

Digging in for Biddeford's housing future



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City, state and federal officials praised the numerous benefits of a new housing development currently under construction on the Barra Road

By RANDY SEAVER | *Editor*

Despite cold and damp weather on Wednesday, a sense of excitement and accomplishment were also in the air as city, state and federal officials all celebrated the formal groundbreaking ceremony of the Thatcher Brook project, a 40-unit affordable housing community being built on the Barra Road in Biddeford.



A GOOD DAY FOR BIDDEFORD | Current and former city officials helped celebrate the groundbreaking of a new affordable housing project located on Barra Road. | Left to Right: City Councilor David Kurtz, Mayor Liam LaFountain, former city councilor Doris Ortiz, former mayor Marty Grohman, Economic Development Director Brian Clark and City Planner David Galbraith. *Photo by Randy Seaver*

Thatcher Brook Apartments will offer a mix of one, two and three-bedroom apartments in “a thoughtfully designed, energy-efficient building” affordable to households earning between \$37,000 and \$75,000 a year.

Rental rates will be based on Maine Housing Authority guidelines that fluctuate depending on the renter’s annual income. The goal is to ensure that rental rates remain below current market rates and do not exceed more than 30 percent of a renter’s income.

The development will also include community space, a playground, and an on-site property management office, creating a high-quality residential environment designed to support residents and families.

“These projects don’t happen by accident,” said Tyler Norod, president and development director of Westbrook Development Corporation.

Norod told the crowd that the project only became a reality because of the “tremendous effort, work and cooperation” that was offered by city and state officials. “Housing is a platform for health, education and overall community well-being,” he said.

RELATED | [New affordable housing project underway on Barra Road \(https://biddeford-gazette.com/2026/04/09/westbrook-development-breaks-ground-on-thatcher-brook-apartments-in-biddeford/\)](https://biddeford-gazette.com/2026/04/09/westbrook-development-breaks-ground-on-thatcher-brook-apartments-in-biddeford/)

Biddeford Mayor Liam LaFountain agreed with Norod.

“This is a good day for Biddeford,” LaFountain said. “This project addresses a significant need in our community.

“Think of a working single parent or a retired teacher who wants to continue living here. Think about the people who work at our hospital, in our schools and in our police and fire departments.”

Working people need and want housing options that allow them to live within proximity of where they work, the mayor added.

A GOAL ACCOMPLISHED



VISION ACHIEVED | Former City Councilor Doris Ortiz and former mayor Marty Grohman listen to dignitary remarks during the celebration of a project they both envisioned and championed two years ago. | *Photo by Randy Seaver*

Former Mayor Marty Grohman also attended Wednesday's groundbreaking ceremony and said he was feeling a deep sense of satisfaction while standing on the ground of a project he first envisioned nearly two years ago.

Grohman said he knew the project was something Biddeford really needed.

"The need for good, affordable housing is critical when you think about our city employees and other working people who want to live close to where they work," Grohman said.

Two years ago — shortly after he was elected as the city's mayor — Grohman said he saw a news story in the Bangor Daily News about Westbrook Development's proposal to build the project in the town of Cumberland.

Although Cumberland voters rejected the proposal — and the town of Cape Elizabeth dismissed a similar project — Grohman said he knew the proposal would be a "really good fit" for Biddeford.

"Basically, I picked up the phone and called Tyler [Norod] and said we wanted to discuss his proposal," Grohman said.

"When I was the mayor, I was constantly hearing about the need for good, affordable housing almost every day from people like [School Supt.] Jeremy Ray and [Police Chief] JoAnne Fisk."

Without good, affordable housing options, the city would face further challenges in attracting city workers and supporting local businesses that are struggling with staffing shortages.

"No one wants to commute 50 or more miles a day just because they can't afford to live near the place where they earn a living," Grohman said.

Grohman said that he and former economic development director George Gervais rolled up their sleeves, looking for ways to make the project a reality.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Both LaFountain and Grohman pointed out the project's "ideal" location, near the hospital and medical service providers — directly accessible on an existing public transportation route — nearby walking trails — in proximity to the Turnpike, large retailers and the city's industrial parks.



THATCHER BROOK APARTMENTS ARCHITECTURAL RENDERING provided by Westbrook Development Corp.

“It was really a no-brainer,” Grohman said, when discussing the city-owned four-acre lot that had been sitting undeveloped since the Barra Road Park project was first opened more than 20 years ago.

Thatcher Brook Apartments is being built adjacent to the Holiday Inn hotel and across the street from the Sam L. Cohen medical services building.

The city and developers hammered out a Tax-Increment-Financing (TIF) proposal that would allow new property taxes generated by the project to be sheltered from state property valuation assessments.

Through the TIF arrangement, Westbrook Development has committed to bolstering the city’s sewer upgrade funding account with \$400,000.

By “sheltering” the new revenue under the TIF, the city avoids getting dinged by the state — when it comes time to calculate how much money the city receives in school funding from the state.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP

The Barra Road project marks Westbrook Development’s first project in Biddeford and is the first phase of a broader housing partnership with the city.



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MAYOR LIAM LaFOUNTAIN described the new project as a critical piece of the city's infrastructure. |
Seaver photo

Norod said the project represents an important example of how municipalities and mission-driven developers can work together to respond to Maine's ongoing housing shortage.

But the Thatcher Brook Apartments project is only the first of four affordable housing developments now being planned by the company in Biddeford.

The next of those projects, Quebec Commons, will bring 45 units of much-needed affordable senior housing to the former and now empty MERC site, with construction anticipated to begin in late 2026 or early 2027.

"Together, these projects reflect a growing partnership between WDC and the city of Biddeford and their shared long-term commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing for families, seniors, and working households," Norod wrote in a previous press release.

LaFountain said the city's housing shortage remains as one of his administration's top priorities.

"Biddeford has made clear that addressing the housing shortage is essential to our city's future," LaFountain said. "I want to thank Westbrook Development, the city council, planning board, city staff and former Mayor Grohman for their work to make this project possible."

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— *Mayor Liam LaFountain*

Former city councilor Doris Ortiz also attended Wednesday's event and said being there gave her a "deep sense of satisfaction" and a feeling of optimism about the city's future in addressing the needs of working families.

During her six years on the city council, Ortiz was tapped by former mayor Alan Casavant to chair his newly created "Affordable Housing Task Force."

"This is an issue near and dear to my heart and was really the reason I first ran to serve on the council," Ortiz said. "I saw what was happening in Portland, and I didn't want that to happen here. Working people should be able to have rental options that meet their needs and allow them to be productive members of our community."

THE FINANCING

According to company officials, financing for Thatcher Brook Apartments reflects a strong public-private partnership that includes support from [MaineHousing's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program](https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/8479), (<https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/8479>), donated land from the city of Biddeford, a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) contribution, a credit syndication through local non-profit [Evernorth](https://evernorthus.org/building-communities/current-properties/) (<https://evernorthus.org/building-communities/current-properties/>), and additional funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston's Affordable Housing Program (AHP) and Maine Community Bank.

"Affordable housing developments require creativity, trust, and strong partnerships at every level," said Beth Boutin, vice president of community investments at Evernorth. "Thatcher Brook Apartments is the result of exactly that kind of collaboration, and it will have a meaningful impact for Biddeford residents for years to come."

ABOUT WESTBROOK DEVELOPMENT | [Westbrook Development Corporation](https://westbrookdevelopmentcorp.org/) (<https://westbrookdevelopmentcorp.org/>) is a leading non-profit affordable housing developer that expands access to stable, high-quality homes and strengthens communities across southern Maine. Thatcher Brook Apartments marks WDC's first project in Biddeford and the beginning of a new four-building pipeline of affordable housing developments in the city. Once completed, these developments will represent 166 much-needed new affordable apartments for local residents.

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