

New public housing unveiled at Green Baxter Court after devastating fire

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Gallery: New Green Baxter Court opening



By [Jack Walsworth | jwalswor@mlive.com](#)
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Nearly 19 months after a [**fire ruined six units**](#) at the Green Baxter Court public housing complex in Ann Arbor, there is a new building standing.

A fire broke out in the early morning hours of January 8, 2014. The unit where the fire started was destroyed. Other units suffered smoke and water damage.

Making matters worse was the fact that when the fire occurred, it was during some of the coldest temperatures the area had seen in years.

"I don't think that any of us will ever forget that night and the time after it, but now we're here to celebrate the new building, a better building, we're here to celebrate healing and strength and survival," said Joan Doughty, executive director of the Community Action Network. "That's what this stands for."

So on Thursday, August 13 there was a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the Green Baxter Court building constructed to replace the building that was lost.

Initially, the displaced families **lived in hotels** before they were given the option of living in another rental unit owned by the Ann Arbor Housing Commission or a Section 8 voucher.

Dealing with the impact of the fire wasn't easy, to say the least.

But, in those families' time of need, the surrounding community stepped up.

"Before we could even start asking for help, we started getting phone calls from individuals, from groups, from organizations, from restaurants," said Doughty. "We had trouble keeping up with the offers of help and we had trouble figuring out how to allocate that."

Of the six families displaced from the fire, one is moving back in. On Thursday, the mother of that family, Pamela Ray, was there.

"It was a traumatic experience at the time but we have overcome that."

Ray said she felt blessed and grateful to see the new building and her new home complete.

"It was a traumatic experience at the time but we have overcome that," Ray said.

Ray is planning to move back either Friday or on Monday.

The building that burned was actually set to be renovated like the rest of the Ann Arbor Housing Commission properties.

"This is a very exciting time for us because we're in the process of renovating, or rebuilding, 100% of our properties," Jennifer Hall, executive director of the housing commission said.

The new building is a "visitable" building meaning that there is no step up into the units, which would allow for someone in a wheelchair to visit. Additionally, there is a bathroom on the first floor.

While the footprint of the building is actually bigger, basements were eliminated.

There are two two-bedroom apartments, three three-bedroom apartments and one four-bedroom apartment in the building.

As the new building stood, ready for families to move in, it showed just how far things have come since that cold, January morning.

"There was so much trauma and there was so much love from the community," said Doughty. "That kind of took these families and the service providers and everybody else in their arms and embraced us. And that's how, I think, we made it through."

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