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Praise for city housing project

By Melita Kurbaras

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Local News - A stained glass fixture above the front door of the new Dalhousie Church Lofts is a reminder of the buildings former use as a Baptist church.

The building at 260 Dalhousie St. was recently converted into an affordable housing complex of 17 apartments, with financial help from the municipality and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

City officials and residents celebrated the conversion of the former River of Life Church on Tuesday, commending developer King Street Holdings Ltd. for turning the inside into unique, attractive dwellings while keeping the historic nature of the structure.

Resident Deanna Budgell, a Laurier Brantford student who moved into a two-bedroom apartment with her four-year-old son, Isaiah, said she loves the high ceilings and large windows in her living room.

Its very difficult to find a place thats not expensive, said Budgell.

She is happy to live in the building that is close to school and the downtown. It also faces on a park, which her son can play in.

Monthly rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$684, while a one-bedroom is \$633, utilities included. No two apartments look alike.

The project began about two years ago, when developer and part owner Howard Rotberg started working with the city and CMHC to rezone the building.

Rotberg said he passed the church hundreds of times while driving to downtown Brantford. He thought it had potential because the basement was mostly above ground, with windows that let natural light in even for what would eventually be lower-level apartments.

It was very daunting, Chris McNabb, of King Street Holdings, said about his initial reaction when he saw the old church. It took a lot of work to restructure the floors and walls inside, but it would have been a tragedy if it was torn down, he said.

I fell in love with the building. I know youre not supposed to do that, but I did, said McNabb.

Brantford waived the development charges and permit fees for a total municipal contribution of almost \$50,000. Federal funding covered \$408,000 through the CHMC Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program. CHMC also provided an interest-free loan of \$47,000, of which \$16,000 has been forgiven.

Mayor Mike Hancock said the project is an example of all three levels of government working together to tackle the issue of affordable housing.

A few years ago we did a study that showed us the numbers we were facing, in terms of the need for affordable housing, said Hancock.

City officials have since been working hard to bring rental projects like this to the community, he added.

I dont think (the need) is something that will ever completely go away, but the city can not reduce it by itself. We need to work with the federal government."

All but two of the apartments at Dalhousie Church Lofts are already occupied.

Standing in one of the apartments, city Coun. James Calnan said he was impressed with the appeal of the apartments, and thought it a great place to live.

I think this shows that just because someone is poor, they dont have to live in a dump, Calnan said.

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