

## Housing authority, Stamford Hospital launch new West Side health clinic

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STAMFORD -- Marking the launch of what they hope will become "a health and wellness district" on the city's West Side, the city's housing authority and Stamford Hospital have teamed up to sponsor a new community health clinic on Stillwater Avenue.

Fairgate Community Health Center opened recently a retail space that is part of Fairgate, a mixed-income residential development owned by the city's housing authority, Charter Oak Communities.

Stamford Hospital paid \$300,000 for the fit-out of the clinic. The two organizations, which are significant stakeholders on the West Side, are aiming to designate a stretch of Stillwater Avenue between West Main Street and West Avenue as an informal neighborhood district called "Vita," Latin for "life."

"It's a way of creating a brand that is not Stamford Hospital, not Charter Oak, but a way of personifying what we consider the essence of the resources that we want to make available," said Vin Tufo, the executive director of Charter Oak. "It's about promoting a healthy lifestyle."

David Smith, senior vice president of strategy and marketing at Stamford Hospital, said in addition to expanding access to primary health care services, the center is involved in health education and prevention activities.

The 1,500 square-foot clinic is operated by Optimus Health Care, a federally funded, private, nonprofit health center with two other facilities in Stamford. Like its other locations, the West Side clinic provides non-emergency primary health care and is open to all patients regardless of insurance status. The facility contains three exam rooms along with a conference room.

The clinic is the anchor retail tenant at Fairgate, where two other retail spaces are yet to be occupied, but have been slated for complementary health-related uses. Rents at those spaces will be partially subsidized by Charter Oak. The housing authority is planning additional retail spaces at Stillwater and Merrell avenues, a portion of which will also be reserved for health and wellness uses.

The second and highly anticipated component of the new Vita district will come as early as this summer, when Charter Oak is to unveil a communal farm across the street from the clinic. Charter Oak recently began razing four houses it purchased on Stillwater Avenue to make way for the roughly 1-acre plot. The farm, to be called Fairgate Farm, will offer locally grown organic vegetables and involve the participation of several community groups, according to Tufo.

He said Charter Oak will look to fund the project through a variety of public and private sources.

Both ventures on the West Side mark the latest evolution of the city's housing authority, which since the late 1990s has been experimenting with different models of housing and community development.

Tufo credited the new ideas to its collaboration with the hospital that began about 10 years ago. Both entities are undertaking large-scale redevelopments on the West Side. Charter Oak is in the midst of building several mixed-income housing communities to replace its older public housing stock, while the hospital is about to embark on a \$575 million expansion and replacement plan.

While promoting access to a health clinic is a first for the housing authority, Tufo nonetheless referred to it as "one piece of the puzzle."

"In and of itself, it's not going to change the world," he said. "But in concert with the hospital it will have the potential of unlocking the potential for an individual who seeks to adopt a healthy lifestyle."

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