

New housing complex embraced with warm reception, thanks for those who helped along way

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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COLLINSVILLE - The Woodland Park Apartments were unveiled to the public with a warm reception this past week in Collinsville.

Several area dignitaries were on hand for the unveiling of the \$20 million project. The new housing complex has 80 units on the 11.2-acre location at 80 Burlington Drive in Collinsville.

Madison County Housing Authority Executive Director Andy Hightower was very proud of the opening of the housing complex and had a lot of people to thank.

“I want to thank retired Executive Director, John Hamm III for his vision of moving Madison County Housing Authority into the 21st Century. Woodland Park was the last of the barrack style projects in Madison County Housing Authority’s inventory.

“Now that the new buildings are completed we must develop programs that will assist us in our effort to move residents towards home ownership. These programs will include job placement, educational and finance management. We will also implement after school tutorial programs for our youth.

“I am grateful to the MCHA Board of Commissioners for its leadership and guidance during the past two years. We also express our thanks to all that partnered with MCHA during the completion of this project.”

Mike Morrissey of Morrissey Construction Co. of Godfrey, who coordinated and executed the project's construction, said this fits in perfectly with the mission of his grandfather who started the company in 1952.

“We started specializing in affordable housing back then and since then we have put families in homes we take pride in here. There are 80 units of about 104,000 square-feet total. We demolished 24 existing buildings that were dilapidated and one of the great things is we created 55 full-time construction jobs with 115,000 worker hours. We bought probably \$7-\$8 million in material and retail equipment, plus used architectural services and rental equipment. It was a big boom in the economy for a year and a half.”

Dan Hurford of Hurford Architects Inc. spoke on behalf of the architecture of the project and said: “The project is amazing and a lot of efforts have made this happen. It was a great day to celebrate that today. We are proud to be part of it. It is certainly refreshing to see something like this happen and all the benefits it provides.”









These are comments from those who spoke at the housing opening:

ANDY HIGHTOWER, MCHA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: "It's a major achievement; years ago, the Madison County Housing Authority took it upon itself to demo all the barracks-style developments throughout the county. This Northgate Apartments was the last one standing; we began this demolition in 2016 – what you see here today is Woodland Park Apartments. We're very proud of it.

"It's low-income housing; there were surveys leading up to this and it was determined low-income housing was still needed in this area. We downsized from 99 apartments with Northgate and rebuilt 80 apartments. It's a big help for a lot of people in the county.

What we did was knocked down the old apartments; we positioned the Housing Authority to move forward for the next 30-40 years; I have to say I inherited this – this was the brainchild of the retired Executive Director, John Hamm and his staff – John is the mayor of Madison still, but he was the executive director here, but he retired; he started all of this and I'm just here finishing off the project.

It's a very proud moment when you can get partners to come to the table and invest \$19-plus million into a housing development. We're very proud. I'd like to thank the Housing Authority board for working with me the past two years and we do plan new ventures here in the future – we do appreciate the support.”

MADISON MAYOR JOHN HAMM III, FORMER MCHA EXECUTIVE

DIRECTOR: "It was 2003 when I came on board with the Housing Authority; (then Madison County Board Chair Alan) Dunston kind of recommended me to come over and got to work with the board - it was a good board – and he said to me 'we have a mission – we're going to clean up public housing and make good, affordable housing for people, a safe environment to live in. It was a whirlwind and we went at it hard. This is the last one of Madison County's public housing that's been redone.

We started in Venice and Madison, did some rehabs in East Alton, rehabs in Edwardsville; they're really nice complexes when they got done with them. I was in on the design part of this one here, but the staff took the ball and kept rolling with it. It makes good improvements for the city (of Collinsville) the way they're structured; they actually pay taxes to the city, so that helps too.

It's a great achievement for everybody – this is big. A lot of people can't say they started a project and completed it, especially with tearing down housing and build new houses back up. The amenities they have – washers, dryers, dishwashers, everything in there is all furnished for them."

MIKE SKOKLO, MCHA CHAIR: "It is a huge achievement, and as I said, the biggest goal is this - replaced the last old housing projects – they're no longer housing projects, they're housing complexes. You look back, they were the old military barracks-style right after World War II when public housing was on the upswing; we changed our thinking to the modern times with mixed-use, where you have public housing, subsidized housing and actually market-rate in the same complex, so you get a mix of people and it's been good.

If you look at the first sets that were done 14 years ago, they're still nice, well-kept and that's what's great about it. It was needed because people need a decent place to live; we are a public entity and we are part of government, even though we're not elected, we're appointed, and this is public service in my opinion, making positive changes for the people we're serving.

It's a big achievement for both Collinsville and the county; a \$19-plus million project is not a small project in today's society with the improvement in the community and the construction jobs – it's just great, and you partner with private financiers – today the banks and such. \$20 million is a lot of money.

It means a lot to the people who live here; we have people who live here and they should live in decent accommodations and that's what we're giving them. It's a great location (across from Woodland Park) and I think the big thing is that we took away the old stigma names and put new names with a new beginning – we're moving forward."

CHRIS DUNCAN, VICE PRESIDENT AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, US BANCORP: "We were the equity providers (for the project) and really, as I was saying to others, more than just a financing partner, more of a true development and ownership partner with the Housing Authority, just really great to be able to work through the whole process for really more than a year and a half with this group and really developing a great relationship with them.

Like I said, just to be here at the end of a really long road really makes it truly fulfilling for the financing partners just as much as the residents who live here. It's worth it all at the end and seeing the final product is really amazing. As people spoke to the before and after, I'd really like to see the side-by-side pictures because the change in this area is really just truly amazing. It doesn't look the same as it used to. Having the park across the street from here, you can see it's the perfect place for kids and families that they have more than just a home; they've got a community here.

We looked at that park blissfully in the middle of winter thinking about how great it would be to go over there and just walk to it in the summer and springtime. It's just really amazing to see the impact a property in a community like this has on the surrounding areas – the houses right across the street, the park really ties everything together. It really changes the whole structure of a good portion of the city. We're proud to be a part of it."

[Brent Feeney also contributed to this story.](#)