

Highland Green co-op offers affordable housing in Melville

July 4, 2017 By Deborah S. Morris deborah.morris@newsday.com



Highland Green in Melville, seen on Sunday, July 2, 2017, offers affordable housing to residents. (Credit: Steve Pfof)

An innovative solution that addresses a need for affordable housing for larger families in Huntington and allowed the town to settle a lawsuit is now complete.

Highland Green recently opened at 1 Strathmore Way in Melville. It's Long Island's first limited equity cooperative housing development, town officials said.

The 117-unit development is part of the town's settlement of a more than decade-old legal fight related to affordable housing.

In 2002, Huntington fair housing advocates sued the town, arguing that an earlier proposed development would have discriminated against people with larger families because it only allowed for one-bedroom, for-sale units instead of multibedroom rental apartments.

Building affordable housing in Melville had been among the conditions for approval for a nearby 55-and-older community built years before.

Limited equity cooperatives are designed to provide affordable homeownership to qualified, income-eligible residents by allowing them to purchase shares in the development for a minimal investment.

Instead of paying rent or a mortgage, residents pay a monthly fee that covers their share of the development's property taxes and maintenance costs. It also gives residents a chance to build equity in the property without having a mortgage or other financing. Residents can take some of their investment with them if they leave.

In the case of Highland Green, purchasers paid the equivalent of two months' maintenance as a down payment; no mortgage or other type of financing was required.

Residents will build equity because part of their monthly payments will go toward the reduction of a \$10.8 million tax-exempt bond used to finance the construction.

Huntington Town Supervisor Frank Petrone suggested the project's co-op structure, having lived in such a development years ago in the Bronx.

"I'm very proud of this," Petrone said. "It's an opportunity for people that can't purchase outright to have the opportunity to have ownership, and through their monthly payments not only pay their expenses, but gain some equity."

The development includes 93 units that are for those whose income does not exceed 60 percent of the area's median income. The remaining 24 units went to people whose income does not exceed 80 percent of the median. Ten percent of the units were set aside as preference for certain veterans, 10 percent for people with physical disabilities and 4 percent for the hearing or visually impaired. The development has 72 one-bedroom units, 39 two-bedroom units and six three-bedroom units.

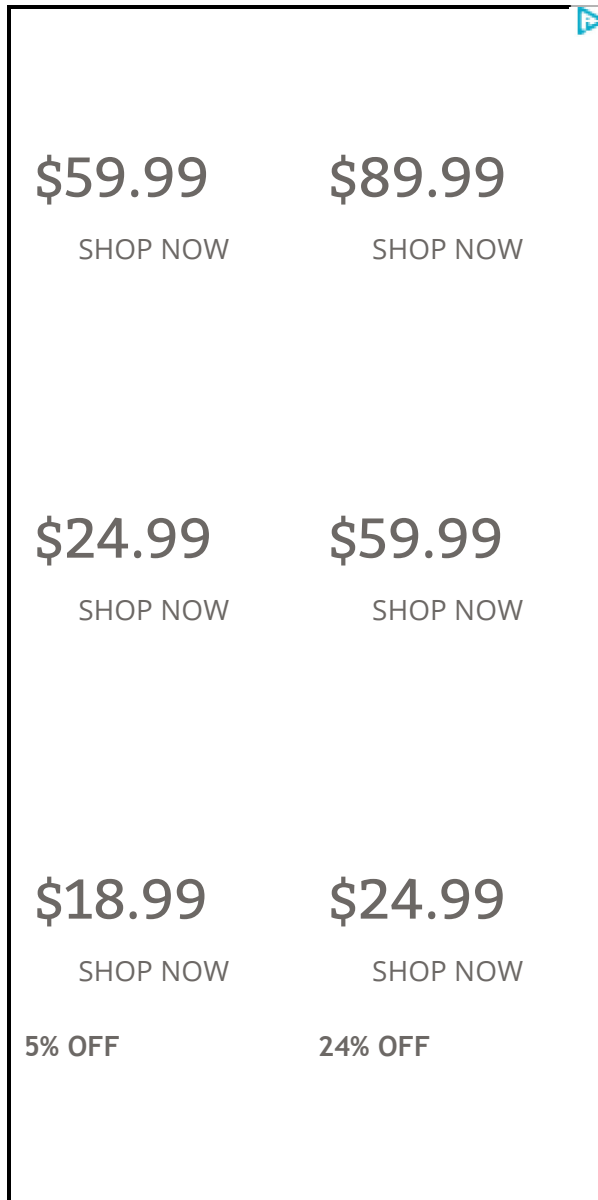
When the lottery was held last year, 171 people applied. All of the units are occupied and there is currently a waiting list, town officials said.

Ulysses Spicer, NAACP Huntington Branch past vice president in charge of the housing committee and current state conference secretary, said his group is pleased with the development.

"We knew there was a great need for family units that were rentals," Spicer said. "This was a winning agreement."

After years of litigation, the NAACP Huntington Branch became the lone plaintiff in the case.

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