

Multifamily Homes In Middletown To Be Transformed Into Condominiums

By MONICA POLANCO

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Rapallo Avenue is being restored into four two bedroom condominiums. (RICK HARTFORD / HARTFORD COURANT / March 17, 2010)

MIDDLETOWN —

Six multifamily houses in the North End, some of which were boarded up and rotting for 13 years, are being transformed into 15 new, affordable condominiums.

The houses — at 47 Rapallo Ave.; 37 and 41-43 Green St. and 47, 49 and 51-55 Ferry St. — are in the city's poorest area and are being rehabilitated as part of a \$6.2 million project to improve the housing stock, said Michael Taylor, executive director of Nehemiah Housing Corp., a nonprofit group that advocates for affordable housing. Taylor said he's applying for additional funding to renovate a seventh house at 29 Ferry St.

The condos are the second piece of a revitalization effort that began with the \$22 million, 96-apartment Wharfside Commons project, completed in 2007, on Ferry Street.

The dilapidated houses — which include a historic four-family home that was rolled down Main Street in 2008 — are being renovated primarily with a grant from the state Department of Economic and Community Development. The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, the Greater New Haven Community Loan Fund

and the Local Initiatives Support Corp. helped finance the initiative

Work on the five houses is expected to end by summer.

The eventual owners — who must earn no more than \$64,000 for a family of four — might move in as early as June, Taylor said. Prices will range from about \$124,000 for a two-bedroom condo to \$168,000 for a four-bedroom unit. Taylor said he must repay about \$1.2 million in loans, using sale money.

Nehemiah, based in the North End, partnered with Hartford-based Broad-Park Development Corp. to increase homeownership in the neighborhood. The 2000 Census showed that fewer than 15 percent of the area's residents were homeowners, compared with close to 50 percent in the rest of the city.

The project was conceived in 1997 when residents told Lydia Brewster — then executive director of the North End Action Team — that they wanted "decent housing," Taylor said.

After years of planning, the initiative stalled last year after the housing crisis erupted, but the financing fell into place last fall. Construction workers began demolishing and gutting the houses this month.

Brewster, now a NEAT board member, praised Nehemiah Housing for "staying in the game" through the recession and intricate financing process.

Increasing the number of homeowners, she said, is critical in bringing greater accountability. She said that homeowners are more likely to do "less hand-wringing" and be more proactive.

"I think that you'll see more people being willing to stand up and be counted when there's evidence of crime or other issues," she said.

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Daniel Justice, of Danbury, owner, Justice Construction, works inside 47 Rapallo Avenue in the north end of Middletown. The historic building, which was moved in 2008 to Rapallo Avenue from Main Street not far away, is being renovated into four two-bedroom condominiums