

Countryside Park Cooperative

West Central Wisconsin Community Action Agency, Glenwood City

◆Community Development◆ Housing◆

The Countryside Park Cooperative: A Retirement Community near Cumberland, Wisconsin, was part of a family estate that included undeveloped lakeshore - a likely scene for upscale development. Had the property sold as a unit, the park would have been eliminated, forcing 18 elderly households - many with disabilities - into a rental market requiring 3 or 4 times their lot rents. West Central Wisconsin Community Action Agency (West CAP) was asked to purchase the property. Seventy-five percent of park residents said they had no other living options; 95% simply wanted to stay. Trailer park residency was the most affordable option - as it is for thousands of rural Wisconsin households.

West CAP negotiated discrete purchase of the park with a plan to transfer ownership to the residents. A pro forma schedule demonstrated feasibility, but the deal required replacement of a failed septic system. The City of Cumberland agreed to match CDBG funds for sewer & water extension to the site, a mile east of the city. A resident cooperative was formed in June, 2005. The purchase was closed in September, 2005. Sewer and water hookups were made in October and the park was annexed into the City.

The resident equity contributors are primary among a list of collaborators including:

- Federal Home Loan Bank, Chicago, AHP Development Grant: \$110,000
- The City of Cumberland, CDBG applicant, co-funder of sewer/water extension .
- WI Department of Commerce, CDBG: \$206,000
- West Central Regional Planning, CDBG writers
- Bremer Bank, Menomonie, construction loan: \$100,000
- Northcountry Development Fund OR Bank of Turtle Lake, long-term mortgage financing (replaces construction loan): \$170,000
- The WHEDA foundation, housing repair grant: \$32,884
- The Otto Bremer Foundation, water/sewer connections grant: \$39,000
- West Central Wisconsin Community Action Agency, Inc. (West CAP), developer

The project solves a critical affordable housing problem. It enables sustainable, cooperative residency for 21 households (including expansion units), providing them with municipal sewer and water, repairs for individual mobile homes, landscaping enhancements, and a community center/storm shelter. It increases the value of the Countryside Park retirement community. It adds land and improvement values to the City of Cumberland, including the properties between the original city limits and Country View.

Because mobile home residency is so widespread in rural Wisconsin - last resort affordable housing for many low-income households - there are numerous situations in which the Countryside Park Cooperative model could be replicated. Because projects of these kinds are not investment opportunities, replications would require the leadership of a non-profit developer able to obtain financing and provide organizing assistance. Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) such as West CAP are likely candidates for such activities.

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