

Affordable senior housing options are slim here

By HOWARD KONAR

We are in the midst of a slow-motion crisis that is affecting the nation, our state and our city. There is a serious shortage of affordable senior housing that will only get worse if we don't take action as a community.

As a nonprofit affordable housing provider, Rochester Management Inc. sees the effects of this shortage on a daily basis, with our 3,500 low- and middle-income units fully occupied and more than 300 seniors on waiting lists for our Rochester-area residences alone.

In fact, rent in our community accounts for 43 percent of household income, compared to 33 percent nationally, according to ACT Rochester, which found "the city of Rochester was less affordable than any county, the region, the state and the nation" after analyzing data from 2011 through 2015.

By 2029, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates "more than 20 percent of the total U.S. population will be over the age of 65." With a growing aging population, we should determine how to best expand Rochester's affordable housing options. Here's why:

- It's the right thing to do. We have a responsibility to help our neighbors, especially senior citizens who have contributed to our community throughout their lives. They deserve safe, quality, affordable

housing options in the same beautiful neighborhoods so many of us are able to enjoy.

- It makes economic sense. According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, seniors with fixed incomes have difficulty with the unpredictable costs of homeownership, leaving less funds for medicine and other necessities, which "in turn jeopardizes their health, potentially leading to increased health care costs." As the rising cost of health care continues to burden the economy, we should recognize how affordable housing might relieve some of that strain by providing reasonable rents and amenities designed to help seniors age in place.

- It will keep Rochester vibrant. If senior homeowners had more alternative housing options for aging in place, we would expect increases in the number of homes for sale. This would mean more houses on the market for young families to move into, thus helping Rochester remain vibrant for years to come.

Cobbs Hill Village has played an important role in Rochester Management's ability to provide below-market-rate senior housing for 60 years. We've worked in close collaboration with neighbor-



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hood and other community groups, current residents and city officials to develop a plan to modernize and expand the community within its existing footprint while continuing to preserve the integrity of Cobbs Hill Park. Based on input gathered at 17 meetings with these

groups in less than 12 months, we have revised our original plan, which had called for two four-story buildings. Our new plan includes two three-story buildings and a row of townhomes, as requested by neighborhood group leaders, a reduction in the number of units from 104 to 98, new exterior-finish materials, colors and landscape design. These changes add \$2.5 million to the project's cost, now estimated at \$25 million, and push the completion date back a full year.

One thing that has not changed is our commitment to ensuring every current resident can remain in the community if they choose. From the beginning of this project, we have guaranteed that existing residents will carry over their current rents to our new greatly improved facilities. In place of motel-style accommodations that offer little in the way of privacy, security or

amenities, the new Cobbs Hill Village will include a variety of apartment sizes and layouts, each equipped with full-size kitchen appliances, energy efficient HVAC systems and private outdoor spaces. The addition of more accessible laundry rooms, a small fitness room, a computer lab and an indoor community space will allow our senior residents to avoid isolation, having places to enjoy the company of neighbors, friends and family year-round whenever they choose. We feel strongly that economic status should not prevent Rochester's seniors from aging in place with basic comforts and safety in this or any neighborhood.

While the New York State budget just allocated nearly \$2 billion to expanding affordable housing, we need to focus on this issue locally as well. It's vital that we work together to make sure we are meeting the housing needs of all of Rochester's residents, including our valued senior citizens.

Howard Konar serves as chairman of Rochester Management Inc., a nonprofit founded in the 1940s by citizens in partnership with local government to meet the city's affordable housing needs. He is the president of Konar Properties. More information is available at www.HousingUpstate.org.