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Wyandanch housing development will offer safe harbor for formerly incarcerated women



A rendering of the proposed Alegria North project in Wyandanch, which includes affordable housing for formerly incarcerated women.
Credit: Beatty Harvey Coco Architects LP



By Randi F. Marshall

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Stacy had a good job, a place of her own, and hopes and plans for the future when she landed in two abusive relationships, one after the other.

That's when her life began to spiral. Stacy, a 39-year-old Nassau County resident whose last name is being withheld to protect her privacy, began using drugs, eventually losing her home, her job, and the support of friends and colleagues.

Stacy hit bottom in June 2021 when, she said, her ex-boyfriend stole a car “that I stupidly got into.” She was arrested, charged with grand larceny and possession of a controlled substance. She served three months in prison and spent nearly eight months in long-term recovery.

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“When I got arrested, it was the worst and best day of my life,” Stacy said. “They stopped me before I was dead.”

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“Everybody's one bad decision away from having their lives destroyed,” Stacy said. “I accept all responsibility. I did my time.”

But bad decisions live on, in court records and online, making it difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to secure housing. And without safe, supportive housing, people can easily slide into recidivism.

New Hour for Women and Children, a nonprofit that works with women while and after they're incarcerated, is partnering with developer Peter Florey to build an 81-unit affordable housing complex in Wyandanch known as Alegria North. It sets aside nine units for formerly incarcerated people, particularly the women assisted by New Hour.

“How do you expect people to thrive and succeed if they don't have a safe home?” asked New Hour executive director Serena Martin-Liguori.

Disappointingly — but not surprisingly — New Hour faced pushback as irrational fears took hold. The refrains were familiar, the tone ugly. When Alegria North was presented to the Suffolk County Legislature this month to secure funding, Legis. Trish Bergin called it “dangerous,” painting a dark picture of a single working mom with a “latchkey kid” coming home alone, living near a “convicted criminal.”

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“I fear for the safety of the most vulnerable individuals in our society,” Bergin said.

But these formerly incarcerated individuals are also women, some with children. What's really dangerous is refusing to help women who need it most, who are doing what Stacy called “the next right thing.”

“If you help them out a little bit, they're more likely not to resort to committing crimes again or using drugs again,” Stacy said. “If you don't help people get back on their feet, you're ... just perpetuating the problem.”

As builder of East Northport's Matinecock Court, Florey is no stranger to Long Island's affordable housing fights. He has a complex in Queens similar to Alegria North, and said he's “never” had a problem with a tenant.

Thankfully, most of the legislature and County Executive Ed Romaine supported Alegria North. Florey hopes to break ground by September.

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New Hour's classes and assistance have benefited Stacy, who is clean, sober, and employed. She lives with her mother, but someday would love a home of her own again. She's eyeing Alegria North.

“I'm not going to lie. I would love to apply,” Stacy said. “But honestly, I feel like there are other girls who need it more than I do. I would rather they get it.”

She has a longer-term idea, too. Before her troubles, Stacy worked in construction project management. She also knows the value of a home. Someday, she said, she'd love to work with Florey to help others the way New Hour has helped her.

Columnist Randi F. Marshall's opinions are her own.



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