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Blairsville housing to be ready for early 2012

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BLAIRSVILLE DISPATCH

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A new housing development in the borough, Grandview Pointe, is expected to be completed late this year, according to Kelly Hicks, executive director of the Housing Authority of Indiana County.

The 24-unit housing complex is being constructed for the authority along Grandview Avenue to replace its existing Conemaugh Terrace apartments at West Market and North Spring streets.

"Conemaugh Terrace residents will be getting a great gift for the holidays this year... a new home. We plan to begin relocating them after the holidays," Hicks said.

Grandview Pointe's eight three-unit buildings are beginning to take shape on the site of the borough's former community swimming pool as part of a land swap with the borough. The borough and its Blairsville Community Development Authority want to raze the Conemaugh Terrace complex once it is vacant to make way for proposed development of private housing that is meant to revitalize the western end of Market Street.

The housing authority's development partner, Trek Development Group of Pittsburgh, is constructing the new Grandview units, which are being financed through tax credits awarded for the project by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. The project cost is slightly less than \$4 million, according to Trek President William Gatti.

Work at the site fell behind by about a month due to the recent rainy season, Hicks said. But, she added, "The contractor is recovering from that through overtime and bringing in additional framing crews."

Work on some of the housing units is more advanced than others. Hicks noted that construction of some of the buildings is just beginning, with pouring of floor slabs or installation of roof trusses. But several other buildings have roof shingles, windows and sliding glass doors already installed and rough plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems in place. Drywall installation will be the next step for the latter structures.

The prime contractor for the project is Max Construction of Saltsburg.

Grandview Pointe will consist of a total of 16 two-bedroom and eight one-bedroom housing units. Hicks explained each building will have a one-bedroom unit in the middle, flanked by two-bedroom units on each end.

Each unit will have it's own front porch, rear patio and locked storage area.

Hicks added that the housing units feature an energy-efficient design and appliances. Windows are oversized to let in natural light, and photovoltaic panels will be installed on the roofs to tap solar energy.

In addition to the housing units, the complex will include a central community building with a fireplace that will house support services and activities for residents.

The former swimming pool bathhouse is being retained for continued use as a locker room for teams playing at the Blairsville High School football stadium located across Grandview Avenue.

"It's a bittersweet project because Conemaugh Terrace was Indiana County's first public housing site, so we'll be sad to see it go. But it's wonderful to be able to replace it with such a beautiful new community," Hicks stated.

But, dating from 1969, Conemaugh Terrace was beginning to show its age. One of the arguments for constructing a new housing facility was that any major work done to update the older complex would trigger handicapped accessibility guidelines that would require widening of hallways. Such changes likely would reduce the number of units at Conemaugh Terrace from 24 to 18.

Hicks noted the Grandview units will feature wide doorways and hallways and large turning circumferences in kitchens and baths to permit the use of walkers, scooters or wheelchairs.

"We're happy to be doing the project," Gatti said. "It's going to be a nice improvement that will make way for redevelopment in the town."

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