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## HERE COMES THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) Carl Greene shows new homes near 13th and Fitwater in South Philadelphia on Friday.

—MARISSA J. WEEKES/TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

# Public housing's new look

## PHA offers mix of rentals, affordable home purchases

By Ayana Jones  
Tribune Staff Writer

As housing costs continue to skyrocket throughout the city, the Philadelphia Housing Authority is touting an affordable homeownership program at the Martin Luther King Jr. Plaza.

PHA is in the process of building 90 units geared toward low-

to-moderate-income residents in the area of 13th and Fitzwater streets. The new development is also representative of the changing face of public housing in Philadelphia.

The MLK site offers a mixture of rental and homeownership units. Most of the 155 rental homes have already been completed.

"We're representing an enclave of affordable housing for the working-class people of our city," said PHA Executive Director Carl Greene as he strolled

through the site. "In a lot of the neighborhoods, people are priced out."

According to Greene, there are homes in the surrounding neighborhoods that are going for upwards of \$500,000. Meanwhile, the PHA homes will range from \$209,000 to \$260,000 and will actually be priced in accordance with a family's income level.

Here's a snapshot at how the MLK homeownership program will work. If a house is valued at \$200,000 and a family has an

annual income of \$30,000 and qualifies for a \$60,000 mortgage, then their estimated mortgage may be \$500 per month. PHA in return would hold the second mortgage for \$140,000, which would be forgiven after a 10-year period.

The three- and four-bedroom homes will feature a host of amenities, including off-street parking, carpeting and dishwashers.

However, Greene anticipates that their proximity to Center City will be a major selling point.

PHA is hoping to have the first wave of homeowners moved in by March.

Greene stressed that the project serves to drive up the property values of other homes in the community.

“We think it’s important that we demonstrate that this project – like our other developments – benefits the entire community,” he said. “It’s a very unusual paradigm – serve the poor and benefit the entire community. It almost never happens.”

Asia Coney, director of Tenant Support Services, Inc., and a native South Philadelphian, believes that the latest development is a good thing for PHA residents.

She noted that other PHA sites such as the Lucien E. Blackwell Homes and Greater Gray’s Ferry Estates have successfully been able to blend homeowners and renters together.

“There was a school of thought that homeowners and renters could not live in the same area, which I always thought was



A construction worker tosses a brick to another while working on the new homes near 13th and Fitzwater in South Philadelphia.

—MARISSA J. WEEKES/TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ridiculous, because that is exactly what Philadelphia is made of,” Coney said. “But there have been consultants and others that have said that folks would not buy homes next to folks living in public housing.”

She explained being ecstatic

about that.

“To me it also provides our young people with images they don’t often see when they watch TV and sometimes go in a certain neighborhood, that there (are) very productive people getting up in the morning, going to work

## Where to call:

To learn how one can get involved in owning a home through the home ownership program, call the Philadelphia Housing Authority at **(215) 684-8015.**

and trying to provide opportunity,” Coney said in regard to the positive impact of homeownership on the community.

After rolling the program out to current and former MLK rental residents along with other PHA clients and residents from the surrounding neighborhood, the authority is now gearing up to target the new homes to the general market.

MLK initially opened in 1960 as four high-rise towers that were renamed in 1970 in honor of the civil rights leader. The towers were demolished in October 1999 and construction on the first phase of the development began in April 2000.