



Owner: DePaul Properties Inc. | Location: Rochester, NY | Completion Date: 2018  
Programs Achieved: Energy Star Multifamily High-Rise, Energy Star Certified Homes, NYSERDA

## Building a Greener and Better Community

The October 2018 completion of Upper Falls Square represents a number of exciting achievements for the Rochester community and New York state's sustainability movement. This affordable housing complex signifies a huge step toward the state's ambitious goals to revitalize the neighborhood, support its most vulnerable citizens, and lead the nation in green building. The milestone also celebrates a groundbreaking moment for the project's talented sustainable development team, including developer DePaul Properties Inc., green building consultant Sustainable Comfort Inc. (SCI), builder Christa Construction, and architect SWBR Architects. As the population shifts and grows, more people are calling a multifamily building their home. The team's vision has been to move the multifamily market to conscious development, which results in sustainable buildings that support the residents who call them home and the communities that surround them.

Today, the \$48 million affordable housing complex at Upper Falls Square provides housing to low- and middle-income residents and services to individuals with special needs. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo is dedicated to neighborhood rehabilitation projects like Upper Falls Square, and the project has become a cornerstone of the state's comprehensive strategy to galvanize the economy, one community at a time.

Chris Straile, Director of Operations of Sustainable Comfort Inc., says, "The Upper Falls Square Apartments project was vital for the city of Rochester, as it provides long-term and permanent housing where residents with mental health diagnosis have access to the supportive services they need to lead productive and successful lives."

Based on data from previous DePaul projects, projects like these have also been shown to improve the community as a whole—often spurring a drop in crime rates and an increase in employment rates. "The Upper Falls Square Apartments will significantly benefit many people, by offering affordable, energy-efficient housing that



drives progress toward healthier, more sustainable communities,” says DePaul President Mark Fuller.

### **A Lay of the Land: Designing to Celebrate and Inspire the Community**

Before construction, condemned buildings and naked foundations littered the Upper Falls Square property. Today, the 142,000-square-foot complex sits on a little over three acres and features two multistory residences: The Ellen Stubbs Apartments with 114 apartments, and The Minister Raymond and Maxine Scott Apartments with 36. The adjacent Anthony L. Jordan Health Center was also renovated to provide accessible health and wellness classes to residents and to the greater Upper Falls community.

In all, Straile explains, “the project boasts a total of 150 affordable housing units, including 32 ADA units and 2 HVA [Hearing and Visually Accessible] units. The two smoke-free buildings are in close proximity to local amenities. They also provide off-street parking and include housing specialists who teach tenants skills that they can leverage within the community. Additionally, Upper Falls Square provides heat, hot water, air conditioning, on-site laundry facilities, and Wi-Fi at no cost to the tenants.”

The Upper Falls Square Apartments also incorporate 75 units that help those with special needs live independently. Studios, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom configurations are available to suit individual and family needs, as well as courtyards and community green spaces to give residents a safe, clean, and welcoming environment.

***“I love everything about my apartment, but my favorite part is the central location. It’s close to stores and other community resources. The builders and architects put a lot of thought into the convenience of spaces and amenities. Overall, it makes me feel good knowing there’s less of an impact living here.”***

— Thomas Singleton, A Current Upper Falls Square Tenant

To pay homage to the strong community ties of the property, the main buildings of Upper Falls Square are named after important local Rochester figures. Building A is called the Ellen Stubbs Apartments. It honors the late Ellen Stubbs, a nurse who was dedicated to serving the community and gave her time and talent to the original Anthony L. Jordan Health Center. Building B is named the Minister Raymond and Maxine Scott Apartments—two people who worked tirelessly to better Rochester and the lives of its residents.



### **From Ideation to Construction and Completion**

SCI was asked to contribute its expertise late in the construction process. It joined Christa Construction and SWBR Architects to help DePaul satisfy stringent requirements for Climate Bond Initiative funding goals.

“The project was originally designed and funded with no energy program initiatives in place or required,” says E. Joseph Gibbons II, AIA, Principal at SWBR, who oversaw the design from conception to construction. “After completion of the construction documents, the main tax-credit funding source required that we meet their newly mandated energy initiatives, including the EPA Energy Star for Homes Program. That led to a hurried call to Sustainable Comfort to huddle and brainstorm some ideas with the entire design team to determine a course of action with the existing design in order to meet these requirements and present options to our client, DePaul.”

“SCI worked very intimately with Mike Seaman, Christa’s Vice President, during the design and preconstruction phases to ensure all green construction goals were made part of the contract documents,” says Jay Weaver, Christa Senior Project Manager and lead project manager on the project. “Their project team is very professional and accommodating, and we look forward to working with them on future projects.”

### **Sustainability Upgrades, Achievements, and Certifications**

In 2016, New York became the first state in the country to receive affordable housing bonds from the Climate Bond Standards Board. Upper Falls Square is one of the first developments in the state to be supported by Homes and Community Renewal’s Green Bonds. To achieve this



prestigious certification, the apartments were designed with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Energy Star Programs requirements in mind:

- The Ellen Stubbs Apartments (Building A) is certified with the Energy Star Multifamily High-Rise program.
- The Minister Raymond and Maxine Scott Apartments (Building B), is designed to exceed the efficiency of the Energy Star Certified Homes program.
- Both buildings incorporate “green” features, including Energy Star-rated appliances and lighting fixtures; low or no VOC paints, primers, adhesives and sealants; and green label-plus carpeting.
- The project utilized high-efficiency Magic-Pak HVAC single-packaged vertical units for heating and cooling in the apartments, as well as central gas hot water heating.
- The high-rise building has a rooftop solar array of photovoltaic panels to offset the buildings electricity consumption and costs.
- Low-flow WaterSense-labeled plumbing fixtures and all LED or CFL light fixtures were installed in both buildings to reduce water and electricity consumption, respectively.

*“I think that the most exciting sustainable component to this project is the solar arrays that are mounted atop the buildings. I believe between both buildings there are roughly 160 solar modules mounted on the roof. Coming from a background of renewable energy, nothing gets me more jazzed than seeing a roof full of solar!”*

— Alex Fox , SCI Project Manager

The thoughtful construction and green design elements of the property have been noticed. DePaul won the “Top Producing Partner Builder Award” in 2018 for its work in the NYSERDA Low-Rise New Construction Program. SCI accepted the award on its behalf.

## Tackling the Energy Star Multifamily High-Rise Certification

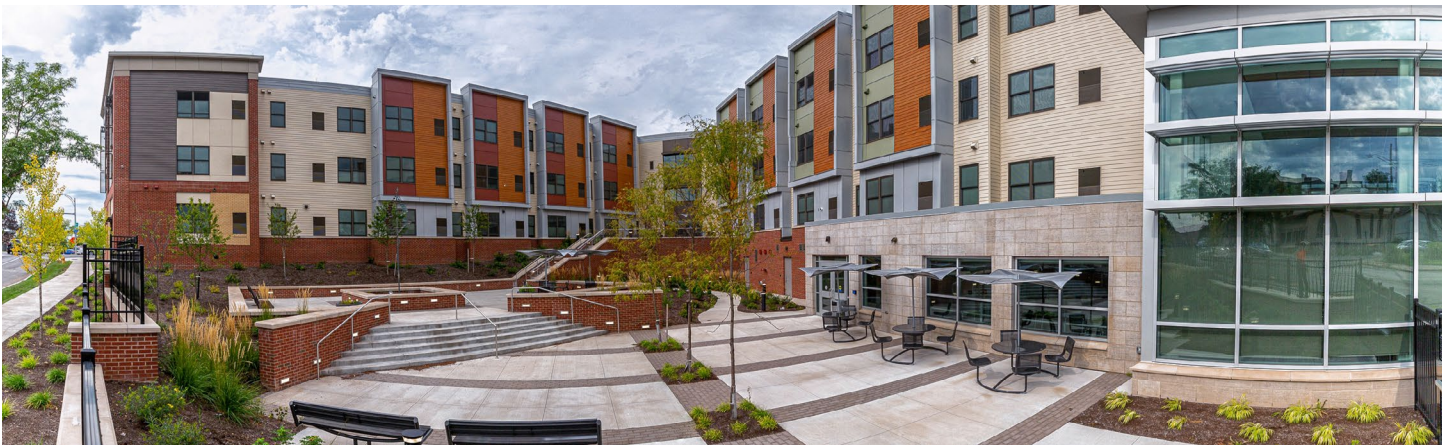
This project revolved around green planning: a commitment to better construction and management practices to help developers, architects, contractors, and residents achieve greater health, resilience, and sustainable multifamily buildings.

Sustainable Comfort Inc., pulling from its ample experience with approving and certifying large capacity buildings, helped DePaul achieve the High-Rise Building Homes certification. As one of the most complex certification programs in the industry, this required special attention to detail, documentation, and communication with the design and construction teams.

Fox says, “We are very familiar and proficient with EPA Energy Star Multifamily Low-Rise projects, but this project was a first of its kind for us at SCI, as an EPA Energy Star Multifamily High-Rise. We really had to dive in to the program guidelines to make sure we were meeting all of the program requirements, but our experience allowed us to tackle it one step at a time with no issues. There is much more photo documentation required for a project of this type, and we performed a multitude of tests, from air infiltration (blower doors), total duct leakage, pressure balancing, and ventilation.”

It was a team effort between the developer, architects, engineers, and general contractor to achieve certification smoothly and successfully. But it was also a rewarding, positive, and fun experience, according to the crew.

“This was a truly exciting and innovative project, and with that comes many challenges. The most difficult part of the project was collecting the documentation required to certify Building A through the EPA Energy Star Multifamily High-Rise program,” says Straille. “I was able to overcome





those challenges by being on-site frequently throughout construction and by working collaboratively with Christa Construction to make sure all the program requirements were being met.”

Christa’s Jay Weaver feels similarly. He says, “Upper Falls was truly a fun project to work on. Not very often do you hear a construction company saying that, as our field tends to be pretty stressful and fast-paced. But this project was different. We had a great design team and a great group of subcontractors, which made this project successful for all. We hope Upper Falls paves the way for future development in the area.”

### Proof That Green Can Be Both Practical and Beautiful

Green building is rapidly becoming valued among developers, buyers, and residents alike. Gibbons thinks this has a lot to do with thoughtful construction that focuses on practicality and aesthetic appeal.

*“Sustainable design does not mean that you have to sacrifice great design. Creativity can marry these two very well, as long as you have a client who is committed to both pieces and a design team that understands the importance of the project for the future residents and the community that surrounds it.”*

— E. Joseph Gibbons II, AIA, Principal at SWBR

Upper Falls Square has great curb appeal. Its exterior colors and stained-glass siding are visible from Cleveland Street. At night, each building’s community room illuminates and shines vibrantly through the glass walls—transforming its beauty from day to night.

“We are always looking for ways to bring daylight into the interiors of our projects. So, we were able to create

a few common interior gathering spaces that focused on bringing the outside into the building, while also becoming focal points to the exterior design of the building,” says Gibbons. “At night, these spaces also allow passersby or visitors to the building an opportunity to understand where the main entrance and common areas for the building are, and perhaps a glimpse into the two-story common area spaces. A two-story living green wall is also located in the larger apartment building lobby as a design focal point for the main entrance.”

### A Lasting Positive Impact on the Community

With 150 thoughtfully-designed units, the Upper Falls Square Apartments provide hundreds of people with a comfortable, safe home so that they can focus on their jobs, life, and families.

“Upper Falls Square is an excellent example of a project that we believe will positively impact many lives in the Coalition of NorthEast Associations [CONEA] neighborhood in Rochester for many years. We are extremely proud of the project, and we are grateful to have a client like DePaul who is passionate about creating places that inspire and uplift the residents who live there,” says Gibbons.

The Sustainable Comfort Inc. team feels the same way. Fox says, “I think this project is important to a city like Rochester because it gives folks who have a harder time at life a chance to have a comfortable, affordable place to live and call home. Not only do projects like this help house people, but they also give numerous people jobs. I am absolutely proud to have worked on this project. Any time that I can help out a community in my home state and leave a positive impact on this world, I am elated!”

Straille concludes, “We look forward to seeing how this affordable housing project will allow income eligible individuals and families to live and work in the same community. These folks can now attend great schools and live in a safe and friendly community, and I’m proud that my work lets me be a part of that.”

