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Interfaith Housing to offer more low-income housing in Morrisville

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By Petra Chesner Schlatter, **BucksLocalNews.com**

Low- to moderate-income housing is hard to find in Lower Bucks County, but Interfaith Housing will have a few additional properties to offer folks in Morrisville Borough.

Stephanie Sikora is coordinator of Volunteers & Outreach for Interfaith Housing Development Corporation (IHDC) of Bucks County. She emphasizes that the group has “a growing presence” in Morrisville.

“We’re excited to expand our outreach into Morrisville, as we have a lot of prospective tenants asking for properties there,” she said.

Sikora said the group is a nonprofit, interfaith partnership dedicated to providing low-income and homeless families with secure permanent housing.

“We have long had a small presence in Morrisville, having owned and managed a single family home on Melvin Avenue since 1998, and a rental property on West Philadelphia Avenue since 2001,” she said.

Recently, however, IHDC has expanded its Morrisville holdings, and currently has three properties in various stages of preparation for families.

* 131 Harrison Street is a three-unit rental property which recently received a complete internal makeover. IHDC replaced the heating units and built a new front porch for the home.

Two of the units are now occupied by tenants, and the third, an efficiency unit, is still available for lease for \$550 a month.

* 311 Moreau Street is a relatively new acquisition, and is now in the process of being completely gutted and rehabilitated. D.L. Lancieri Construction is the contractor for this property, which will be getting an all-new interior, from insulation to drywall, and a brand new kitchen. The plan is to have this home completed for lease by August.

* 201 Anderson Avenue is the newest addition to the Morrisville portfolio. The property is now under agreement, and IHDC expects to close on the sale by the end of July and finalize the acquisition. This property will be a two-unit rental property, each unit with one bedroom.

Also, IHDC has, within the last three weeks, purchased a currently vacant lot on Harrison Street on which two new homes will

be built as a twin unit.

Chris Auth, IHDC executive director, said six families in Morrisville now have housing through the group.

“We’d like to do more in Morrisville,” Auth said, noting that IHDC has two lots to add to its program. “We got them from William Penn Bank. They foreclosed on the properties and sold them to us for an affordable price.”

The plan is to build two homes there and sell these houses to low-income families. Auth said the price-tag will only be \$150,000 for brand new houses.

For rental housing, there are 200 families on a waiting list. IHDC has 65 apartments or single family homes in Lower Bucks County. Most of the housing units are single-family row-houses or twins.

“We want to add 10 this year,” Auth said about Lower Bucks County facilities. Buyers have to be able to get a mortgage and have a credit score of at least 650.

“A lot of folks who live in these neighborhoods and towns have credit problems,” he noted. “It’s more of a challenge finding people for lease-purchase.”

Auth said people want to live in Morrisville. “We try to purchase homes in areas that match the criteria of the location that our tenants on our waiting list want to live,” he said. “We try to meet the needs of low- to moderate-income families.”

He said these are families that couldn’t afford to live close to work in Bucks County.

“We call it our scattered site project,” Auth said, noting the communities include Bristol Borough, Bristol Township, Bensalem Township and Morrisville Borough. We would like to be able to develop affordable housing in other townships, but the costs are cost prohibitive. We have to rent for affordable rent. The cost has to be low enough. Rents are restricted by the county.”

Auth gave an example of the people who need help from IHDC. “We have a woman on our board who bought a house from us,” he said. “She works two-and-a-half jobs.”

One of her jobs is working in a group home for the developmentally disabled. She works the extra jobs so she can pay her mortgage and other expenses.

Instead of paying \$1200 a month in rent, people can pay \$750 per month, not including utilities through IHDC.

The income for a family of four cannot be more than \$47,000.

Auth said, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the median income is \$78,300. “Our people can’t make any more than 60 percent of the median income,” he said. “For Bucks County...40 percent of the population falls below 60 percent.”

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