

LETTERS AND OP-ED

Affordable vs. low income

I am writing to follow up on the 9/21/06 publisher's note regarding housing. Your point concerning recent changes in the market is well taken, and your accolades towards Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services are appreciated. I do want to express two concerns I have regarding your piece. First, the Silver Mill apartments will provide rental opportunities that are affordable to people earning between \$24,000 and \$41,000 a year. Your editorial leads readers to believe that the maximum income is \$26,900. Without some other source of subsidy such as a section 8 voucher already in hand by a renter, the income level you quoted is much closer to the minimum requirement rather than the maximum allowed.

Secondly, I ask that you help us in overcoming the stereotypical phrase of "low-income housing." In our world, it is simply "housing." It's housing that is affordable to people with low incomes as defined by HUD. You mention in your editorial that low income doesn't mean what it used to. By our standards, you employ as many low-income people in this community as do other businesses. Does that mean I want you to call it "workforce" housing? No, not at all. It's still just "housing." It's housing that has income targeted restrictions to people who earn less than 60% of the median income. The fact that the biggest source of investment in these developments comes from a program called the "Low Income Housing Tax Credit" doesn't help me in making my case. In our profession, we just call them "Tax Credits" to try to get away from the "Low Income" label. Other than that, our properties are developed

in much the same way as conventional deals. We don't purchase "Low-Income" 2x4's to make our properties more affordable. If I purchase my boxer shorts at Filene's and you purchase yours at Wal-Mart, does that make yours "Low Income" boxers?

Looking in the classified section of your paper on Thursday, there were 5 one-bedroom apartments advertised for rent between \$700 and \$800 in Manchester. There were 11 two-bedroom apartments listed between \$750 and \$1,050 and 3 three-bedrooms between \$925 and \$1,050. There were a few more units listed that were either outside of the city or didn't list the rent. My point is that we are providing just as good quality housing if not better than market rate while offering rents that are at 75% to 80% of the cost of market rate. I believe that providing newly created housing units to the market that are good quality, free of lead paint and other environmental hazards, and still remain affordable is a positive thing for the city. If this initiative forces another landlord to make improvements to their building to remain competitive, then good. It by no means creates a ghetto.

If we can help educate the media and open your eyes to see "Low Income" housing differently, then I'm hopeful that you can help us change the public's perception. I invite you to join me on a tour of all of our properties so that I may show you firsthand what I mean.

Robert Tourigny
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