



Springport apartment complex plans to 'go green' with energy-efficient affordable housing

By **Jon Szerlag** | jszerlag@mlive.com September 30, 2013 at 6:00 PM

SPRINGPORT, MI – A Springport apartment complex built more than 20 years ago is getting rehabilitated to produce energy efficient and affordable housing. Great Lakes Capital Fund invested \$1.6 million to revamp Green Meadows Apartments, located at 281 Green St., with new roofs, windows, doors, lighting and energy-efficient appliances.

“It’s a complete overhaul,” said Thomas Lapka partner with project developer TJ Development. “We don’t change a footprint in the project, and we don’t move walls. We rehabilitate.” Energy optimization has been becoming more popular and affordable, and many project developers and contractors are looking at energy-efficient measures with the advancement in appliances technology, but also with the knowledge of energy efficiency.

“Contractors and builders, they are more familiar with the best practices and technology which work properly. These measures (of energy effectiveness) are getting more incorporated into projects,” said Rachael Cluett, buildings program research analysis for the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, a nonprofit which works to advance energy efficient policies, programs and behaviors. “As this learning curve happens, it becomes more cost effective for them to also implement energy efficiency into their buildings.” The Springport apartment project is rehabilitating 24 apartment homes for low- to- moderate-income families, and is anticipated to bring 36 jobs through construction and ongoing efforts in a 15 year span. Through the remodeling, the apartments will have new low-argon filled windows, new roof and wall insulation, LED lighting, new Energy Star appliances and high efficiency heating and cooling systems.

“This (project) is in a rural area, and rental housing is very critical in rural parts of America,” said Kelly Bernero, advocacy and public relations specialist for Great Lakes Capital Fund. “Through acquisition deals, we are rehabilitating structures and getting them a lot of work-over. They are getting to be energy efficient to keep utility costs down, and the developer has really gone above and beyond with their environmental stewardship commitment.” Lapka, whose business has rehabilitated 43 affordable housing projects, said the project is through the federal government and Michigan State Housing Development Authority, utilizing low-income housing tax credits. Investors like GLCF find placement for the tax credits through investors, and his company utilizes the money to rehabilitate the entire project.

Rent is controlled by the United States Development Authority and is based on income limits. Lapka said these projects are highly regulated by the USDA and MSHDA with inspections and asset management work. “There are a lot of eyes looking on these projects to make sure they are done right, we did what we promised to do and maintain and operate like we are supposed to do,” Lapka said. Lapka said once the project is complete and is under the tax credit program, they have to maintain and operate the site for a minimum of 15 years.

“We are in the community for the next 15 years ... probably longer,” Lapka said. “We pay attention to our projects. We, as owners, take a personal interest in every project we are in and onsite. We want to make sure it is looking good.” Through regulations by MSHDA, three of the apartments are being saved for families in need. Bernero said GLCF is also partnering with the **Jackson Community Action Agency** to set aside three apartment homes for families with special needs. She said the agency will provide support and counseling services as needed for the families. Lapka said MSHDA has requirements which sets aside supportive services units, which runs a gamut from seniors living alone who need special attention or for families or individuals with special needs such homelessness,

disabilities or even someone coming from an abusive relationship. “They still pay rent, but we provide a partnership with a local agency for the supportive services they need,” Lapka said. “We make sure everything is all right, they are living okay, have food and doing the right thing to live as normal as possible. The goal is to get them as independent as possible, and provide the services they need.”

The project is not only going to benefit the families of Green Meadows, but will also help boost the Springport-area’s businesses, tax revenues, jobs and school system, officials said. Statistics from the National Home Builders Association and the Historic Tax Credit Coalition show the rehabilitation of Green Meadows is anticipated to bring \$304,320 to local taxes and revenue and roughly \$2.4 million to local incomes for the first-year and recurring costs combined. “We are out there to provide the affordable housing portfolio ... and our goal is to have these people with decent credit and good backgrounds ... to move on in the local community and work in the local community,” Lapka said. “The benefits are definitely community-wide. They need a decent and safe place to live, and the township and village councils are all very supportive of the project. They have been very cooperative and saw the benefit for it.

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People watch as renovation work is done at the Green Meadows apartments in Springport on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. The apartments are getting a facelift, including new appliances. (J. Scott Park | MLive.com)

A construction worker hammers on the side of a building at the Green Meadows apartments in Springport on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. The apartments are getting a facelift, including new appliances. (J. Scott Park |

Renovation work is being done at the Green Meadows apartments in Springport on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. The apartments are getting a facelift, including new appliances. (J. Scott Park | MLive.com)

Old appliances wait to be hauled away at the Green Meadows apartments in Springport on Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013. The apartments are getting a facelift, including new appliances. (J. Scott Park | MLive.com)