



Rockabill Development renovates Queens affordable housing portfolio

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Queens, NY Rockabill Development, a leader in providing development and construction services to the affordable and supportive housing community, and Selfhelp Community Services, concluded a \$5 million effort to preserve and rehabilitate 72 apartments in the Glendale neighborhood. The project is the first to be completed under the city's Neighborhood Pillars Program, which assists community-based non-profits and mission-driven organizations in safeguarding the affordability of existing buildings.

Located at 71-15, 71-21, and 71-27 65th St., Rockabill and co-owner Selfhelp acquired the three, four-story apartment buildings in April 2019 through the NYC Acquisition Fund. Prior to the acquisition, residents faced rent increases on an average of \$469 per month due to the mix of unregulated and rent-stabilized units in the buildings.

In line with the goals of the Pillars Program, Rockabill worked with the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the Housing Development Corp. (HDC), and council member Robert Holden on a Article XI exemption to provide all residents with rent-stabilized leases—including those who did not have one previously.

Under the terms of the 40-year agreement, 11 homes will be affordable for individuals and families earning no more than 50% AMI; 10 homes for those earning no more than 70% AMI; 24 homes for those earning no more than 85% AMI; 18 homes for those earning no more than 105% AMI; and eight homes will be affordable for those earning no more than 120% AMI. Of these units, 36 will be permanently affordable and 15 units have been set aside to serve the formerly homeless.

The Glendale Neighborhood Pillars project has had more of an impact than Rockabill and Selfhelp originally anticipated, with improved affordability, stable ownership and new management proving integral in helping vulnerable residents weather the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now that the project is complete, residents benefit from upgraded apartments, including new bathrooms; the building's outdated cloth wiring has been fully replaced to ensure reliable electricity; new windows were installed to improve energy efficiency; violations were cured; and work to address aging infrastructure—from facade repair to new roofs—will ensure the properties remain operationally viable for generations to come.

“We are very proud to have taken a non-regulated property and protected its affordability for current and future generations in Glendale,” said Niall Murray, managing partner and founder of Rockabill. “This project was truly a team effort, from our residents who trusted us to enter their homes at the height of the pandemic, to our contractors who went to great lengths to accommodate at-home learning and communicate every step of the way.” “The success of this project and our collective perseverance in the face of exceptional challenges proves that New Yorkers are the most resilient, brave, and committed people there are.”

“We are thrilled to see the first project completed under Neighborhood Pillars accomplish exactly what it is set out to do – lock-in affordability and security for families and communities. Neighborhood Pillars was designed to support non-profit and mission-driven partners looking to acquire properties for affordable housing, providing stability that is more critical than ever in the wake of COVID-19,” said HPD commissioner Louise Carroll. “We are so proud of our dedicated partners Rockabill, ConRock and Selfhelp for seeing this project through despite very challenging conditions.”

“The rehabilitation and preservation of these 72 homes will bring a greater stability to the Glendale community, while paving the way for similar efforts across the city under the Neighborhood Pillars Program,” said HDC president Eric Enderlin. “The completion of this project while we work through the challenges of the pandemic is a true testament to the devotion of our partners and strength of this community.”

“Selfhelp Community Services is thrilled to celebrate the completion of the rehabilitation and preservation of these 72 apartments in Glendale, Queens,” said Evelyn Wolff, executive director, Selfhelp Realty Group. “It’s a privilege to be part of the City’s first completed Neighborhood Pillars Programs and Selfhelp’s first preservation deal. Access to safe, affordable, and stable housing is part of any strong and vibrant community, and the ongoing pandemic amplified these needs.”

“We are grateful to the residents for their support and patience during the renovation process, and to our partner Rockabill Development, along with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Housing Development Corp. (HDC), and council member Robert Holden for their work to ensure long term affordability for these tenants,” said Wolff.

General contracting firm, ConRock Construction, was midway through an extensive tenant-in-place capital improvement campaign when the project was halted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once ConRock was granted essential status to resume work, establishing a robust communication channel between ownership, the residents and the construction team became paramount.

“Rehabbing-in-place in the age of COVID-19 was a reminder of how important clear and cogent communication with residents is to our success,” said Bill O’Connor, co-president, ConRock Construction. “A pandemic is not something that you can plan for or run a calculation on, but we got through this by leveraging technology to foster collaboration between construction crews, building

teams, ownership and tenants, keeping everyone safe while getting the job done.”

In addition to exceeding all city regulations related to site safety plans, temperature checks, and social distancing measures, ConRock adopted a hands-on, human-centered approach to managing the project during such a difficult time, including:

- Created a mobile app to improve how on-site teams complete superintendent daily log and advanced COVID-check in procedures

- Altered construction schedules to not to disrupt at-home learning for school age children in the buildings

- Continued only with work in common areas and building exteriors until the city reached Phase 4

- Posted weekly notices with construction schedules and progress updates

- Hired a resident to serve as an on-site tenant relations coordinator to address any construction or COVID-related concerns

- Established a dedicated phone number and answering service operated by Selfhelp to address tenant needs and assist with benefits, food deliveries, and in-home case management, as well as facilitate communication with high-need or elderly tenants

- Hired a porter to ensure advanced cleaning protocols, especially for high touch surfaces