

New Supportive and Affordable Housing Coming to Claremont in 2018

Supportive housing for Claremont in 2018

By Robert Christie

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Steve Coe (front, 4th from r), Community Access CEO; funders and developers broke ground for a new \$52.2 million affordable and supportive housing complex at 111 E. 172nd Street.

Government officials in partnership with Community Access broke ground on Wednesday, February 22, for a new affordable 14-story, 126-unit complex that will cater to residents struggling with mental health issues.

Community Access, a company that specializes in supportive housing for people dealing with mental health concerns, will have onsite support services to help each of its tenants fighting through those issues.

The \$52.3 million project received help from Governor Cuomo's five-year Affordable Homeless and Housing plan which is geared towards fighting homelessness and creating more affordable housing opportunities in the state.

"This development will offer residents the help they need to find their footing, focus on their recovery and reach their future goals," said Ann Sullivan, commissioner of the NYS Office of Mental Health.

According to Cal Hedigan, deputy CEO at Community Access, the 111 East 172nd Street site will be different from other supportive housing they have throughout the city.

"Because of the nature of the site we were able to create a urban agriculture component," said Hedigan.

The site will feature an urban farm with six raised growing beds that will be used to grow vegetables year-round.

In addition, it will have a commercial kitchen in which tenants will learn how to improve their nutrition and prepare healthy meals.

Hedigan added the farm will not only help the tenants nutritionally but also socially.

"One of the things people living with mental health concerns tend to struggle with is isolation, loneliness and difficulty creating new meaningful relationships," Hedigan continued. "[The farm] is not just about the food - it's a way to draw people out."

Community Access first filed applications for the project in 2015.

Hedigan said the company was very pleased with the site's size and possibilities, adding that usually sites are hard to come by for Community Access.

Also, she said the host communities are not always thrilled about having people with mental health issues moving into their neighborhood.

She added that for people living in supportive housing, "Developing relationships in the community and not being exposed to discrimination or high levels of stigma are very important in people's recovery."

Hedigan said usually in the beginning of the development process, community members are concerned about this type of housing coming into their neighborhood.

However, she added, "Once it's built and they see the quality of the building and they see it's contributions to the community, we're generally welcomed."

The complex will have 60 of its units - which are all studio apartments - set aside for people struggling with mental health.

According to Hedigan, some of those people will be Medicaid users identified by the state while others will come from state mental health facilities.

Fifty-seven of the units will be for low income families - chosen through a lottery - that are making 57 percent of the area's median income while eight units will be low-income studio apartments.

Hedigan said the facility is expected to open by mid 2018.

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