

# Exeter's Three Meeting Place seeks to complete affordable housing project

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EXETER — Avesta Housing recently applied for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to receive \$500,000 in funding for the fourth phase of its affordable housing project at Meeting Place Drive off Epping Road. Felder Kuehl Properties, LLC also approached the town for the same grant to break ground at 85 Epping Road.

Avesta's final installment at Three Meeting Place will provide 43 one-bedroom and two-bedroom units to families, completing the multi-building campus at Meeting Place Drive. The current campus consists of three buildings and 97 units.

A CDBG grant is a federal program run by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop viable communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and opportunities to expand economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons.

Shreya Shah, development officer at Avesta Housing, said the property is meant to add to the campus in many ways while simultaneously meeting the need for more affordable housing in Exeter. A picnic area and a playground are included in the plans.

Although the project is still in the design stage, Shah says Avesta intends for the fourth phase to be energy-efficient. There has been talk of installing solar panels on the roof to meet the Natural Green Building Standard (NBGS).

Three Meeting Place will also provide residents with Avesta's service-enriched housing through a resident service coordinator.

"Service-enhanced housing involves integrating the community's social service network into the building's ongoing operation and management," Shah said. "These services can improve the quality of life of residents by working with residents on the skills to become and maintain their self-sufficiency."

So far, the funding sources of the project consist of tax credits and subsidy from New Hampshire Housing and funds from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston.

Darren Winham, economic development director of Exeter, and his department are choosing to back the Avesta Housing project instead of Felder Kuehl Properties. Winham attended the Board of Selectmen meeting on Jan. 3 to seek approval and support from the board.

At the Tuesday night meeting, Winham made his intentions clear.

"Avesta is ready to go," he said. "They really seem to have their ducks in a row. I really like the idea that they're going to be enhancing the rest of the campus."

Town Manager Russ Dean agreed that completion of the Avesta project should be a priority, referencing past positive experiences with Avesta acting as a "sound company."

Later in the week, Winham stressed the importance of seeing the Avesta project through until the end.

"For me, it makes sense to get one project done before you move on to another one. That's it, pretty cut and dry," he said.

Winham believes the final phase of the Avesta project will be a great asset to the community. He referred to the playground, picnic area and potential for energy efficiency as "gravy" on top of a crucial project that began years ago before he came into his position of director. In Winham's mind, completion of this last installment would strengthen the campus altogether.

"It helps four buildings instead of helping one," he said.

Additionally, Winham hopes Three Meeting Place residents will join and contribute to the Exeter workforce and ultimately improve the local economy.

At the Jan. 3 meeting, Selectmen's Chairman Dan Chartrand made a motion that it was the sense of the board to support Avesta in its CDBG request in the current round of funding. The motion passed and will be revisited in more depth Jan. 17.