PHA celebrates Housing America Month with opening of Mantua Square in West Philadelphia

Event highlights importance of affordable housing programs

(Philadelphia, PA October 4, 2011) – The Philadelphia Housing Authority’s formally opened the award-winning Mantua Square at 35th Street and Fairmount Avenue in West Philadelphia today as part of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) “Housing America” month celebration. The development stands on the former site of an outdated 18-story high rise building demolished in March 2008.

PHA highlighted the opening as part of a national effort to raise awareness about the importance of affordable housing and community development programs, as well as the challenges currently facing these programs.

“Mantua Square represents another landmark achievement for PHA in its commitment to provide quality, affordable, and environmentally friendly housing in the city,” said Michael P. Kelly, the agency’s Executive Director. “We intend to make a lasting, positive impact in the neighborhood and become a catalyst for local economic growth.”

The new development occupies a full square block with a mixture of walk-up apartments and duplexes totaling 101 units. The square surrounds a gated courtyard with ample green space and 92 parking spaces for residents. The green space also helps with storm water management. Photovoltaic solar panels with the capability of generating up to 200 megawatts of power annually are mounted on the roof.

The Housing America campaign is spearheaded by NAHRO, an organization of housing and community development agencies.

“We are very proud of the work the Philadelphia Housing Authority has done and Mantua Square is a shining example of the good work PHA has done in the community,” said NAHRO CEO Saul N. Ramirez, Jr. “With the Census Bureau reporting nearly 1 in 6 people lived
in poverty in 2010, providing decent, affordable places to live in safe neighborhoods is more important than ever.”

Mantua Square addresses the blight that has plagued the community over the past 50 years, while setting an example for other developers through the sustainable, efficient use of land and buildings. The new development complements and encourages current revitalization efforts in the neighborhood and will reinforce future reinvestment activity by both the public and private sector.

Congressman Chaka Fattah, a senior member of the U.S. House Appropriations Committee and longtime advocate for affordable housing in Philadelphia, said, “Every day that we visit Mantua we see a neighborhood on the rise. PHA, with its vision and the backing of federal resources, has been a major player in that rebound. Today at Mantua Square we have the shining example of their efforts – 101 units, plus parkland, commercial and community space. Congratulations to Director Kelly and his staff for another successful contribution to the city’s affordable housing needs and neighborhood rejuvenation.”

The Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities (PAHRA) recently recognized Mantua Square with its “Best Practices” award for design excellence. The revitalized site improves the aesthetics of the neighborhood while fitting in with the surrounding fabric of three story homes.

PHA’s philosophy of sustainability and the agency’s concern for environmental issues are reflected in the design of Mantua Square. The development has created green space where little or none existed before by including a courtyard with shade trees and benches. An infiltration bed under the courtyard and adjacent parking space reduces the amount of storm water that goes into the sewer system by sending it into the ground instead. The solar panels will produce clean, electric energy that will be used in part by the commercial space and common area at the site, with the rest going to the electric grid.

The redeveloped site contains 7,400 square feet of commercial, intended to attract more businesses to the area. PHA also has a management office and a community center at the site.

Mantua Square is accessible to Lancaster Avenue, a well-established commercial corridor that has grocers, pharmacies, clothing stores, and other services. It is also accessible to Powelton Village, University City, Center City (Art Museum and Fairmount Park), and the Philadelphia Zoo. The Mantua neighborhood is working class, but has seen an influx of Drexel University student renters and renewed interest from both Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania.
PHA invested $28.1 million to build the new homes at Mantua Square, including approximately $10 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act’s Capital Fund Recovery Competition.

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The Philadelphia Housing Authority is the nation’s 4th largest housing authority, serving more than 80,000 rental residents. PHA is also a major real estate developer. See more at www.pha.phila.gov