

# PRESSRELEASE

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## **Worcester Housing Authority Awarded \$10 Million from Gateway Cities Neighborhood Revitalization Program**

*WHA to address housing, economic mobility, and resident connectivity in comprehensive project*

**WORCESTER, Massachusetts** – Heading into the latter half of 2020, the Worcester Housing Authority shows no signs of slowing down when it comes to providing housing and building futures. The WHA has been awarded \$10,000,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development’s Gateway Cities Neighborhood Revitalization Program to begin work on its “Inspire to Grow” project. The project, which will address neighborhood revitalization needs at the WHA’s Curtis Apartments, will also focus on resident engagement, connectivity, economic mobility, and housing.

Major elements for the project include:

- The demolition of the WHA’s Great Brook Valley central building at 69 Tacoma Street, which currently houses property management offices, central maintenance operations, inventory and warehouse supplies and materials;
- Creation of a new multi-story, 38,000 square foot Economic Opportunity Center, a “one stop shop” for all resident services for Great Brook Valley (GBV) and Curtis Apartments (Curtis);
- The Economic Opportunity Center will house:
  - Property Management offices for GBV and Curtis;
  - All self-sufficiency programs including A Better Life, HUD’s Family Self Sufficiency, ROSS, and Transitional Housing Program;
  - Resident Service office that oversees youth education and recreation programs, adult learning programs and elderly programs for all WHA developments;
  - The relocation of the Great Brook Valley branch of the Worcester Public Library;
  - The relocation of the Worcester Comprehensive Education and Care, the area’s primary childcare center;
  - A state-of-the-art computer lab to conduct employment readiness trainings and workshops for residents.

- The development of 18 new apartments of public housing at the Curtis Apartments, 30, 32 and 34 Great Brook Valley Avenue. Six of the apartments will be fully accessible for disabled residents and in compliance according to Section 504 requirements.
- The transformation of the 30,000 square foot barren concrete quadrangle at the rear of 36-42 Great Brook Valley Avenue into a vibrant, landscaped, and welcoming green space. Valuable input from residents and the Tower Hill Botanic Gardens will help shape the development of this currently dull and largely unused area;
- Enhanced resident safety with the replacement of 20 rear staircases at the Curtis Apartments, along with complete restoration of Brookview Drive and area fencing;

### **The Economic Opportunity Center: Making Programs and Services More Available for Residents**

The WHA's "Inspire to Grow" project will make all programs more accessible for housing authority residents, starting with the construction of the Economic Opportunity Center. Replacing the Maintenance and Inventory Warehouse located at 67/69 Tacoma Street, the Economic Opportunity Center will move all self-sufficiency programming, Life Skills courses, and related services into one central location. Residents will be able to sign up for and participate in all Family and Resident Services programming at the center and easily connect with staff as they strive to create better lives for themselves and their families.

### **New Apartments and Improved Accessibility**

Additionally, the "Inspire to Grow" project will focus on housing availability in Worcester's Great Brook Valley. The relocation of Family and Resident Services personnel to the Economic Opportunity Center, who currently work out of 30, 32, and 34 Great Brook Valley Avenue, will result in the turnover of office space into 18 new apartments of affordable housing, with six being fully accessible for disabled residents. An exterior elevator will also be constructed to help residents access their units. Similarly, the relocation of Worcester Comprehensive Education and Care to the EOC will help the WHA pursue to convert that newly vacated space into 18 additional apartments at Great Brook Valley Gardens. Addressing the lack of housing and accessible apartments presently in the GBV neighborhood, the "Inspire to Grow" project will help welcome new residents into the WHA.

### **Other Renovations: Resident Safety**

Resident safety will likewise be a large aspect of the WHA's "Inspire to Grow" project. The replacement of 20 rear staircases at the Curtis Apartments, which have not been upgraded since the building's construction in 1950, will feature new handrails and bump outs that will drastically improve the development's aging façade and add dimension and architectural interest to its otherwise unattractive and outdated appearance. The replacement of Brookview Drive and nearby fencing, now in a state of disrepair, will make it safer for residents to walk around the site.

### **Resident Connectivity and Economic Mobility**

The evolution of the boring and lifeless courtyard at the Curtis Apartments into welcoming, colorful green space touches upon the resident connectivity element of the "Inspire to Grow" project. Located in the rear of 36-42 Great Brook Valley Avenue, the landscaped area will have benches and outdoor lighting, which will inspire residents to explore beyond their front doors and into the larger Curtis

Apartments neighborhood. Funded by DHCD's Creative Place-making Award Program, the planned green space will be designed with help from Tower Hill Botanic Gardens and invaluable resident input that will help create an area that is truly their own.

Economic mobility is likewise a prominent facet of "Inspire to Grow". Several elements of this project, including the construction of the Economic Opportunity Center, turnover of units, and the development of green space at the Curtis Apartments will provide considerable on-the-job experience for residents and especially participants of the WHA's Step-Up Apprenticeship Program. Furthermore, the WHA will be working with area partners such as Worcester Comprehensive Education and Care, Worcester Technical High School, and the City of Worcester beyond the completion of the "Inspire to Grow" project to train and hire apprentices interested in working for local government, in the field of early childhood care, and in trade careers such as plumbing, electric, HVAC maintenance, and more.

Aiming for completion in 2023, the WHA's "Inspire to Grow" project will help both residents and the Worcester community thrive long after the final brick is laid. This project will help area businesses, apprentices, and other local stakeholders work together to generate business, provide valuable workplace training, and instill a sense of resident pride that will bring new life to the Curtis Apartments and the Great Brook Valley community. The WHA is excited to roll up its sleeves and get to work, as explained by Chief Executive Officer, Alex Corrales:

***"This is tremendous investment to the Curtis and Great Brook Valley neighborhood. It provides an opportunity for residents to easily access services and resources in the new center, but also allows the creation of much needed public housing apartments."***

*The mission of the Worcester Housing Authority is to enhance the Worcester community by creating and sustaining decent, safe, and affordable housing that champions stability and self-sufficiency for its residents. To learn more, please contact WHA Chief Executive Officer Alex Corrales at 508-635-3106.*