

THE RECORDER

Former inmates to live in Winslow

By ANITA FRITZ Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — Some inmates about to be released from the local jail after completing their sentence or being put on probation may soon find themselves living in the low-income kitchenette apartments in the Winslow on the corner of Main and Wells streets.

The sheriff's and local probation offices are working with the Greenfield Housing Authority, which manages the Winslow Apartments, to provide housing for nonviolent men and women and non-sex offenders who are re-entering society after serving up to 2 1 / 2 years in jail.

Sheriff Christopher Donelan said the priority will be to find apartments for those inmates who have nowhere to go when they are released from jail. He said that might mean they are homeless or may only have a couch to stay on in a home where someone is still using drugs.

He said it is the inmates who have committed crimes like driving under the influence, robbery to support a drug habit or breaking and entering, not the more violent crimes, that will participate in the program.

"No one is serving a life sentence on Elm Street," said Donelan. "Everyone serving time will eventually come back into the community and it's better that they and we are all well prepared."

Donelan and GHA Executive Director John Counter have been talking about creating some sort of program for former inmates for the past two years, and it has finally come to fruition, they said. Counter said GHA has currently set aside three rooms for inmates re-entering the community. He said one recently began living in the Winslow and two more will be living there within the next two weeks.

See [RELEASE Page A2](#)



Recorder/Paul Franz

Joe Camden, a captain in the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, and Dan Finn, interim executive director of the Greenfield Housing Authority, look over a typical room in the Winslow that may house low-risk former inmates.

Release: Developing a safe, stable place to live after getting out of jail

From Page A1 “I think this is really good for the Winslow,” said Counter, who said GHA has had continual problems with about a half-dozen of the Winslow residents. He said he’d like to see the majority of the 55 rooms in the Winslow rented to released inmates over the next few years.

While Donelan said there will be a deputy sheriff in and out of the Winslow daily, making sure things are going smoothly and overseeing crews that will be painting, cleaning and doing some repairs, Counter said it will be good for other Winslow residents to know that there will be that kind of presence.

“The sheriff’s guards have the authority to knock on a door if they smell marijuana — they can arrest someone if they feel the need,” said Counter. “Once our residents learn about the jail guards being here on a regular basis, they may be a little more careful and stop doing things they shouldn’t be doing.”

GHA has had problems with residents doing drugs and getting drunk, having parties and inviting guests who congregate in hallways and disturb other residents, as well as with residents who fight with each other.

“There’s going to be more security in the building and that’s a good thing,” said Counter. District Court probation officers will also be spending time in the Winslow, including several hours each evening.

Tonie DeAngelis, chief probation officer for District Court, said officers will be there checking on inmates who are on probation. She said they will also be making sure conditions of probation are met, including treatment plans.

She said if an inmate living in the Winslow violates the conditions of probation, it could result in eviction.

Donelan said inmates are assessed before they enter jail and take part in whatever programs are deemed necessary while there — those may include domestic violence counseling, anger management, substance abuse programs and therapy. They are then reassessed before they are released and new treatment plans are created.

“They have to comply with treatment plans when they leave the jail if they want to stay at the Winslow,” said Donelan.

He said an inmate pays nothing to live there until they get a job.

Then, according to Counter, they pay 30 percent of their gross adjusted income.

Donelan said the three groups are also working with Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, Mass. Rehab and the business community to help find jobs for released inmates.

DeAngelis said when inmates re-entering society do not have programs like the one being offered in Greenfield, they tend to commit crimes again within four to 12 weeks.

Donelan said for those inmates who don’t make it into the Winslow, the sheriff’s office works with them to place them in homeless shelters until a room becomes available.

He said the jail also runs the Kimball House, which is located on the jail property on Elm Street and houses 15 inmates who are ready to re-enter society.

“We are trying to provide stability to as many as we can,” said Donelan. “This is the best chance for their success —

we're helping them find a home, get a job, pay their taxes and take care of their kids."

He said 10 to 12 inmates are released each week and the average inmate serves 90 days. Many of them serve six to nine months.

"This is going to give inmates a great chance at being rehabilitated, give the community new members who are out there working and doing good things, and Winslow residents a more secure and safer place to live," said Counter. "And it is going to give the housing authority, sheriff's office and probation office peace of mind."

Donelan said people in the community who have come in contact with inmates who have re-entered society after going through in-house programs at the jail have told him they are well-adjusted, focused and determined to stay on the right path.

He said a couple of inmates have kept in touch with him.

"One has been employed for the past 14 months, moved back with his wife and is taking care of his child," said Donelan. "Those are the results we're looking for."

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