

JournalNews

New White Plains housing to save energy

BY KEITH EDDINGS

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WHITE PLAINS - Two progressive causes - affordable housing and energy conservation - intersected on a hard-packed half-acre at the edge of downtown yesterday, when contractors began drilling the first of eight wells that will tap temperatures 350 feet below the surface to heat and cool 14 townhouses that will be built on the site.

"With heating oil approaching \$5 a gallon, energy efficiency is no longer an option," developer Alexander Roberts said.

Along with geothermal energy, the housing will use hyper-efficient insulation, plumbing and lighting to cut energy bills by one-third, or about \$20,000 a year for all of the units.

Those savings will come on top of state and city subsidies that Community Housing Innovations will pass along to middle-income buyers, who earn from 80 percent to 100 percent of the median income for the region. Community Housing Innovations is a White Plains nonprofit developer, of which Roberts is executive director.



Builders work at the future site of the Minerva Place townhouses in White Plains. The new housing will use geothermal energy. (Ricky Flores/The Journal News)

ON THE WEB

To see a video of how geothermal technology works, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWCNEoUTte4.

The subsidies will make the townhouses affordable to a family of four earning as little as \$77,200 a year by capping the monthly mortgage payment at \$2,413.

But it was the project's energy **efficiency**, not its affordability, that grabbed center stage yesterday at 5 Minerva Place, where the pounding of a drilling rig stopped for an hour while the builders and government officials gathered under a tent to backslap about the achievement and toss shovels of dirt as cameras whirled.

"No boiler. No smoke. No fire. No emissions," Roberts said as he opened the news conference, explaining how geothermal technology uses the Earth's relatively constant temperatures to draw heat from below in winter and from buildings in summer. "This project combines my two great passions - affordable housing and energy efficiency."

"If you hit oil, we want the land back," Mayor Joseph Delfino told Roberts, referring to the city's contribution to the development. White Plains also kicked in \$1 million from its affordable housing fund.

Geothermal energy has been heating and cooling buildings for decades in the United States, including all 280,000 square feet of clubhouses and other buildings at Westchester Country Club in Harrison, but rising fuel costs along with a growing awareness of the **environmental** damage caused by fossil fuels have accelerated the demand for it. In White Plains, the new Post Road Elementary School now under construction will be heated and cooled by geothermal energy, which produces an average of 4 kilowatts of power for every one it consumes.

Other green projects are under way in White Plains. At a public works garage a few blocks from yesterday's groundbreaking, the city is fueling eight General Motors vehicles with hydrogen pumped from a small plant that extracts the gas from water in a pilot project with Shell, the Dutch oil giant. Public Works Commissioner Bud Nicoletti recently proposed installing solar panels on the garage, after Gov. David Paterson and the state Legislature agreed to allow businesses and municipalities with the panels to sell their excess power back to utilities.

The Minerva Place housing is expected to cost \$4.6 million and open in the spring, Roberts said. He said his **company**, which has renovated 600 units of affordable housing on Long Island and in the northern suburbs - including 74 units on North Kensico Avenue - would expand the use of geothermal energy in future projects.

"We're going to take this on the road and make it a standard any **community** can use - an energy-efficient, cost-effective affordable- housing development," he said.

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