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LONG ISLANDTOWNS

Walls are rising in Riverside, where family in search of affordable housing will build a future



The first wall of the future 116 Vail Ave. went up in Riverside on Tuesday as part of a partnership between Habitat for Humanity of Long Island and the Southamptton Housing Authority. Credit: James Carbone

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Myrnissa Stone-Sumair stood in the foundation of a Riverside home Tuesday just before its first wall went up and reflected on the significance of the effort in an area where affordable housing can be hard to come by.

“It takes a whole lot to build a house,” the Habitat for Humanity of Long Island official said from inside the future 116 Vail Ave. “Today we’re here to raise a wall ... it’s a symbol that some great work is about to start.”

The home is one of six single-family homes — which cost \$290,000 on average and take roughly six months to complete — being built in Riverside through a partnership between the nonprofit and the Town of Southamptton Housing Authority for Habitat for Humanity’s Homeownership Program.

Two homes on Vail Avenue are under construction, while two additional parcels there are in development and awaiting permits, according to nonprofit officials.

Unlike similar houses the nonprofit has built, a family has not been chosen yet for the Vail Avenue home. Each Habitat for Humanity homeowner signs a 30-year mortgage with 2% interest, while the nonprofit covers a second mortgage.

The window for applications for qualified families for the home at 116 Vail Ave. opened Feb. 1. Families can apply on the nonprofit's website, www.habitatliny.org, until Feb. 28, according to Stone-Sumair.

To qualify, applicants must be employed and fulfill a minimum of 300 hours of "sweat equity." That involves helping to build that home and houses for others in the program, going through financial preparation classes and volunteering through community service.

Southampton Town Housing Authority Executive Director Curtis Highsmith told Newsday his office already has more than 2,100 applications on the waiting list for affordable housing and municipal officials expect a strong response from applicants who want to own the Vail Avenue house.

"The need is tremendous, so we recognize that this is going to be a very successful application process," Highsmith said.

Suffolk County Legis. Bridget Fleming (D-Noyac) said the county had transferred ownership of the property at 116 Vail Ave., which was in the county's possession after the previous owner defaulted on tax payments, to Southampton Town and its housing authority.

Fleming said having more affordable housing options for people is key, with property values and prices rising since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

"Despite the fact that across Long Island we are starting to see COVID prices relax, here in Southampton it is still extraordinarily difficult for a family to be able to get into a home," Fleming said. "A home means you have that sense of foundation, that sense of security, some place where everyone gathers and is able to feel like they belong in our community."