



CITY ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE GRUELING HOUSING CRISIS WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART PASSIVE HOMES — HERE'S HOW THEY'RE DOING IT

“[It’s] critical to provide residents with a high-quality, long-lasting, and vibrant place to call home.”

By Rick Kazmer / January 25, 2024



Photo Credit: The Architectural Team

Boston housing officials have renovated one of the [country's oldest](#) federal public residential developments as part of ambitious [planet-friendly plans](#) through 2030.

NBC10 Boston [reported](#) that the Anne M. Lynch Homes at Old Colony, built in 1940, have undergone three of six phases of improvements to make the residential units safer and cleaner, using [passive building principles](#).

"What we're doing when we retrofit public housing ... when we make it more sustainable, is we're ensuring that the people who have been bearing the greatest burdens of the climate crisis can also benefit from the new green future that we were trying to build together," Housing Authority deputy administrator for sustainability and capital transformation Joel Wool [told](#) NBC10 News.

The changes are geared to benefit people of color and low-income residents, the folks least responsible for planet overheating and its impact, [according](#) to Wool, per the story.

The work started about 10 years ago when better windows and ventilation upgrades were added. This reduced asthma risk for residents, with children in mind. The third, recently completed phase meets [Phius](#) standards for passive buildings, all [per](#) NBC10 News.

Passive homes are designed to meet a "rigorous" level of energy efficiency while providing a comfortable abode. Thermal control, the use of natural sunlight, shading, better insulation use, and humidity management are all considered in the design.

The homes are billed as performing up to 85% better than commonly made structures, with a cost that's 3-5% more, [according](#) to Phius's website.

The goal is low energy consumption and less air pollution.

In Boston's Old Colony, the improvements will impact 887 units once all six phases are complete. Reducing asthma risk is one benefit, which NBC10 News [reported](#) is backed by analysis — a 2015 study published in the [American Journal](#) of Public Health.

The news report said that 188 residents in three city housing developments, including Old Colony, were studied. The results showed that buildings with passive principles had reduced the risk for asthma-related hospital visits by 76%. It also [found](#) that "children were less likely to miss school because of asthma."

The project highlights the importance of understanding how our homes are made and how to [best use](#) the utilities that power our lives for more cost-friendly and healthier living.

Elsewhere, experts are developing [microbes](#) that would effectively bring our homes to life. Even [termites](#) can teach us some geometry lessons about better airflow, according to other researchers.

The Boston officials plan for Old Colony's successes to be only the beginning, as the Housing Authority team wants to have "[fossil fuel-free public housing](#) by 2030."

"Sustainable and healthy public housing is critical to provide residents with a high-quality, long-lasting, and vibrant place to call home," authority officials [state](#) on the agency's website.