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Manufactured homes give families another choice

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BARRINGTON — Just a couple of years ago, Sarah Black and her young family thought they would never own a home of their own.

Houses far exceeded their price range and many housing communities only wanted residents who were age 55 and over.

Then Black saw a newspaper advertisement for affordable manufactured housing in Barrington.

Her husband, Rick Black, was skeptical and worried that the houses would be too small. She said he quickly changed his mind, however, when he toured a ranch-style home with three bedrooms, storage space and vaulted ceilings in the living room.

The Blacks and their two young children moved into their new home in the Pepperidge Woods housing development in February 2005 and are now an integral part of the thriving community located off Hall Road.

"This is not just a house. This is our home," Black said. "It's like the neighborhood I grew up in. There are lots of people walking around (outside) and the playground is packed (with children)."

Officials are heralding Pepperidge Woods as the first manufactured housing community in the state to start as a cooperative, which means the homeowners will be able to collectively buy the land on which their houses rest.



Sarah Black of Barrington talks about her new energy efficient home of the Pepperidge Woods Community, Wednesday afternoon. With energy costs in the news so frequently, efficient communities like Pepperidge Woods, the first of its kind in the country, may be on the rise in the near future.

(Aaron Leclerc/Staff photographer)

This transfer of ownership can occur when the final six homes of the project are sold, officials also said, and the community will join 86 other cooperatives in the state, funded in part by the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund.

"There should be more places like this," Black said. "I like that you have a sense of ownership, and that makes you rely more on the community."

With home prices continuing to be well out of range for most working people, the Pepperidge Woods housing development offers a more affordable alternative. Most homes are selling between \$164,000 and \$187,000, with a monthly lot fee of \$175.

Manufactured homes on their own land would cost between \$200,000 and \$225,000, and such homes in a park would include \$300 to \$400 monthly lot fees, Mike Rudolph the Re/Max agent for the Pepperidge Woods project, said.

Jane MacDonald with the Community Loan Fund said selling the development to the community gives homeowners long-term control of the land, which also helps their manufactured homes appreciate in value, as opposed to paying rent to a landlord.

"It's an empowering process," MacDonald added. "The model of this cooperative is based around the idea of wealth creation."

Rowell said the community also can keep its costs stabilized for years because its members must decide collectively whether to raise the lot fee for such services as snow and trash removal. Residents also will vote on fuel bids cooperatively.



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Pepperidge Woods residents are not required to sell their homes, when and if they decide to do so, at any predetermined figure, MacDonald added.

The Pepperidge Woods project also is considered to be the first EnergyStar-rated manufactured housing community in the country.

This rating means that every home has extra insulation on the walls, floors and ceilings and windows; water heaters and furnaces also are energy efficient.

The houses are set on permanent, insulated concrete foundations with frost walls that extend four feet below ground, Peter Rowell,

the Community Loan Fund's new production program manager, said.

These measures will ensure that residents are spending less on their utilities and maintaining their homes.

The homes were manufactured by Burlington Homes of Maine, and Rowell said project workers literally put two halves of each 1,300 square foot home together when they arrived on site. Everything else was installed beforehand, including the appliances.

Along with the desirable attic and storage spaces, each home has distinctive elements including granite front steps, gravel walkways and different layouts in the ranch- and cape-style homes.

Project officials agree that more housing communities like Pepperidge Woods are needed, and they are hoping more land will become available somewhere in the state for additional projects.

The current project became available when neighboring Barrington Oaks Cooperative, a mobile home park community, learned that its property would be sold along with an undeveloped 25-acre lot adjacent to it.

Unable to purchase the land on their own, the homeowners approached the Community Loan Fund for assistance. In March 2002, the community sold the undeveloped land to the Community Loan Fund and were able to purchase the park.

The Community Loan Fund then set to work building 44 homes, a community center and several recreation areas on that land. The developers decided on the name Pepperidge Woods because it is a common name for the black gum tree, several of which can be found on wetlands on the northern end of the development.

Current residents at Pepperidge Woods include a variety of ages and professions. Teachers, firefighters and grocery store clerks live side-by-side, and many residents are encouraging their aging parents to retire a street away from them.

"People who are buying homes have lived here in Barrington all their lives, and they want to stay here and they want their kids to stay here," MacDonald said.

Parents love that their children can ride their bikes around the development, and neighbors often stop to chat when they take their daily walks around the neighborhood, MacDonald also said.

David Stack, the Community Loan Fund's Manufactured Housing Park Program director, said the town of Barrington has been very supportive of the project as well.

Town officials regularly note the need for more workforce housing that is affordable.

Other community members also have recognized the project and the Community Loan Fund. In 2006, Citizens Bank awarded the fund with the Housing Heroes Award and a \$50,000 donation.

For more information about this project, contact Rudolph at 431-1111 ext. 3840 or MacDonald at 224-6669 ext. 257 or visit www.nhclf.org.

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Mitchell Mulrooney of Barrington goes for a backflip on a community park swing set while playing in the Pepperidge Woods neighborhood with his buddy, Brandon Whelan, Wednesday afternoon.

(Aaron Leclerc/Staff photographer)