live here," said Jeffrey Cohen, a developer and former CDC board member who was key to securing the property. He praised the color-scheme and layout by Boston architect Nick Elton, who designed Bostwick Gardens across the street.

Lawmakers, speaking at the event, said the struggle to afford housing has been the "number one" issue for constituents. Housing waiting lists are hundreds — sometimes thousands — deep, said state Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox. Both he and state Sen. Paul Mark, D-Becket, told the crowd they will keep pressing Beacon Hill for more state funds that will help solve the problem.