

# THE ARLINGTON ADVOCATE

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## To the rescue Housing Corporation buys 18 one-bedroom units

**By Jennifer Mann**

Staff Writer

The options for affordable housing in town are about to diversify, with the Housing Corporation of Arlington expected this week to acquire four properties in Arlington Heights to protect 18 one-bedroom apartments for mixed-income residents.

The closing of the deal, scheduled Wednesday after press time, would expand the agency's portfolio to 46 affordable apartments, including 18 two-bedroom, seven three-bedroom and three four-bedroom units currently spread across Arlington.

HCA Executive Director David Levy said while the agency's program with two-family homes "has served Arlington residents well," this week's purchase will create more affordable options for singles and cou-

ples — "a population that has sort of been left out so far.

"It's really allowing us to broaden our reach within the community," he said, mentioning while the Arlington Housing Authority offers one-bedroom units, they are reserved for the elderly and disabled. "We think it is a great opportunity for low- and moderate-income couples to stay here and be able to raise their families."

HCA will preserve the properties as mixed-income affordable rental development, with units reserved for households earning up to 50 percent of the median income (\$29,450 for one person), and some for those earning up to 80 percent of the median income (\$46,300 for one person).

The development, which is the  
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first initiative to come to fruition under a production capacity grant from Massachusetts Housing Partnership, coincides with HCA's 20th year providing affordable housing in Arlington.

"We're really thrilled that we could sort of mark this occasion by acquiring these buildings," Levy said. "We've come a long way in 20 years."

The four properties at 1016 and 1166 Massachusetts Ave., 2 Orchard Place and 6 Burton St., have been owned and managed by Robert P. Stevens, who in 2004 sold 20 other two-family homes along Rockaway Lane and Bow, Forest and Summer streets that have since been converted to condominiums, according to Town Assessor Robert Greeley. All the properties have been in the Stevens family for more than 50 years, Greeley added, and the second-generation property owner appears to be liquidating his assets.

A woman who answered Stevens' phone spoke to him and said he declined comment Monday.

Levy said the property owner "tried to keep rents reasonable" at the four buildings and "I think they looked at this transaction as a way to keep some affordable rental housing in Arlington." The deal was inked after about a year of negotiations from when the property owner first indicated interest to HCA.

The buildings are fully occupied, and Levy said none of the tenants

will be forced to leave with the acquisition — in fact, when new leases are signed many residents will see their rents decrease immediately. He explained enough of the tenants qualify within the income brackets for the project to move forward.

The HCA executive director said the development project is expected to cost \$3.2 million, including the acquisition and soft costs and about \$500,000 in renovations and improvements to the buildings constructed in the 1940s.

Stevens "has maintained (the buildings) pretty well over the years, but there are a number of capital improvements that need to be done and we're going to be addressing those needs," he said, adding while two tenants will have to temporarily relocate during renovations, HCA is paying for their hotel rooms.

HCA has teamed with Feinmann of Arlington, a design and remodeling company that has helped on past projects, for the renovations that include electrical service upgrades, asbestos and lead paint abatement, roofing and plumbing.

"We look forward to ... assisting in any way we can with the mission of HCA," said Peter Feinmann, the company president.

Levy said Feinmann has also volunteered to donate a portion of its profit back to the project.

"We are so unbelievably thankful for him doing this," he said.

Part of the project also has been

financed by \$450,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant funds allocated by the town.

"This is a positive step for Arlington," said Selectmen Chairman Kevin Greeley. "The town has made affordable housing a priority and HCA has run with it. We are true partners."

Construction is expected to start next week, with an open house ceremony planned for the spring.

Levy praised consultant Peter Smith of Peter Smith Associates, who was hired last year under the three-year grant from Massachusetts Housing Partnership to find affordable housing development opportunities in town. He and HCA initiated the effort with a comprehensive study of developable, under-utilized, abandoned or town-owned property in town, and also contacted landlords who had larger properties, like Stevens.

As The Advocate reported last week, HCA is also considering a development on town-owned land near Spy Pond at the end of Pond Lane. In its preliminary stages, Levy and town Housing Director Laura Wiener have been making the rounds with various groups that have interest in the property to gain their input.

*The Housing Corporation of Arlington will celebrate its acquisition of four properties for affordable housing with a ceremony on Thursday, Oct. 12 at 11 a.m. at 1016 Mass. Ave.*