

# Balter Partners' Workforce Housing Has Deep Roots in Peekskill

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[Christian Larson](#) — October 8, 2020



*'We could not be more pleased to be able to provide this needed affordable and workforce housing in such a walkable location' William Balter (photo by John Vecchiolla)*

On Sept.9, Mayor Andre Rainey, County Executive George Latimer and other officials gathered for the ceremonial groundbreaking of a new affordable housing project in Peekskill. Strategically located midway between the city's downtown and waterfront districts, 645 Main Street will offer 82 rental apartments and is scheduled for completion by summer 2022.

In his presentation at the ceremony, William Balter, principal of project developers Wilder Balter Partners, outlined the benefits of the development. He also acknowledged the involvement of two people in the audience – his father Lee Balter, and prominent Peekskill artist and advocate Wilfredo Morel.

Few in attendance were more enthused than Morel, who came to Peekskill as an HIV/AIDS counselor in the early '90s.

For Morel, the fact that these apartments will be offered at 40% to 80% of Westchester median income means more housing opportunities for the residents who form the backbone of the community. "When it comes to affordability, people can use a lot of words," he says. "The ultimate thing is numbers."

## **KILEY CONNECTION**

Morel's interest in the project, as well as his longtime friendship with Lee Balter, is tied to the adjacent Kiley Youth Center on Main Street.



*Upgrading the Kiley Center as part of the housing project was 'imperative to the Balter family,' says Wilfredo Morel (photo by Christian Larson)*

In 1994, Morel wanted to put on a show with local students at Peekskill's Paramount Theater. When he didn't have the money to mount the production, Balter – a member of Paramount's board — stepped in to make sure the show had everything it needed.

Morel and Balter quickly bonded over their desire to provide opportunities for the underserved youth of Peekskill. Over the years they collaborated on many projects, including the community foundation Arts 10566, but their passion was always the Kiley Center. A two-room building in what Morel called a “depressing” state, the center has provided afterschool activities, homework help, sports, and art classes to the youth of Peekskill.

“Lee always asked, ‘What can we do for the Kiley Center, so the community can be proud of it?’” says Morel. “But it never went anywhere.”

## **FUNDING FOR KIDS**

Wilder Balter Partners will be working with the Peekskill Housing Authority and Boys and Girls Club of Northern Westchester to provide funding for much needed renovations and expanded parking at the Kiley Center. According to Morel, the center's inclusion in the affordable housing plan was “imperative to the Balter family.”

The 645 Main project is a fitting tribute to Lee Balter's commitment to the people of Peekskill, says Morel. Apartments will be as little as \$900/month and the building will

feature amenities such as a community room, fitness center, rooftop garden, and solar paneling which could provide up to half of the development's power.

Standing apart from the crowd as officials and developers posed for photo ops, Morel admitted that he had seen affordable housing offered to artists in the downtown area and wondered "when is the time when my community can receive that kind of treatment?" The 645 Main development gives him hope.

"It is a true, affordable opportunity," he says. "It's a no brainer."

*Christian Larson lives in Peekskill, having recently moved from Brooklyn, where he worked for NY1 News. He is a writer, podcaster, and event planner.*