



Recorder/Paul Franz

John Counter, executive director of the Greenfield Housing Authority, at Oak Courts in Greenfield, where \$11.7 million will be used to renovate 74 apartments and build a community center with two additional handicapped-accessible units.

## \$11.7M for Oak Courts renovations, community center

By ANITA FRITZ  
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GREENFIELD — The much-needed renovations that families in Oak Courts apartments have been awaiting more than six years will finally begin this fall.

John P. Counter, executive director of Greenfield Housing Authority, which manages the low-income housing development, said GHA has received \$11.7 million for

the project.

Counter said the money will be enough to not only replace the siding on all of the buildings and renovate all 74 apartments, but also build a small learning-community center and a duplex that will house two accessible apartments.

He said all apartments will have two or three bedrooms and a new playground will be built to

replace the most dilapidated of the two currently there.

"These people deserve this," said Counter, who has decided to hire RAC Builders Inc. of Agawam to do the work.

According to the GHA, renovations on bathrooms and kitchens throughout the development were last done in the early 1980s. Those will all be updated again and new carpeting and fixtures

will be installed.

What Counter said he is most excited about, besides people finally living in updated, more energy-efficient apartments, is that there will be a learning-community center for them to gather.

He said currently one of the small vacant apartments is used as a makeshift center.

See RENOVATIONS Page A8

A8 The Recorder Friday, July 26, 2013

Greenfield, Massachusetts

### Renovations

From Page A1

New windows for \$162,520, the new playground for \$132,130 and some landscaping for \$15,600 will be included in the construction.

In 2007, the state awarded the Oak Courts renovation project \$5 million, but "when the bottom fell out of the housing market shortly after that, the project was shelved," said Counter, who replaced former executive director John Cariddi in 2010, when Cariddi retired.

"We went looking for more money this time around," said Counter. "I wanted \$20 million to demolish all of the buildings and start over. We got almost \$12 million instead, but I'm not going to complain, because it's more than double what the project was originally going to get, so we're going to be able to do more than originally planned."

Kerry L. Dietz of Dietz & Co. Architects in Springfield has and will continue to work with the GHA to see the proj-

ect through.

Counter said he plans to have a groundbreaking by mid-September, and believes the project will be completed within two years, by fall 2015.

He said each of the existing 16 buildings will be resided with a fiber cement horizontal siding. They are currently sided with vertical cedar siding.

"The buildings are going to look more residential," he said.

Counter said the renovations will be done in phases.

In Phase 1, 16 apartments, which are already vacant, will be renovated.

When those are finished, residents who live in the apartments located in Phase II will move into Phase I apartments and so on.

"Several of our buildings are vacant, because as people moved or were evicted, we kept their apartments empty," said Counter. "We knew this was coming, so we thought that was the best idea."

The state Department



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John Counter, executive director of the Greenfield Housing Authority, at Oak Courts in Greenfield where they will renovate the apartments and build a community center with two additional handicapped-accessible units.

of Housing and Community Development, which is funding the project, agreed.

Counter said more than 300 people will live in Oak Courts when the project is complete. He said most buildings have four apartments and a couple have eight. He said on average 3.5 people will live in each of the 74

apartments.

Counter said Mayor William Martin fought with him for more money for the project.

"The mayor and our legislators were great," said Counter. "And the GHA board was fantastic moving this along. It was a once-in-a-lifetime deal."

Many of the building code items haven't been updated in many years, including sprinklers, which will be installed, said Counter.

Counter said the GHA will continue to work with Oak Courts residents to help them find ways to finish their educations so they can find better jobs and move out of

Oak Courts.

"Many of our residents don't make more than \$12,000 a year," said Counter. "We have to change that. These renovations are going to mark a brand-new era. We are going to follow them with increasing our support to all of the residents."