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Addressing deteriorating homes *Director outlines plans for updating WHA housing stock*

By Rochelle Moore Times Staff Writer

Edward Jagnandan has had a long-standing vision for the Wilson Housing Authority that would lead to improved housing for thousands of low-income residents.

When he applied for the post in 2006, he told the board chairman that the public housing apartments at Anthony Street would be a great location for a home-ownership program.

That dream is now a reality but only one of many pieces of a larger puzzle — and plan — to transform the all of the Wilson Housing Authority units.

Citywide, the Wilson Housing Authority has more than 700 units located at E.B. Jordan Homes, El Ramey Circle, the Bruce Rose Plaza, Whitfield Homes and Forrest Green and almost 50 other properties, including houses and duplexes, scattered across Wilson.

Jagnandan, who has been with the authority since January 2007, has wanted to improve the housing stock and previously sought to turn the Bruce Rose Plaza, a high-rise housing complex for the elderly, into an assisted living facility.

He's also wanted to tear down Whitfield Homes, the 300-plus housing area with old properties deteriorating to the point of the WHA closing 52 units.

Faced with aging facilities and reduced federal capital funds, the Wilson Housing Authority has had to come up with new ways of renovating or replacing its public housing, he said.

Whitfield Homes area still standing and the Bruce Rose Plaza remains in need of extensive repairs.

"The federal government is cutting our funds tremendously," Jagnandan said. "Federal dollars are shrinking all across the board so the housing authority has to find new and creative ways of fixing up their stock and make it more livable."

The WHA receives close to \$800,000 in capital funding from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development each year but needs about \$7 million to make needed repairs and improvements, Jagnandan said.

FORREST GREEN, STARMOUNT CIRCLE

The Wilson Housing Authority has already made certain improvements with 68 newly-remodeled apartments in the Forrest Green community. The \$7.2 million project, which involved energy efficient construction, was funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The project will continue in September with the construction of a three-story apartment complex for seniors at Starmount Circle. The \$7.5 million project is being paid for with multifamily revenue bonds and, once finished, the 38-unit complex will be called Pinnacle Point.

ANTHONY STREET

The 26 apartments at Anthony Street is the authority's first home-ownership area where two-and three-bedroom apartments have been converted into condominiums and are now on the market for sale. The housing authority is

selling two-bedroom units for \$68,000 and the three-bedroom units for \$73,000. Public housing residents had the first option to purchase the units. Now, they are on the market and for sale to the general public.

The renovation was paid for with \$645,645 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

E.B. JORDAN, BRUCE ROSE PLAZA

The next step of renovating and improving public housing stock is planned for apartments in the Bruce Rose Plaza, on Broad Street in downtown Wilson, and E.B. Jordan Homes. The E.B. Jordan community, a multifamily housing area off London Church Road, is planned to undergo renovations that would involve improvements to 113 units and expanding it to 116 apartments. The housing area would be renamed to London Church Crossing.

The Bruce Rose Plaza work involves renovations to 58 units, which would include structural improvements and the replacement of aging utility infrastructure.

“I was told that the whole Bruce Rose Plaza has to be done — new plumbing, new roofing, new interiors and new windows,” Jagnandan said. “We want our residents to be safe and secure and have a better place to live so we’re planning on fixing it up and the people who are living there will have a better place to live and it will last 40 years or more.”

The authority is applying to the N.C. Housing Finance Agency for approval to issue \$9.5 million in tax-exempt bonds to renovate apartments at E.B. Jordan and the Bruce Rose Plaza. The housing authority should know by January whether the funding proposal is approved.

EL RAMEY CIRCLE, FORREST GREEN

Also in January, the Wilson Housing Authority will ask the N.C. Housing Finance Agency for approval to issue another bond-funded project that would pay for the renovation of 40 units at El Ramey Circle, along Stantonsburg Road, and the remaining 117 apartments in the Forrest Green community.

“We don’t know the amount yet but it looks like it could be close to \$9 million,” Jagnandan said.

WHITFIELD HOMES

The plan is still in place to tear down the 311 units in the Whitfield Homes community but if a sizable grant source doesn’t come through, the housing authority has another plan to renovate the area. The authority received a \$200,000 Choice Neighborhoods Planning grant earlier this year and plans to seek a \$31 million Choice Neighborhood Implementation grant with HUD. The funding would pay for the complete demolition of Whitfield Homes and the construction of new housing.

“We’ll tear down the whole site,” Jagnandan said. “If I do not get that (funding), they may not come down, they may be rehabilitated.”

“We will use that \$31 million and leverage additional funds to do additional housing.”

If the federal grant is not available, the housing authority will consider another two-part bond financing deal that would split the renovation of Whitfield Homes into two projects and include the addition of a new 120-unit high-rise housing complex for seniors. The WHA would seek the bond funding in 2013, Jagnandan said.

NEW HOUSING, HOME OWNERSHIP

The housing authority is also searching for land in downtown Wilson where a new high-rise apartment complex could be build to accommodate the elderly and be paid for through tax-credit financing, Jagnandan said.

“There’s a need for elderly housing,” Jagnandan said. “Wilson County has a huge demand.”

The housing authority’s other 46 properties scattered throughout the city, including duplexes and houses, are also planned for renovation before they are available for sale to people living in public housing or the general public.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

All of the projects being considered have been backed by the WHA board, in an effort of the authority trying to

meet current and future needs with dwindling funding from the federal government. The WHA has experienced a 30 percent cut in capital funding during the past couple years and housing authorities across the nation are having to find new sources of revenue to pay for capital improvements.

“This is my vision for the agency and we’re trying to put all these plans in place,” Jagnandan said. “Nothing is finalized yet but, overall, this is where we’re headed. I’m trying to find ways to depend less on HUD funding, since they’re giving us less anyway.

We’re trying to get into bond programs, tax credits and dealing with other developers to create other housing. There has to be a plan to survive.”

Mayor Bruce Rose said that Jagnandan’s leadership in Wilson has brought much-needed change and improvements to the housing authority’s aging housing stock. Rose also said that Jagnandan is also interested and involved in the future of the city.

“I certainly think when Edward Jagnandan came to Wilson, he was running and he’s still running,” Rose said. “I just think he’s done a wonderful job. The improvements are great. These are very modern apartments now.

“His dream is for everybody to have a decent, affordable place to live.”

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