100 new homes ahead of schedule

By MICHELLE BRUNETTI POST Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, August 10, 2014 5:43 pm

EGG HARBOR CITY — Conifer Realty’s 100-unit affordable senior housing project on Philadelphia Avenue is 30 percent complete and probably will be finished earlier than expected, a company executive said last week.

“The foundation work is done. Most of the utilities are in, and we have framed up to the third floor,” said Senior Vice President Charles Lewis. He estimated the new opening date for April or May, rather than June as originally predicted.

The company still expects to send out applications in January to those who have put their names on an interest list.

Lewis said the building’s fourth floor will be framed and the roof and windows installed in about a month, freeing the workers from weather concerns.

Mayor Lisa Jiampetti said the project has moved smoothly.

“I’m expecting it to be at capacity by the time it opens, which is a good thing for Egg Harbor City,” Jiampetti said.

If all the units are occupied, in the first year alone Conifer will pay $63,000 to the city in Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT). That will save taxpayers 3 cents per $100 valuation on the tax levy, City Council President Ed Dennis has said.

Lewis said the apartments will be offered for rent to those who are first to submit finished applications. There will be 85 one-bedroom units and 15 two-bedroom units. All have full kitchens.

One pet per unit will be allowed, but pets must meet size and weight limits.

Applicants will have to show they are over age 62 and have incomes below 60 percent of the median income for the region, Lewis said. In 2014, that’s $28,620 for a single person and $32,700 for a couple, according to the state Department of Community Affairs. They will have to submit to a credit check and criminal background check, Lewis said.
If the criminal background check turns up convictions from long ago, an applicant may come in and argue for being accepted, based on staying out of trouble for years.

“It depends what it is,” Lewis said. “If it’s a senior and something happened that was just a youthful indiscretion, we’ll waive it.”

Conifer is also building affordable rental units for families in Rio Grande, and is on the verge of starting to build such units for families in Cape May Court House and Atlantic City. The projects are to some degree financed by loans from Hurricane Sandy relief funds.

The 80-unit Rio Grande project is about 25 percent complete and on target to open in May.

“We’re pretty much done with the site work and framing out the buildings,” Lewis said. There are seven residential townhouse-type buildings in that complex, he said, plus a community center.

The Cape May Court House project, where Conifer hopes to build 48 units of affordable family housing in eight buildings and a community center, is waiting for state Coastal Area Facility Review Act approvals. If Conifer gets the CAFRA approvals by the end of August and starts construction in September, completion could be September 2015.

“Basically, there are some threatened and endangered species on an adjacent property, and some of the forested areas on the (Conifer) site arguably are habitat for those creatures,” Lewis said. “We are saving 75 to 80 percent of those areas, and impacting less than an acre.

In Atlantic City, Conifer’s Hope VI affordable family housing project involves building 90 residential units in 18 buildings and adding on to a community building. The buildings will be sprinkled in a four-block area near Absecon Boulevard bounded by Maryland Avenue and Baltic Avenue,

Conifer plans to close in September or October on the financing, if it gets construction approvals from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development soon.

“Ideally all the construction will be done by the time school starts in 2015,” Lewis said.

Hope VI is located in two areas of the Back Maryland section of the city, near where Absecon Boulevard intersects with Maryland and Virginia avenues, up to Mediterranean and Baltic Avenues.

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