

Affordable housing project continues

COREY LEBLANC

✉ coreyleblanc@thecasket.ca

Construction of Riverside Estates continues, with tenants expected to be enjoying their new home by early in the New Year.

Work on the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society (AAHS) initiative — a four-unit complex — began in September.

“Things are moving along very well,” Colleen Cameron, AAHS chair, told the Gasket, in a recent interview.

At the end of July, AAHS unveiled plans for the project, which coincided with an announcement of a \$100,000 federal-provincial funding commitment.

Riverside Estates will be a multi-family building, with a pair of two-bedroom units and two one-bedroom units. Both ground floor apartments will be barrier-free, meeting the needs of people with disabilities, as part of the

first phase of the initiative.

AAHS, a registered Canadian charity, will manage and operate the development.

As for the tenants, their selection will be based on income, in accordance with Housing Nova Scotia’s regulations, as well as a commitment for proportional representation between Antigonish town and county.

“We have a committee put together developing some criteria,” Cameron explained, when asked if tenants have been pin-pointed for the first four units.

“We will soon, and I don’t know how soon is soon — in a few weeks’ time — put out an ad for people to apply.”

She noted she has been getting calls from “interested” people.

“They want to get on a waiting list, but I said we don’t have a waiting list, but I will take your name and number, and when we

are ready, we will let you know when you can apply,” Cameron said.

Eligibility also includes a stipulation that people have lived in Antigonish for a minimum of two years.

Cameron noted prospective tenants will also have to be willing “to, sort of, get along with other people.”

“We want to build a community here. And, that’s what we are saying we are doing — community building. So, it is not just putting together some units and then saying, ‘move in,’ and that’s it,”

She added the plan is to have a tenant navigator “to help with any of the issues they might be facing.”

“If they need particular services or help, in any way, we will try and meet those needs, so that people are able to have a good home,” Cameron said.

Along with the federal-provincial commitment, the project has received financial support from the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Martha (\$100,000) and Municipality of the County of Antigonish (\$100,000), along with the purchase of land for the development from the Town of Antigonish for \$1.

To date, there have also been private contributions of more than \$40,000.

“There has been some tremendous support,” Cameron said.

With first-phase construction underway, she agreed it has been uplifting for those who have been pushing for such an affordable housing initiative.

“It has hit home,” Cameron said.

“There have been so many people working on this — it has been more than 20 years — so to actually see something being built is great.”

Cameron said she moves back-and-forth from thoughts of ‘this is fantastic’ to ‘oh my God, how are we going to get the rest of the money and build the rest of these units?’

“This is just a little drop in the bucket — four units — but it is a start,” she added.

She noted “it is exciting and we are very happy that we have gotten to this point.”

As for the second phase, the non-profit volunteer group hopes it will include 10 units.

“We are hoping that the whole community will support us, when we go out with our campaign to raise the next \$700,000 to finish this project,” Cameron said.

“We are hoping that, this time next year, we will be into a big fundraising campaign.”

Cameron reiterated that “this is just our beginning.”

“There is a bigger need in our community,” she said.