

Advocate 10/22/11

WESTWOOD

More mixed-income housing commemorated

By Elizabeth Kim
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STAMFORD — The city's housing authority, Charter Oak Communities, on Thursday commemorated the recent opening of a 95-unit mixed-income housing complex on the West Side known as Westwood.

The townhouse-style development spread across 4 1/2 acres on Progress Drive represents the first phase of housing intended to replace Vidal Court, a 216-unit state-assisted housing project on Merrell Avenue that is slated to be torn down. It is the agency's fourth mixed-income

development.

Like other housing authorities across the country, Charter Oak has been trying to move away from public housing projects such as Vidal Court that concentrate poor families into mid- to high-rise buildings and have become difficult to manage and occupy.

Nonetheless, Vin Tufo, the executive director of Charter Oak, said he is often asked whether a mixed-income model of housing works.

"It certainly can work if you build it right and if you manage it right," he said, standing before an audience of about 50

people, including Mayor Michael Pavia and state officials.

Of the 95 units at Westwood, 38 are market-rate rentals. The remaining 57 are reserved for families making between 25 percent to 60 percent of the area median income and went to families who were living at Vidal Court.

All of the units were fully leased prior to its opening, according to Tufo.

Beginning with Southwood Square, the mixed-income development that in 2002 replaced the troubled public housing project in Waterside named Southfield Village, much has been said about

the design of the housing authority's new developments. Like Southwood Square and Fairgate, a Charter Oak development on Fairfield Avenue, Westwood resembles a New England village. The buildings feature Colonial-style doorways, shuttered windows and chimneys. They are set amid a landscape of sloping lawns and tree-lined sidewalks.

Democratic State Rep. Patricia Billie Miller, a former housing authority employee who grew up in Southfield Village, testified to the changes.

"The only thing we saw most of the time was cement," she said, adding

that she noticed a playground at Westwood.

She praised Charter Oak's latest developments as spacious communities that are "not just a place where people can sleep. They are a place where people can call home."

Outside the event, Rosemarie Voltaire, 42, a mother of three, walked with a friend along the neatly landscaped sidewalks. She said she had been living at Westwood for two months.

Prior to moving, Voltaire said she lived in Vidal Court for 10 years. She prefers her new residence.

"Before I had two bedrooms, now I have three," she said.