The Washington Post

APARTMENTS

RENTAL, HOME AND GENERAL CLASSIFIED

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GENERAL CLASSIFIED INSIDE

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CASE No.

EXHIBIT No:

New Complex, New Soul?

Md. Tenants Hope Community Spirit Survives Renovation

By Diane Kittower
Special to The Washington Post

The management at Bethesda Commons faces a clear challenge: Can it gut and renovate the old buildings that make up the complex without destroying the invisible bond that ties the residents together?

KSI Management Inc. bought what was known as Bradley Boulevard Manor 18 months ago to turn it into the only "affordable housing" units in Bethesda, subject to income limits for the residents, with tax credits going to the developers.

The seven buildings of garden apartments, located on Bradley Boulevard a few blocks west of Wisconsin Avenue, date back to the late 1940s and early '50s. Long known as among the cheapest housing in not-cheap-to-live-in Bethesda, the apartments had become run-down and were in need of updating. Still, it was a popular place, with little turnover. "Many residents have been here for more than 25 years," said Wendel Winston, leasing consultant at Bethesda Commons. Winston also worked under the old management.

Little wonder that the complex was popular. Not only was it inexpensive, but it is located within walking distance of Safeway and Giant stores, Strosnider's Hardware, the fabled Bruce Variety store, banks, a CVS drugstore, a bakery, a post office, restaurants and the Bethesda Metro stop.

And with nearby employers ranging from small, long-established companies to the National Institutes of Health to technology giant Oracle Corp., a number of residents walk or take the Montgomery County Ride-On to work, said Dell Holloway, the property manager.

"You can't beat the location," said



BY LARRY FOGEL—THE WASHINGTON POST

Amy Elieff, an eight-year resident. She works at the Safeway that is almost directly across the street on Bradley. "I didn't buy a car until last year," Elieff said. She knew people who lived in the complex before she moved in. "We all know each other. There is a sense of community."

One neighbor, originally from Brazil, had Elieff write a letter to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, attesting to the neighbor's marriage.

In fact, many of the residents are from abroad. "It's like all the world is here," Holloway said. Australia, Bosnia, Poland, Russia and Yugoslavia are represented. The age range, too, is diverse, including recent college graduates, couples, young families and seniors.

To live at Bethesda Commons, residents must meet income guidelines that spell out maximums and minimums based on the number of occupants. For most of the apartments, the maximum annual gross income for a single occupant is $33,360; for two people, typically it's $37,800. KSI certifies income level by, for example, verifying employment and rental history. Alimony, child support, Social Security, pensions and savings also are part of the calculation.

The company's 20 other rental properties in the Washington region also are affordable housing. KSI receives a tax credit from the federal government for providing such units.

"We've had a lot of people call who want to rent, but their income is too high," Holloway said. Even though they are ineligible, a number of callers acknowledge the need for affordable housing for low- to moderate-income renters.

The majority of the newly renovated units have gas cooking and individually controlled gas heat, although some have electric cooking and centrally controlled heat and hot water. Utilities are included in the rent in certain apartments, depending on the setup. All have dishwashers and wall-to-wall carpeting.

Leases are for one year. Then tenants must reconfirm their income levels, whether they rent month to month or sign a lease. "We send reminders that recertification is coming up," Holloway said.

The renovation is leaving the red-brick shells in place but replacing walls, windows and electrical wiring, plus adding central air conditioning. Some of the work being done brings the property up to current building codes and Americans With Disabilities Act standards.

Holloway estimated that a little more than 60 percent of the units have been renovated so far. All of the apartments that have been renovated are occupied. Holloway said she is signing up tenants to move in in June, when the next batch of units becomes available.

During the renovation, tenants have moved elsewhere, both on and off the property. Some must leave because they are not eligible to live there under the income guidelines.

Elder Holohan is one of those who moved within the complex. His old apartment is now the complex's computer center, and he has settled into a unit with an enclosed porch on the first floor.

There are lots of new people, Holohan said, but he expects the sense of community to remain. "People help others here," said the 17-year resident. When he broke his ankle, for instance, neighbors brought him soup. And when the woman above him had heart trouble in the middle of the night, he took her to the hospital.

Leroy Davis has been there even longer than Holohan—almost 20 years. Davis both lives at the complex and helps KSI maintain it, as he did for the previous owners.

When there's a snowstorm, he said, everyone gets out and shovels. He and other residents fondly remember parties and cookouts when the complex was Bradley Boulevard Manor, and Holloway said parties celebrating the international flavor of Bethesda Commons are upcoming. "It still feels like the old community," Davis said. "I grew up in this area and wouldn't want to live anyplace but Bethesda."



BY MARK FINKELSTEIN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Frolcan Sunglao, left, who lives at Bethesda Commons, chats with assistant property manager Dionne S. Jacobs and leasing consultant Wendel Winston in a model apartment at the complex on Bradley Boulevard.

Bethesda Commons

5079 Bradley Blvd.
Chevy Chase, Md. 20815
301-718-6110

- **APPLICATION FEE:** $25 per adult occupant
- **SECURITY DEPOSIT:** Varies
- **LEASE TERM:** 1 year
- **UTILITIES:** Included in some units
- **AMENITIES:** Fitness room; computer room
- **PARKING:** By permit
- **PET POLICY:** Cats only (extra security deposit, monthly fee)

APARTMENT SIZE	QUANTITY	SQUARE FEET	MONTHLY RENTAL
1BR/1BA	52	718	$495 to $740
2 BR/1BA	310	687 to 863	880 to 930
3 BR/1 BA	6	807	1,015