

Tenants Persevere to Save Affordable Housing

Historic Housing in D.C.'s Mt. Pleasant Neighborhood Has Been Fully Renovated and Made Energy Efficient While Remaining Affordable to Low and Moderate Income Families

On October 6th, D.C. Councilmember Jim Graham joined residents, neighbors, and community developers to celebrate the Grand Opening of the St. Dennis Apartments in Washington, D.C.'s Mt. Pleasant neighborhood. Low income working families, many of whom had endured deplorable living conditions at the property, can now enjoy fully renovated, energy efficient affordable apartments. The preservation and renovation of the St. Dennis was made possible due to the tenacity of the Martinez family who refused to be forced from their neighborhood when their landlord sought to convert their apartment building to luxury condominiums.

A Story of Tenacity

"Our fight has been for affordable housing for low-income people" said Eva Aurora Martinez, the matriarch of the Martinez family, as she described the struggle to save her home in an April 2008 Washington Post article.

The Martinez family refused to give in when the previous owner emptied the building through poor management and "buy-offs" in order to convert it into market-rate condominiums. Eva Martinez and her



The Martinez daughters celebrate the grand opening of the homes they fought to save.



two daughters remained the lone tenants in the building for more than two years, enduring broken doors and windows, demolition crews, unlit hallways, and other hazards all because of their staunch belief that low income people deserved the right to remain in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood. With the assistance of pro-bono counsel from the law firm of Arnold and Porter, the Martinez's filed several suits against the owner for failure to comply with D.C.'s right of first purchase law. They secured a settlement that included the option to purchase the property at market value and chose the National Housing Trust-Enterprise Preservation Corporation (NHT/Enterprise) to assist in securing the financing to acquire and renovate the property.

NHT/Enterprise raised \$9.7 million to redevelop St. Dennis. Critical to the success of this project was bridge financing from the Site Acquisition Funding Initiative (SAFI), provided by Enterprise Community Loan Fund and the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) through the Housing Production Trust Fund. SAFI financing allowed NHT/Enterprise to acquire the building

on behalf of the tenants by a court mandated settlement date back in 2008. Rehabilitation and permanent financing sources included 9% Low Income Housing Tax Credits provided by DHCD and syndicated by Enterprise Community Investment, Inc. Other financing sources included historic tax credits, construction and permanent loans from Capital One Bank, a subordinate loan from DHCD, a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, and tax credit exchange funds provided by the federal stimulus bill.

St. Dennis received nearly \$4 million in renovations including significant energy efficiency upgrades. Improvements included a new roof, windows, reconfiguration of units, new individual HVAC systems, new wiring, new domestic water system, new kitchens and new baths.

The rehabilitation of St. Dennis Apartments meets the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria as required by the District of Columbia. Residents will enjoy significant health and economic benefits as a result of utility saving and environmentally friendly improvements.



Photo: DCist

