

Harrison MTA housing will have 7 affordable units

Mark Lungariello, mlungariello@ohud.com 12:53 a.m. EDT March 13, 2015

Five percent of the 143 units in the proposed town center will be designated affordable.



(Photo: File photo Carucha L. Meuse/The Journal News)

HARRISON — A new town center with luxury apartments that will be constructed on the south side of the Metro-North station will include 5 percent affordable housing — [the first](#) ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2014/11/24/mta-board-member-open-affordable-housing-harrison/70056530/](#)) designated affordable units to be built in the town since the 1980s.

Last year, Harrison entered a [joint development](#) ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2015/01/15/astorino-punts-harrison-housing/21834955/](#)) deal with the Metro-North and AvalonBay Communities to put up several mixed-use buildings where train station parking lots now stand. But the town faced scrutiny from a fair-housing coalition because it did not include any affordable housing.

Under the deal announced Thursday, seven of the [143 apartments](#) ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2014/11/28/harrison-affordable-housing-tests-astorino-power/19612981/](#)) planned at the site will be designated affordable housing, town Supervisor Ron Belmont said.

"It's finally a reality," Belmont told The Journal News. "We're moving forward."

The long-discussed project calls for constructing four-story buildings with 27,000 square feet of retail space and a 500-space parking garage. The 3.3-acre site at the corner of Halstead and Harrison avenues is owned by Metro-North but will be turned over in exchange for the developer tagging 475 spaces in the garage for Metro-North commuters.

Occupants of the affordable units must make less than 60 percent of Westchester's median income and will be chosen through a lottery system. The project must go through the town's permitting process before moving forward.

The agreement came almost four months after Journal News Tax Watch columnist David McKay Wilson raised the issue of Harrison's [lack of an affordable housing component](#) ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2014/11/20/harrison-developments-lack-affordable-housing/19324979/](#)) at the MTA project and two other multi-family developments under review in the town. The column quoted County Executive Rob Astorino as favoring affordable housing there.

Workforce Housing Coalition founder Alexander Roberts called 5 percent an "inadequate" amount of housing. Roberts said Harrison should modify its zoning code to require all new developments to include at least 10 percent affordable housing.

"The town of Harrison, which is two-thirds the size of Manhattan and has failed to produce even one affordable apartment in nearly a quarter-century, should not be allowed to continue to rig its zoning to benefit only the wealthiest New Yorkers," he said.

Harrison ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2015/01/31/lowey-silent-harrison-affordable-housing/22619659/](#)) is one of 31 Westchester County communities named in the 2009 settlement terms of an affordable housing lawsuit filed by a New York City nonprofit housing advocacy group called the Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York.

As part of a deal reached with the federal government, the county agreed to obtain or build 750 units of affordable housing in towns and villages where the black and Hispanic populations made up less than 3 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of the overall population.

The county expects the seven units in the Harrison development to be counted toward its obligations under the settlement and will provide as much as \$1 million in subsidies for the apartments. County Executive Rob Astorino, a Republican who came into office after the settlement was signed, has said zoning should be dictated by local municipalities and not the county or federal government.

"This is an example of how housing gets built and home rule and local zoning is still respected," he said in a statement.

Harrison is one of the last communities named in the settlement that hasn't adopted a model ordinance requiring, in part, that any new housing developments include 10 percent affordable units. A September 2014 report by the monitor appointed to oversee implementation of the settlement cited Harrison and five other municipalities for having zoning practices that contributed to a lack of integration of their black and Hispanic populations.

Citing the [Tax Watch](#) column, ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2014/11/20/harrison-developments-lack-affordable-housing/19324979/](#)) federal housing monitor James Johnson [intervened](#) ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2015/01/15/astorino-punts-harrison-housing/21834955/](#)), asking Astorino to detail his outreach to Harrison, which led to several meetings between Harrison officials and high-ranking Westchester County officials.

The Workforce Housing Coalition [held a press conference](#) ([/story/money/personal-finance/taxes/david-mckay-wilson/2014/11/28/harrison-affordable-housing-tests-astorino-power/19612981/](#)) at Grand Central Terminal, and testified before the MTA board, asking the transportation agency to require affordable units in its transit-oriented development projects. Roberts said Thursday the county should intervene to ensure affordable units are set aside in the other residential developments planned in Harrison.

Staff writer David McKay Wilson contributed to this report.

Housing advocates: 7 affordable units just won't cut it

Mark Lungariello, mlungariello@lohud.com 11:16 p.m. EDT March 13, 2015

Harrison's Metro-North development will have seven affordable housing units, but more should be planned in two other Harrison developments, a housing coalition says.



(Photo: File photo, David McKay Wilson/The Journal News)

HARRISON – The town may be getting its first new affordable housing units in a quarter-century, but the head of a fair-housing coalition said his group will be pushing for more.

The town announced Thursday that seven units of affordable housing ([/story/money/real-estate/2015/03/12/harrison-affordable-housing-mta/70226582/](http://story.money/real-estate/2015/03/12/harrison-affordable-housing-mta/70226582/)) will be included in a 143-unit development planned by AvalonBay Communities on the south side of the town's Metro-North station. Affordable units represent 5 percent of the total amount, but Alexander Roberts of the Workforce Housing Coalition said his group will be pushing for 10 percent at two other construction proposals in the town, which would include 463 apartments in total.

Roberts noted that a Housing Allocation Plan by a Westchester County housing opportunity commission set a goal for Harrison of 756 affordable housing units by 2015. The seven units were a huge victory and broke up a "logjam" in the town, he said, but more housing is still needed.

"It's a huge step forward but still a drop in the bucket for the greater goal," he said.

Verco Properties wants to build 42 luxury apartments with ground-floor retail space at the former Harrison playhouse, which has sat vacant on Halstead Avenue around the corner from the Metro-North station since 2011. Normandy Real Estate Partners is looking to construct 421 apartments at a former office complex on Corporate Park Drive.

Town Supervisor Ron Belmont, reached by phone Friday, said he had no comment on whether the town would negotiate with either developer to include affordable housing in those developments.

Harrison is one of 31 communities in the county named in the 2009 settlement of a federal fair-housing lawsuit, in which Westchester agreed to build or obtain 750 units of affordable housing in communities where black and Hispanic residents made up less than 3 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of the overall population.

All but six of the communities named in the suit — including Harrison — had developments in various stages of planning, according to the county's most recent status update on the settlement implementation. Harrison is one of 12 communities named in the settlement that have yet to adopt a model zoning ordinance that would require 10 percent of any development's units to be affordable.

Westchester has completed more than 220 units and has 450 units with financing in place. Roberts said including affordable units in market-rate apartment developments would effectively subsidize the construction and reduce the per-unit cost to Westchester when compared with the all-affordable developments the county has built in other areas.

Roberts said the coalition was pleased Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino's office was part of the negotiations to include affordable units at the Harrison Metro-North station and said the county executive should now convince the town to adopt the 10-percent provision.

"They brokered this, maybe they can broker that," he said.

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