

Affordable Homes: Boynton Ct, Hills Ct, the Municipal Campus, Pipestave Hill

Unlike the [Almshouse](#) and the Pipestave Hill apartments (which came with the Town's purchase of the Cardinal Cushing Academy complex), additional Town-sponsored affordable housing now located at the municipal campus and Bachelor Street entailed a decades-long siege, punctuated by fierce battles upon identification of any specific site. A band of determined, dedicated, indefatigable volunteer members of the Council on Aging and the Housing Authority made it happen. Among those was [Lionel L. Brunault](#), for whom the elder housing at the municipal campus and the family housing at Boynton and Hills Courts [are named](#). He served for many years on the Council on Aging and as Director of Merrimack Valley Elder Services, but died in 1988, as building plans were underway.

In [1972](#), the Town began considering its newly acquired Pipestave complex for a variety of uses, not least, elderly housing. Use of this site for affordable homes was periodically revisited, never without opposition. In its [1982 annual report](#), the Planning Board observed, "[I]t is felt this usage of Pipe Stave Hill is not in keeping with the best land use of that area." Notwithstanding, in 1974 the Town [voted to convert the "white house"](#) on Pipestave Hill into four apartments. In the same year, the West Newbury [Housing Authority was established](#) to obtain funding for additional affordable homes.

Meanwhile, in the mid-1970s two sets of private developers began planning two [40-unit elderly housing complexes](#), one at the corner of Crane Neck Road and Main Street, and one at a spot between Prospect and Bridge Streets near the cemetery. At the same time they endorsed the ["anti-snob zoning bill" \(§ 40B\)](#), the Selectmen and multiple others ranging from the Fire Chief to the Historical Commission questioned the proposals. The Town urged delay so that the Housing Authority could take control; the [proposals were withdrawn](#).

The Housing Authority began to seek funding and the Council on Aging continued to survey townspeople about the need, always showing strong demand. In [1980](#), the Housing Authority assumed responsibility for the Pipestave apartments and began a concerted search for a site for elderly housing, including Pipestave Hill, the rear of the Central

School, the William Daley property behind the [Carr Post](#), and on Bachelor Street.

Repeated grant denials and the longstanding lack of Town support took a toll. The [Housing Authority lost members](#) in the early 1980s—in the beginning of 1983 none was left but for one member appointed by the state. Despite a series of nearly continuous setbacks, members of the reconstituted Housing Authority carried on to completion. They [continued to seek grants and began to focus on converting the wing at the Central School](#), now that younger classes were moving out to Page School.

After myriad false starts and rejected funding applications, in [July 1986](#), a state grant was obtained for 14 units of elderly housing and 12 duplex family units. The state insisted that [family housing](#) must be part of the project, in addition to the elderly housing the Town initially sought. At the Fall Town Meetings in [1986](#) and [1987](#), it was voted to transfer easements to properties at the Central School and on Bachelor Street to the Housing Authority for this purpose.

As plans coalesced, so did opposition, particularly to what is now Boynton Court. The Conservation Commission objected to wetlands impacts but was overruled by the state. Bachelor Street neighbors voiced an array of concerns, perhaps rooted in the complaint to the Selectmen that the family housing would create ["an instant ghetto."](#) The [Selectmen wavered](#), but ultimately continued their support for the projects. [Lawsuits](#) brought by the neighbors and the Conservation Commission delayed construction from 1989 into mid-1991.

The litigation was resolved in favor of the Housing Authority and groundbreaking took place on [August 28, 1991](#). The Housing Authority hired an executive director to manage the projects in May of 1992, rental applications were submitted in June, and in [early August](#), tenants began to move in.

In [April of 1989](#), when success was near but still far from certain, Housing Authority Chair Nancy Barry summarized the advocates' unshakable determination to see it through: "We've come a long way, but there's still a long way to go. ...We want to continue until we reach a point where we have to take another tack."

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News report 9/25/1973

Source: Adelaide Janes Newsclipping Collection, Town Archives



Hills Court Family Homes, 2021

Source: Historical Commission

Elderly Housing, the Municipal Campus, 2021

Source: Historical Commission



Boynton Court Family Homes, 2021

Source: Historical Commission

"Housing for the elderly is like a lot of things: Everyone seems to be in favor of it, but it's very difficult to get everyone to agree on one plan."

People ask: Does W. Newbury need housing for the elderly? 1-10-78

WEST NEWBURY — Housing for the elderly is like a lot of things: Everyone seems to be in favor of it, but it's very difficult to get everyone to agree on one plan.

Dem Guschov, a developer based in Merrimac, wants to construct a 40-unit housing project for elderly persons near the intersection of Main Street and Crane Neck Road. Guschov's plans call for five buildings, each with eight units. The developer formally applied to the zoning board of appeals for a special permit to build the units last week. Appeals board chairman Frederick Faulkner said a hearing will be set.

The questions on many people's minds are: Does West Newbury need housing for its elderly citizens? If so, just how great is the need?

Stephen F. Burke Jr., chairman of the board of selectmen, presided over an "informational meeting" on the subject of elderly housing last night.

Said Burke, "It's important we know what our older people want. I personally would like to see housing for the elderly, if they want it."

He added he would like to see attractive buildings, as opposed to what he termed "World War Two veterans' housing. (Quonset huts)".

Guschov, in his letter to the appeals board, claims West Newbury does in fact have a need for housing for elderly people, and that he will support this contention when he appears before the board to request the special permit to go ahead with the project.

Several of West Newbury's

officials attended the meeting called by Burke, and offered their views on elderly housing in general, as well as Guschov's plan in particular.

Russell Lahr, building inspector, said he would not be involved with Guschov's proposal until the developer submits his final plans. But he expressed concern about rents charged at the apartments. He said, "Rents at some of these places can run as high as three, four, even \$500 a month."

Selectman Albert Elwell, who chairs the selectmen when they sit as the board of health, said percolation tests indicate the water level for the land on which Guschov plans to build the apartments rises as high as four feet below the surface. According to Elwell, that's the highest water level allowable for building.

Charles D. Courtemanche, chairman of the water commissioners, said added water usage could tax the town's

supply. He said, "It's well known we have a marginal position with water."

He said annual water consumption in West Newbury has increased from 52 million to 60 million gallons in just four years. This rise in water usage, he added, necessitated a water ban last summer.

Fire Chief Richard Berkenbush said he was concerned about the water pressure in the six-inch main which comes from Groveland.

Malcolm S. Burr, a member of the planning board, asked "Who's going to run it?" Burr said a private developer might be able to hold on to the apartments for a few years, then sell them.

Many area towns, such as Georgetown, have elderly housing projects which were initiated and are now run by their local housing authorities.

West Newbury has a housing authority, but according to Chairman Charles Shupe, it currently lacks money.

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News report 1/10/1978

Source: Adelaide Janes Newsclipping Collection, Town Archives