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Rehabbed city housing ready

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It was reminiscent of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" as Beloit resident Aja Wilson saw her newly remodeled house for the first time Wednesday.

"It's just wonderful and beautiful," the mother of four said. "It looks like a home."

Wilson's house at 1012 Mary St. is one of 22 public housing units that have just been rehabilitated by the Beloit Housing Authority. The project was funded through federal stimulus tax credits, federal WHEDA monies, and the capital improvement fund from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Wilson was the first tenant to move in, and another four families are expected to move in by Christmas, according to Beloit Housing Authority Director Cathy Pollard.

By Dec. 31, the goal is for all 22 families — who have been temporarily relocated to other public housing units — to be settled into their newly improved homes.

"Everything looks so bright," Pollard said. "And we're right on schedule."

Rehabilitation began in late September on the 22 units located at the Cunningham and Sixth Street sites. The Cunningham site is comprised of 14 units on Mary Street, Merrill Avenue and Ritsher Street, and the Sixth Street site is made up of eight units on Sixth Street and Carpenter Street.

The duplexes and single-family homes were gutted out and upgraded with new Wisconsin Energy Star rated appliances, electrical services and plumbing. Garages and extra bathrooms were built, bedroom sizes were adjusted, and some now have laundry rooms on the first floor instead of the basement. New windows, doors and light fixtures were installed, the exteriors were refurbished, and the interiors were drywalled and painted.

As Pollard walked through Wilson's newly improved home on Wednesday, she was pleasantly surprised.

She opened closet doors to find neatly organized shelves, commented on the upgraded refrigerator and washer and dryer, and eagerly inspected the bathroom fixtures she had selected.

"It's been fun," Pollard said. "Like a major shopping trip."

While Wilson's friends and the housing authority's custodial workers were hauling in furniture and a TV, Wilson was anticipating how happy her kids — ages 13, 10, 9 and 1 — will be with their new home. With an

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Aja Wilson moved into her newly remodeled house at 1012 Mary Street on Wednesday. Her house is one of 22 public housing units on Mary Street, Merrill Avenue, Ritsher Street, Sixth Street and Carpenter Street that was remodeled by the Beloit Housing Authority.
 Staff photo by Hilary Dickinson

additional bedroom, she said her family will not be as overcrowded.

Though the tenants are just now moving back into these houses, work has already started on the next group of public housing units to be rehabilitated.

In late November, work began on four units on Poole Court. A total of 44 units at the Poole Court, McLenegan and Telfer sites are expected to be rehabilitated by the spring.

The Poole Court site consists of 16 units on Poole Court and Caldwell Avenue; the McLenegan site is comprised of 20 units on Sunshine Lane and Elmwood Avenue; and the Telfer site is made up of eight units on Wren Drive on the backside of Telfer Park.

The rehabilitation of the Cunningham, Sixth Street, Poole Court, McLenegan and Telfer sites cost about \$11 million, according to Pollard.

The housing authority's second phase of the rehabilitation project is expected to begin in June.

This \$12 million phase will upgrade the remaining 66 public housing units scattered throughout the city and is made possible through various federal funding and private investors, according to Pollard. Forty-one of these units are for the elderly and disabled, and the other 25 units are single-family homes.

Most of the public housing tenants make minimum wage, with many making less than \$20,000 a year. In fact, 100 percent of the tenants living in the Cunningham and Sixth Street sites live at 30 to 50 percent of the county median income, which equals to about \$12,000 - \$15,000 a year, according to Pollard.

"I hope this will be the standard for public housing," she said of the rehabilitation. "This is how we intend to keep housing in Beloit."

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