

Roseland flats are affordable —and attractive

Apartments show low-cost housing can be architecturally pleasing, too

Some of the worst architecture in the city has been built in the name of affordable housing.

They were built on the cheap—and it shows. Consider the grim little bunkers of the 1960s and 1970s. Or the now-fading vinyl-sided cheapies built in the 1980s and 1990s. What a waste. Many blocks might have been better keeping the vacant lot.

The Roseland Ridge Apartments, dedicated Wednesday at 105th and Michigan, make a good case for the virtues of good design in low-income neighborhoods. Built on a piano wire-tight



Linda Miller, the first resident, admitted early skepticism: "But I decided to take a chance."

budget of \$6.4 million, the 40-unit row of apartments, with its gabled roofs and colorful brickwork, brightens an otherwise bleak stretch of Michigan like a row of klieg lights.

"People'll come by here and say, 'Roseland?'" Mayor Daley said with a smile as he stood in an unfurnished living room after the dedication.

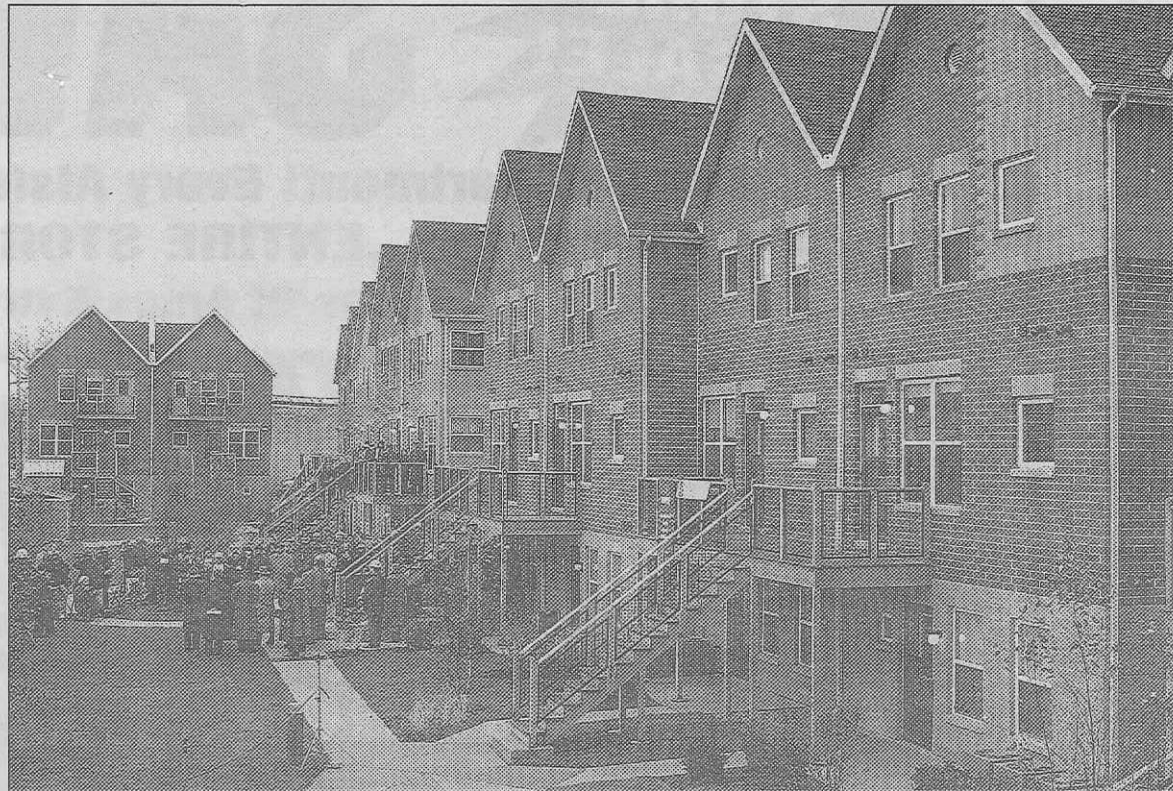
Good design can help the cause of affordable housing, and Roseland Ridge shows that more of it must be done. Solid architecture can do much to erase the stigma of affordable housing as last-chance dwellings. Neighborhoods such as Roseland, which are attempting to turn back the effects of decades of neglect and crime, might not feel "stuck" with affordable housing were it designed as humanely as Roseland Ridge.

Quality architecture would even make the residents feel better about living there.

"I was a little skeptical about Roseland at first," said Linda Miller, the first Roseland Ridge resident. "But I decided to take a chance."

Roseland Ridge reads like a row of single-family homes. There are bay windows—rendered in stucco instead of brick, but it works—and a touch of limestone above some windows.

There are some astoundingly clever touches here for such a low-cost project. In Roseland, Mich-



JOHN H. WHITE/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

Officials gather in the courtyard of Roseland Ridge Apartments for dedication ceremonies Wednesday. The 40-unit complex, built on a \$6.4 million budget, brightens the otherwise bleak neighborhood.



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igan Avenue and its sidewalks sit on a 6-foot-high ridge, but the yards immediately east are at grade. Landon Bone Architects pulled the buildings back from the ridge to make patio spaces for the garden apartments. The upper dwellings bridge over the space with minimalist metal stairs (form follows budget), marking the entrances that lead to the front doors.

"We couldn't change the grade," said project architect Jeff Bone, of Landon Bone. "We had to deal with it."

In a design masterstroke, alley garage parking was nixed from the design, replaced by small surface lots that bookend the complex. The result is a wide open common area that feels like a small

park, with its curved paths. The line of dwellings has a break in the middle, creating a nice axis from the street to the large yard. Bone said park furniture could be added later.

Roseland Ridge is built in a pretty tough neighborhood. But its architects gave the complex the means to defend itself without turning it into a fortress. A wrought-iron fence surrounds most of Roseland Ridge, and it takes a security code to enter the main gate. But the entryway is nicely done, the sturdy gate rendered delicate to the eye with metalwork seemingly borrowed from the Louis Sullivan notebook.

Each apartment has its own security system. And the back of the dwellings carries scores of windows, allowing parents to keep an eye out for children playing in the courtyard, Bone said.

Stringing together the funds to build a project such as Roseland Ridge can be complicated. Built by the nonprofit Neighborhood

Housing Services of Chicago, it took \$2 million in low-interest Chicago Department of Housing loans and \$445,000 in federal low-income housing tax credits to move ahead with the project. The tax credits generated almost \$3 million in equity, underwritten by the National Equity Fund, which allowed the project to be completed.

The financing scheme is a far cry from a century ago, when monied downtown developers and philanthropists such as Marshall Field and Julius Rosenwald oversaw the building of low-income housing. Frank Lloyd Wright designed Francisco Terrace and Waller Apartments on the West Side for working-class folks of the 1890s.

But the need for housing that uplifts as it shelters continues.

"There is space, there is light," Daley said. "It feels like part of a community."

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