

DANVERS HERALD

Grants allow affordable Danvers housing for disabled

By Cathryn Keefe O'Hare/Danvers Herald
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Danvers - There will be a newly built five-bedroom ranch home in Danvers, with special fittings for five disabled adults, now that the federal government has donated \$690,000 toward the project.

U.S. Rep. John Tierney recently announced the award of the grant to Bridgewell, a Lynnfield-based nonprofit. Bridgewell had formerly been known as the Greater Lynn Mental Health and Retardation Association. It serves 2,900 individuals in 18 communities, including Danvers, according to information on its Web site, www.bridgewell.org.

Retrofitting an older home is very difficult, said Elaine White, director of housing for Bridgewell. For instance, some individuals who are confined to their beds might require roll-in bathrooms and showers. Doors must be 42-inches wide to accommodate wheelchairs. Kitchens, too, have to be handicapped accessible. Retrofitting is both difficult and very expensive, she said.

"Bridgewell is pleased to have the opportunity to develop this new home, which represents part of our ongoing commitment to provide accessible housing for individuals with disabilities," said Bridgewell's Chief Executive Officer Robert S. Stearns. "We would like to thank the congressional delegation and local legislators for their assistance and support."

"This funding could not have come at a better time," said U.S. Rep. John Tierney. "This funding will allow Bridgewell to build affordable homes for local residents who require supportive services."

The new home will be 2,500 square-feet in a single story, with five bedrooms for five people with developmental disabilities and physical challenges. The home will also have a living room, two bathrooms, a kitchen and a dining room, White said.

She did not say specifically where the home will be located, just on land the agency owns in Danvers. It will count towards the town's affordable housing total, a concern of many, including selectmen who formed the Affordable Housing Subcommittee last year to study how to stay above the state's required 10 percent affordable mark and out of the strictures of Chapter 40B.

"It's a very good thing for the town," White said, who added with pride that the agency celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008.

Bridgewell is awaiting final word about a state grant of \$350,000 to build the home. The state had given preliminary approval, and now that the federal government has approved the project, the state money is all but assured, White said.

The project will probably not be started for another 12 to 18 months, White said. She also said the agency has over 80 group homes in 14 communities. Many are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to allow "people to live as fully as they can," White said.