



Owner: DePaul Properties Inc. | Location: Buffalo, NY | Completion Date: 2016
Programs Achieved: Energy Star, LEED for Homes, NYSERDA Low Rise

The Beginning

A barren 11-acre patch of asphalt was all that remained of a once booming commercial plaza; abandoned for years, this West Seneca, New York, property was an eyesore in the community. But thanks to the efforts of a local politician and a non-profit agency dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with disabilities, this space has been transformed into Ebenezer Square Apartments, a comfortable, safe, energy-efficient housing complex.

DePaul, a Rochester, New York, based non-profit, embraces the philosophy that the best neighbors derive from community-based decision-making. Before launching a housing project, the agency carefully considers where to locate the new building, how it will be oriented and constructed and the best way to leverage the greater community to provide the best living situation for their residents.

“The property manager at each of our facilities is trained to know the community. DePaul focuses on linking residents to community resources. Studies show the less income you make, the less likely you are to use community services, and using community services helps prevent homelessness.”

— Gillian Conde, Depaul Vice President

Councilman Michael “Mickey” Kearns, who now serves as an assemblyman for the state of New York, became

involved in the Ebenezer Square project when DePaul began considering a site near a river. He knew that the community had targeted this location for a waterfront park and would be reluctant to relinquish its plans. So Kearns steered the agency toward the abandoned asphalt parking lot, which he believed would earn community approval.

Kearns had a personal stake in the project – his brother was born with mental challenges – and he recognized the importance of providing housing for individuals with mental disabilities within a community-integrated setting.

“There’s a lot of stereotypes about people with mental health problems and disabilities, and in order to move them into the community, there has to be the right setting,” Kearns said. “I had a hunch that this was



going to be the right site for a project like this. Good infrastructure leads to good development.”

Conde was charged with drumming up community support for the project. “At first there was significant NIMBY [not in my backyard] from the community members,” she said. “The community gets fearful when something big is coming in. We had to take them to other sites to see the DePaul product.” Her efforts paid off in time.

Breaking Ground

Conceptualized in 2006, the project did not break ground until 2014, making it the longest project DePaul had undertaken. The result is a 100-unit, three story building with a total of 103,000 square feet, approved through the New York State Office of Mental Health [NYSOMH]; 75 units are single-room occupancy [SRO]. Best of all, the project achieved LEED for Homes Platinum certification, the highest level possible, from the U.S. Green Building Council [USGBC].

Joe Gibbons, principal from SWBR Architects who designed the project, explained that a project of this scope requires the right site and the right design. “We asked ourselves, ‘How do we minimize the impact of the building on site and to the view from the neighbors’ backyards?’ Since the site was surrounded by single-family homes, we oriented the building so it would be less intrusive to their backyards,” he said.

Funding

To fund this \$24.4 million project, developers used a combination of Tax Credit Equity from Red Stone, funding from DASNY [Dormitory Authority of the State of New York], and incentives from New York State Energy Research & Development [NYSERDA]. To comply with requirements from these programs, the building had to meet the energy efficiency standards of ENERGY STAR Homes as well as the USGBC LEED for Homes program.

LEED for Homes

By pursuing LEED for Homes, the team had a framework within which to make decisions and document their achievements. The LEED rating system, developed by the USGBC, is the foremost program for buildings, homes and communities that are designed, constructed, maintained and operated for improved environmental and human health performance. A building can achieve LEED certification under the LEED for Homes program after undergoing a technically rigorous process, including the incorporation of green strategies to achieve efficiency and healthy indoor environments. The sound design and operation of the home is tested and measured using tools like a home energy [HERS] rating and onsite inspections.

Ebenezer Square Apartments features several LEED points, including the following:

- Located on a previously developed property
- Easy access to parks and public transportation
- Incorporated low-maintenance native plantings and wildflowers instead of grass in certain areas
- Use of low-flow water fixtures
- Energy Star Certification
- Reduced energy usage of 68% with a HERS index of 32
- Limited wood waste by using panelized construction
- Improved air quality through the use of low-emission paints, adhesives and sealants
- Recycled 65% of the construction waste
- Installed ventilation systems for each apartment to provide fresh air for residents
- Implemented a no-smoking policy on the property

“The project team pursued LEED for Homes because it was the next logical step. This is not just green design. It’s important to the people we talk to: investors, tax credit professionals and local municipalities,” said Gibbons. “Since this project was finished and received





LEED for Homes Platinum, it means something when I talk to other municipalities. Ebenezer is a lynchpin for DePaul to show others that LEED for Homes can be done and it makes a difference.”

DePaul recognizes the importance of solar and always finds a way to keep it in the budget. “We had so much land we introduced solar, as we are always conscientious about saving energy,” said Joy Cromwell, Project Development for DePaul.

“We build solar into the project from day one and make it a priority. Low income and solar credits help off-set the installation costs.”

— Mark Fuller, President Of Depaul

Ebenezer Square boasts a 150kw solar array consisting of about 500 solar modules that are expected to generate 172,000 kilowatts annually and supply around 75% of the building’s electrical usage. The solar system, which has a life expectancy of 25 years, will result in an annual reduction of 123 tons of carbon dioxide.

Sustainable Comfort, Inc. served as the green building consultant for the project, providing guidance and support to help ensure that Ebenezer Square achieved its LEED for Homes Platinum goal.

Richard Molnar, Vice President of Calamar Construction Management, Inc., the builder on the Ebenezer Square project, said, “This was our first time building an Energy

Star and LEED for Homes building, we had to learn as we went along. We don’t typically get involved with the air and duct sealing to the extent we did in this project. Sustainable Comfort, Inc. helped us out quite a bit.”

Gibbons added, “You need to have a trusting partnership to make it easier to implement programs like LEED for Homes.”

Ebenezer Square has proven to be a success on several fronts. “Property values around the site are rising. This is a beautiful property that brings a lot of pride to the neighborhood and opens other opportunities for development. It’s the perfect location on a bus line,” Kearns said, citing the positive environmental impact of the project. “We all know how important our resources are going to be someday. DePaul had the foresight to build a LEED Platinum building to preserve these resources and make utilities more affordable. We made our case and proved our point. Now we have a great facility of which we are very proud. Achieving LEED for Homes Platinum helps us prove that the facility is an asset. DePaul did it right — LEED Platinum, beautiful apartments, and all in a setting that looks like a park. Ebenezer Square embodies the themes of community and better living.”

