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Beacon Communities, Frontier Enterprises and Prellwitz Chilinski's Wilber School Apartment project earns LEED Gold

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The new, mixed-income Wilber School Apartments earned national recognition for both sustainable design and historic preservation. Days after the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) awarded the project a Gold Certification under the LEED-for-Homes program, the National Housing & Rehabilitation Association (NH&RA) named it the Best Historic Rehabilitation Involving New Construction at the 2010 Timothy Anderson Awards for Excellence in Historic Rehabilitation. The project's architect, Prellwitz Chilinski Associates, and its developers, Beacon Communities LLC and Frontier Enterprises Inc., accepted the award at the NH&RA's Fall Developers Forum event in Boston on October 19th.

LEED for Homes is the preeminent national certification program for homes designed and built to be energy- and resource-efficient as well as healthy and durable for occupants. Among other criteria, Wilber School Apartments' Gold-level certification was based on comprehensive Home Energy Rating System (HERS) testing through the Energy Star program and onsite technical inspections.

New Ecology Inc., of Boston, in partnership with the design/development team and the contractor, Keith Construction, helped ensure environmental sensitivity. Key strategies included diversion of demolition/construction waste from landfills, reuse of wooden demolition debris for off-site electricity production, installation of energy and water-efficient appliances and fixtures, and careful insulation and air-sealing to make the building perform better than a comparable building built to code. The property also features two underground cisterns used to store rainwater, which is then reused to irrigate the site's drought-tolerant landscaping.

Lauren Baumann, vice president at New Ecology, said, "Well preserved older buildings are 'greener' than new construction. Wilber School Apartments captured the benefits of an in-town location, reused resources, and preserved craftsmanship that is all but impossible to replicate."

Recognition from NH&RA and USGBC reflects the Wilber team's commitment to sustainable design, historic preservation, and high residential quality in the conversion of a long-shuttered, historically significant community school into 75 mixed-income apartments. The 105,000 s/f development program consisted of full rehabilitation of a school originally built in 1922 and the addition of a modern, complimentary new wing. Approximately one-third of the apartments are reserved for households making up to 30%, 50% or 100% of the area median income. The apartments' high design standard, the result of collaboration between PCA and Beacon's in-house designer, Mercedes Farrando, has helped the project succeed in the community. Since opening in January, Wilber School Apartments is already 87% leased.

The \$29 million project drew from multiple funding sources including federal and state low-income housing tax credits and historic rehabilitation tax credits, which were purchased by AEGON USA Realty Advisors, LLC to generate more than \$15 million in equity financing. MassDevelopment also

issued \$14 million in tax-exempt bonds for construction and permanent financing, which was underwritten by RBC Capital and guaranteed by Bank of America during the construction phase and by the Mass. Housing Partnership upon full occupancy.

"It's what adaptive re-use is all about" a committed team creating the financing and design necessary to reconnect buildings to the fabric of communities...and doing it in a way that is both historically sensitive and forward thinking," said PCA's David Chilinski, the project's principal-in-charge.

The development met the National Parks Service's exacting standards for historic rehabilitation, resulting in meticulous preservation of the building's character. The legacy of Wilber School echoes throughout the project, including in the apartments themselves, which feature large windows and small kitchen blackboards built from pieces of original chalkboard slate and emblazoned with "Wilber School - 1922."

Leslie Donovan of Tremont Preservation Services, responsible for overseeing historic preservation on this project, said, "Wilber School Apartments represents the best model of preservation: town, owner and numerous contributors working to rehabilitate a very endangered building. Having enjoyed working with Tim Anderson in the past, I am delighted to see the project honored with an award in his name."

Josh Cohen, development director at Beacon Communities, summed up the project and its awards. "We are big believers in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. We also believe that LEED certification was not only the right thing to do, but also a way of assuring the town of Sharon, the Commonwealth of Mass., and our funders that we intended to build to a very high standard. Now we have found that LEED certification makes the apartments more competitive in the market. This project is extremely rewarding for Beacon and our team, and we thank the town of Sharon for the opportunity."

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