

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

RE: **ORDER OF THE BOARD OF ALDERS OF THE CITY OF NEW HAVEN**
approving a Development and Land Disposition Agreement with respect to those properties known as 69 Grand Avenue, 19 Clinton Avenue and an unnumbered parcel on Perkins Street, New Haven, Connecticut, formerly known as Horace H. Strong School. (Submitted by: Carlos Eyzaguirre, Deputy Economic Development Administrator)

REPORT: **1630-14**

ADVICE: **Approve**

BACKGROUND

The Board of Alders has referred to the City Plan Commission, for its advice, an Order requesting approval of the Development and Land Disposition Agreement (“DLDA”) for the former Strong School location at 69 Grand Avenue in Fair Haven.

The Strong School has not operated at this location since 2010 and has remained vacant (except for periodic use as storage by New Haven Public Schools) since that time. During this time, multiple attempts by the City of New Haven to solicit qualified developers of the site with proposals that provide the highest and best use as well as significant community benefit have been unsuccessful.

In Summer 2022, a two-year community engagement process on the future of the Strong School involving hundreds of Fair Haven residents and including a joint City and community-led feasibility study of the building culminated in the release of a Request for Proposals (RFP) that balanced community aspirations and concerns about artistic and cultural inclusion as well as affordable housing with historic preservation of the building and financial viability of any future project. A final public meeting attended by over 75 residents was held in September 2022 to hear the proposals directly from the RFP respondents.

Following the recommendation of a Selection Committee composed of the affected Alder, community members and representatives from the City’s planning, economic development and housing divisions, Pennrose was selected as the preferred developer for the Strong School. Their proposal includes an adaptive renovation of the historic school building that will provide no less than 50 affordable housing units as well as community arts and culture space including live/work spaces for local artists. An LGBTQ+-friendly environment is another key aspect of the project vision.

The estimated total cost of the project is \$25 million with a projected completion date of 2025. The developer is proposing that all ~50 residential units -- which includes a mix of studio, one bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments -- will be affordable units for households between 30% to 80% of the area median income (“AMI”). The vast majority of units (over 40) are projected to be deeply affordable housing for households between 30% and 60% of the AMI.

Furthermore, Pennrose is ranked among the top 25 affordable housing developers nationally and has unique expertise in historic school restoration. Pennrose recently redeveloped the historic Mary D. Stone School in Auburn, MA into mixed-income senior housing and was awarded the 2022 Affordable Housing Finance Magazine Reader’s Choice Award for the conversion. Pennrose is also completing redevelopment of the historic William Barton Rogers Middle School in Boston, MA, which will be New England’s first LGBTQ-

friendly senior affordable housing development. They have completed similar projects in many Connecticut cities and towns including Hartford, Torrington, and Meriden.

In addition to Pennrose, the development team includes: The Cloud Company, a 100% minority-owned, CT-based real-estate development firm; WRT Planning and Design; and historic consultant PAL Inc. Following construction, the property will be managed by the Pennrose Management Company which will help ensure the buildings are kept in a state of good repair.

The City and Pennrose anticipate a three-year planning and construction timeline while continuing to work closely with community partners as the project moves forward. Pennrose will also have to go through the City's regular land use approval process which will allow multiple opportunities for further input before the project becomes a reality. Quarterly status updates will also be provided to the community by the City and the developer via the regular meetings of the Fair Haven Community Management Team

The Strong School is a truly special building and site and the City is excited to begin this redevelopment and renovation project with Pennrose to deliver more affordable housing to the Fair Haven community. The project's added focus on creating community arts spaces will also help highlight the artistic contributions of residents and the cultural vibrancy that truly defines Fair Haven and the City as a whole. Furthermore, engaging Fair Haven residents in a robust public process helps ensure this is a high-quality project responsive to the community's values, needs and concerns.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The City Plan Department has been working closely with Livable City Initiative, the Economic Development Administration, and community members in Fair Haven on the redevelopment of the Strong School campus for many years. The DLDA that will allow the redevelopment of the former Strong School Campus as a mixed-use project adding at least 50 new affordable housing units, and new commercial space, complies with the City's Comprehensive Plan that calls to:

New Haven Vision, 2025, Sec. IV-12:

"Support the provision of affordable, workforce (middle income) housing within the City. To that end, explore the feasibility of incentivizing developers who provide workforce housing through reduced parking, where appropriate, and other incentives."

New Haven Vision, 2025, Sec. xx-iii:

"Build mixed-use developments along all of the city's commercial corridors, as indicated within the future land use map, through necessary zoning amendments."

New Haven Vision, 2025, Sec. IV-13:

"Identify historic structures that can be successfully used to meet the City's affordable housing goals. Low-income housing and historic rehabilitation tax credits can be combined when historic structures are rehabilitated for affordable housing."


This project is a win-win for neighborhood and the New Haven community at large and represents the fruition of a community driven process to make best use of a deteriorating school building. The innovative adaptive reuse of the building will retain a valuable architectural resource that will serve to enhance community and social capital in the neighborhood. The addition of affordable housing units, particularly focused on a traditionally underserved LGBTQ population, addresses significant needs for more housing in this neighborhood. Staff also note that this project will further the City's "Resolution

Endorsing the Declaration of a Climate Emergency to Restore a Safe Climate, adopted on September 3, 2019 in that Section 4.5 of the DLDA outlines the Commitment of Sustainability including: commitment to carbon reduction measures, installation of all electric heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, hot water systems, and appliances in all of the residential units, design and build a photovoltaic array with minimum module efficiency of not less than twenty percent (20%) to cover all roof area not utilized for mechanicals, and providing Level 2 electric vehicle charging stations in at least twenty (20%) percent of the parking spaces.

ADVICE

The Commission finds the Order in the best interest of the City and recommends approval.

ADOPTED: April 19, 2023
Leslie Radcliffe
Chair

ATTEST:  April 24, 2023 | 9:31 AM EDT
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Laura E Brown
Executive Director, City Plan Department