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2018 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS: FAMILY FINALIST

Affordable Housing Community Offers a Unique Agricultural Focus

Approximately 900 applications were submitted for the 35 single-family homes.

By [Donna Kimura](#)

Thirty-five single-family detached homes wrap around a one-acre community garden at Sunflower Fields, a community designed with a strong agricultural focus.

SUNFLOWER FIELDS

Harrisburg, Pa.



It's here in the suburbs of Harrisburg, Pa., where workforce housing meets the "agrihoods" movement. The homes resemble farmhouses, the community building looks like a red barn, and the professionally designed community garden is the development's centerpiece.

An undeveloped section of a former farm was just the site developers were looking for to build a community that would encourage healthy living and learning about where food comes from, says Michael Kearney, president and CEO of Monarch Development Group, which partnered with Affordable Housing Associates of Dauphin County on the project.

"We started researching community gardens and found there's a huge benefit not just physically but mentally and spiritually for people who can get outside and get their hands dirty,"

he says, noting that the garden can be used by people with different physical abilities.

Sunflower Fields was built in compliance with the township zoning ordinance as a "conservation subdivision," which allows for small lot sizes in exchange for setting aside a portion of the site for certain conservation uses.

The agrihoods movement has generally been used with moderate- and upper-income developments, but the homes at Sunflower Fields, which range from one to four bedrooms, are all affordable to households earning 20%, 50%, and 60% of the area median income. Five are set aside for people diagnosed with a mental illness or disability.

Approximately 900 applications were submitted for the 35 homes.

The \$13.5 million development is financed largely with low-income housing tax credit equity from RBC Capital Markets. Sunflower Fields is also unique because it could eventually provide homeownership opportunities for the renters. The developers have started a homeowner reserve to help with a future conversion to homeownership.

PROJECT DETAILS

Developers: Monarch Development Group and Affordable Housing Associates of Dauphin County

Architect: Kramer+Marks Architects

Major Funders: RBC Capital Markets—Tax Credit Equity Group; Fulton Bank; Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency; Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership; Dauphin County; Federal Home Loan Bank of New York