

# The New York Times

April 4, 2010

## Real Estate

IN THE REGION/Westchester

### Builders Ponder a Housing Mandate

By ELSA BRENNER

AS Westchester tries to comply with a federal settlement mandating the creation of affordable housing in mostly white, well-to-do communities, the construction of low-cost units continues in low-income, racially mixed areas.

But the outlook for more such housing in the poorer cities is uncertain. Budget constraints and the focus of the settlement, which calls for below-market-rate housing in affluent towns like Bedford and Scarsdale that have little or none, may limit county financing for affordable projects in cities like Mount Vernon, Peekskill, and Yonkers, developers say.

Westchester officials said through Donna Greene, a spokeswoman for Rob Astorino, the county executive, that "Everything is currently under review based on both the housing settlement and the county's ongoing budget issues."

Builders of affordable housing are concerned and apprehensive.

"There simply are not that many sources of funding for this kind of housing," said Ron Moelis, a developer of low-cost housing in Yonkers. "To lose one of them would make future projects that much more difficult."

Steven Brown, the president of a nonprofit with a \$35 million project for 105 affordable housing units in Yonkers on its drawing board, is also worried. Mr. Brown said construction "would not be feasible" without the county's anticipated contribution of \$6.75 million. Westchester has indicated in the past that it would contribute to the project, but no formal agreement has been signed.

Mr. Brown's organization, the Greyston Foundation of Yonkers, has tapped into a mix of city, county, state and federal financing to build about 200 units of below-market-rate housing in Yonkers since 1991.

Mr. Moelis's organization, L&M Development Partners of Larchmont and Manhattan, specializes in affordable housing and



ROB BENNETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**ROUTES TO HOMEOWNERSHIP** Arthur Trotman of Mount Vernon is a participant in a rent-to-own program. Below, 330 Riverdale Avenue in Yonkers, affordable housing, is now going up.

has built more than 10,000 units in the New York metropolitan area in the past decade.

In Yonkers, L&M is constructing a \$58 million 137-unit complex to which the county has committed to contributing \$7.6 million. Other sources of financing for the project, 330 Riverdale Avenue, include about \$25 million from the state and \$20 million from the Bank of America, its equity partner in the deal.

The studio, one-, two- and three-bedroom units on Riverdale Avenue will be available to renters earning 50 to 60 percent of the area's median income. The median for Westchester — the third-richest county in New York after Putnam and Nassau — is \$79,881, as of the 2000 census, which is the most recent information available, according to Adam Glantz, a spokesman for the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. By contrast, in Yonkers the median annual income is \$53,233, according to HUD.

Construction on the L&M project is about one-third completed.

The county is struggling to meet even the initial requirements of the housing settlement, which was reached between Westchester and the federal government in August following a three-year legal battle with the



JACK COOGAN/OCV ARCHITECTS

Anti-Discrimination Center in Manhattan.

The agreement calls for the county to spend more than \$50 million of its own money, in addition to other funds, to build or acquire 750 homes or apartments, 630 of which must be provided in towns and villages where black residents constitute 3 percent or less of the population and Hispanic residents make up less than 7 percent. The 120 other spaces must meet different criteria for cost and ethnic concentration. The county has seven years to complete the construction or acquisition of the affordable housing.

The first requirement of the settlement, to submit an acceptable plan for enacting it, was due at the beginning of the year, but in February, a federal monitor rejected the county's proposal as

vague and lacking in accountability and enforcement.

The county's existing commitment to affordable housing, made before the housing order, amounts to about \$14.1 million for five projects: two in Yonkers (one of them is the Riverdale Avenue complex); and one each in Greenburgh, Port Chester and Peekskill, according to the county Planning Department.

Like the Greyston Foundation's proposal, the demolition and rebuilding of Cottage Place Gardens, a 256-unit public housing project in Yonkers, may also not come to fruition if county financing is unavailable. Jan A. Brodie, a vice president and regional director of the project's developers, Community Builders of Boston, said that because of the uncertainty of this and other sources of financing, if the new complex does go forward, it will be built in phases. Costs for the project have not been determined.

And while affordable housing developers dependent on county financing worry about future projects for working-class and blue-collar workers, the Cheshire Group, a developer working in Mount Vernon, is focusing on still others who are often unable to afford housing in Westchester: "pink-collar professionals," defined by Jenifer Steig, a principal of the group, as secretaries, administrators, teachers and nurses.

The real estate investment company has bought 101 co-ops in Quincy Park Avenue, a 50-year-old seven-story residential building, from the LeFrak Organization and is marketing them on a rent-to-own basis.

"Without this program, I could never afford to own something," said one tenant, Arthur Trotman, an electrician for the New York City Transit Authority who earns about \$60,000 a year. Mr. Trotman is hoping at the end of 12 months to parlay half of his \$1,450 monthly rent at Quincy Park Avenue into a down payment for a one-bedroom co-op. "It won't be a castle," he said, "but finally I'm going to have something to call my own."