

# Agencies Revamp Valley Vista: People Inc. overseeing work on decades-old subsidized apartments

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WOODSTOCK -- A 1970s-era subsidized housing complex undergoing a major renovation was shown off last week to some of the people who have made the face-lift possible.

The Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission's Housing and Community Services Policy Board toured Valley Vista Apartments in Woodstock on Thursday morning.

Shenandoah County's community action agency, People Inc., owns the apartment complex and is overseeing the \$5 million project.

Funding for the project is coming through a mixture of grants, loans and tax credits from various organizations, including the state Department of Housing and Community Development, the Virginia Housing Development Authority, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta and the Weatherization Program, People Inc. President and CEO Rob Goldsmith said.

The HOME Consortium Northern Shenandoah Valley, which is overseen by the policy board, contributed \$125,000 towards the project, Goldsmith said.

According to a news release from the regional commission, the HOME Consortium was set up to receive federal funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to put toward housing projects for low- to moderate-income residents. It has received \$770,453 in fiscal 2010, the release says.

Thursday's tour started in a ground-floor apartment heavily damaged by water. Parts of the floor and ceiling were ripped up, and the kitchen was in serious disrepair. Rusty water filled the toilet, and the sink was rust-stained.

The next stop was a partially renovated third-floor unit. It has new windows and new laminate flooring. Countertops, boxes of cabinets, and a bathroom sink were sitting in the living room.

The group also saw two finished apartments, including one that is handicapped-accessible.

Goldsmith told the policy board that the apartments were being fitted with energy-efficient features, and with new wiring, plumbing, kitchens and bathrooms. The energy-saving devices will mean lower utility bills for tenants, he said.

"We're really concentrating on making this as green, as energy efficient as we possibly can so they can be affordable for the people who live here," Goldsmith said. "Through your support, through tax credits, through several other sources ... we're going to be able to keep the rents actually a little lower than they were when we started. We're getting rid of some of the smaller units and making some larger units for families here."

That will bring the 88 units down to 85. The parking lot's potholes also will be fixed, Goldsmith said.

He said People Inc. bought Valley Vista from the government at a foreclosure sale. The complex is guaranteed to be operated as an affordable-housing site for the next 30 years, Goldsmith said.

The renovation started in January, and so far 22 apartments have been finished. The plan is to be done by October, said Tim Varner, People Inc. superintendent.

Rents for one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments range from \$450 to \$695, Valley Vista site manager Rita Torres said.

She said more screening is being done on prospective tenants at the complex, which in the past has had a reputation for drug trafficking and gang activity. Torres said credit and criminal background checks are being done, and there will be more reference checks.

Housing policy board Chairman Chuck Johnston, who is planning director for Clarke County, was impressed with the work.

"I think they've done a great job, and I think the units are very nice and it looks like it's going to be a real positive improvement for the community," he said. "I've already heard the town folks are pleased not to have to deal with as many issues here."

Shenandoah County Department of Social Services Director John Ayres said clients receiving Section-8 vouchers are now encouraged to check out Valley Vista.

"It's excellent now," he said. "We love dealing with these folks. They know how to manage it and run it. We wish they would take over more apartment units."