

## LOCAL NEWS

# State officials visit Ayer housing development to celebrate state support for impending sale

Residents back buyer amid housing affordability crisis



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AYER — Gov. Maura Healey and Housing Secretary Ed Augustus visited with residents of the Devenscrest Village neighborhood in Ayer Monday morning to celebrate the [state grant funding supporting](#) the impending sale of the “naturally occurring affordable housing” development.

The development features 114 individual housing units in 37 buildings off Littleton Road, which were among hundreds of housing units in 21 developments across the state to receive the state’s 2025 Affordable Housing Grant awards, the funding from which is being used to help facilitate the transaction of the property. The Devenscrest development was built after the end of World War II, and the family that owned the property kept rents low for the residents, but did not necessarily keep up with maintenance.

In 2021, New Hampshire-based Brady Sullivan Properties purchased the development and began renovating the units, while also raising rents significantly.

“It displaced a lot of people who called this place home. There are not a lot of other options in the area,” said Augustus during a tour of the neighborhood Monday while standing inside the home of Denise Perrault, a Devenscrest resident.



The grant funding came from the Affordable Homes Act, which Healey signed last summer. That legislation, Healey said, has resulted in nearly 100,000 new homes being built.

“We’ve got to build more homes. This is a great example of what is possible. State funding makes this project work. As a result of state funding we were able to save 114 homes for Massachusetts families, and that is a big deal,” said Healey. “These were properties that were in need of renovation and repair.”

The property is being sold to Schochet Companies, who signed a purchase and sale agreement in March. Schochet President Richard Henken said the hope is that the sale will be completed in about mid-November, though it could possibly take until closer to the end of the year. Henken said his company owns, operates and develops about 6,000 units of mostly affordable housing throughout New England.

“[Brady Sullivan] has been very good about agreeing to sell it back to us, with the tenants having the option to acquire it from us in 10 years in order to preserve the housing,” said Schochet. “After some laborious negotiations, he is doing the right thing, and we are very grateful to him for that.”

In addition to the facilitation of the sale with state money, Henken said 35 vouchers will be applied to the property allowing for “low, very low and extremely low income families to live here.” Those vouchers will keep the rent at a certain percentage of the tenant’s income for 35 of the 114 units.

“So, if you’ve got an elderly citizen getting \$1,000 a month from Social Security, she will pay \$300 a month for rent with the state subsidizing the rest,” said Henken as an example.

Those subsidies, Henken said, will be “project based” meaning if a tenant moves out, the

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Massachusetts Law Reform Institute housing attorney Ann Jochnick described Devenscrest as having been “naturally occurring affordable housing” for the last 50 years, meaning it has been affordable for tenants without the need for subsidies.

“This has been a really tenant-driven effort that came together... This is the kind of thing we need to do. We have to build new affordable housing, but we also have to preserve it,” said Jochnick.

Elizabeth Sheriff is the president of the Devenscrest Tenants Association, the resident organization partnering with Schochet to make the purchase happen, has been living in Devenscrest for a little more than four years, with her move in to the neighborhood taking place less than a year before the property would be sold to Brady Sullivan.

“My family moved here to save up to purchase a house... we all know COVID happened and that changed the market,” said Sheriff.

After Brady Sullivan purchased the property, Sheriff said things turned south quickly for the neighborhood, and she received a no-fault eviction notice.

“I can’t afford \$3,000 a month on rent or whatever it can be for a payment,” said Sheriff.

“I feel like, sometimes, if you are not in the trenches you wouldn’t understand the significance of this. This is a big win for all of us,” said Devenscrest resident Deamber Houle.

Houle said after rents began rising, many residents of the neighborhood moved out.

“One person I know worked for the government, and she was afraid of it getting on her record if she had an eviction. She ended up moving out of here,” said Houle. “They never foresaw that we could fight this thing.”

“They just never saw that this could happen, but we all questioned that during the whole process, several times I’m sure, but here it is,” fellow resident Bill Barlow added.

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