

## Affordable housing units in Harlem will become the first green block in nation

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SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

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Water doesn't trickle down from the right basin of [Jeanette Davis](#)' sink - it pours.

Puddles have formed under the kitchen cabinet of her W. 135th St. apartment, and the 58-year-old recently used a broom to evict a live rat from her neighbor's mailbox.

"And this is what I go through every day," she said.

But starting this winter, her building and its nine six-story companions along a historic row between Lenox and Seventh Aves. will be among the first affordable housing blocks in the country to undergo a green overhaul.

From solar panels on the roof to efficient boilers in the basement, the buildings are slated to be retrofitted with new energy-saving appliances and materials.

"We're hoping our project will be a model for the entire country," said [Wendy Rowden](#), managing director for The Rose Smart Growth Investment Fund, which bought the buildings last year. The fund also got a 15-year extension on the complex's Section 8 status through the [Department of Housing and Urban](#)

[Development](#), she said.

Rowden also is hoping the buildings will benefit from federal stimulus money earmarked for such projects through the Green Retrofit Program - up to \$3 million, she said.

Work on the 198 units is expected to begin by the end of the year.

This isn't the first time the row of 10 buildings has been at the center of [Harlem](#) history.

In 1910, the buildings became the first properties that far north in [Manhattan](#) to be bought by an African-American landlord - in this case, St. Philip's Episcopal Church, said [Michael Henry Adams](#), a Harlem historian. St. Philip's was then the wealthiest church with a black congregation in the city.

Among the early black occupants was photographer [James Van Der Zee](#), whose first studio in Harlem was at 107 W. 135th St., Adams noted.

"They have some beautiful ceramic detailing and wrought-iron fire escapes," Adams said of the buildings. "But their true glory is their true history as a unique instance of African-American self-determination."

The "original architectural fabric" of the structures has not been lost on the building's retrofit masters either, said [Bill Stein](#), the project's principal architect.

"It's really a fantastic place to live and a great place to make a statement about the possibilities of sustainable design," he said.

At the recent Urban Green Expo, held in Chelsea, Stein and his colleagues presented their plans, which include restoring vestibules and long-removed cornices. Old floor tiles and wood will be replaced by sustainable materials, and 32 unreliable boilers will be scrapped in

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favor of 10 energy-saving models.

The project's energy advisers also opted for panels on the roof connected to an LCD screen in a storefront to display how much energy is being produced.

"It's a nice capstone, something that people can gravitate towards, something that's tangible and measurable," said [Andrew McNamara](#), a consultant from [Bright Power, Inc.](#), which advises on clean energy and is working on the project.

When Davis enters her building, she can still see the chipped paint outline where the vestibule used to add a measure of security. When the vestibule is restored, it will also prevent winter chill from rushing into the stairway.

"I'll go along with it, I'm down for it," she said of the retrofitting plan. "I want that so I had so I could go ahead and fix up my house."

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