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Project of the Month: The Hunter Group and Elaine Construction complete \$4.4 million renovation and deep energy retrofit

November 23, 2011 - Green Buildings

The renovation and deep energy retrofit of the former Presentation Academy School building at 640 Washington St. is nearing completion. Once complete, the former school will be utilized by a combination of private not-for-profit and for-profit educational and community groups that will provide a variety of mixed services to the greater Boston community.

The Hunter Group, Inc. (THG) has been working on the renovation with a group of private citizens. The building and site consist of a 3-story brick building on a 1.2-acre site in the Oak Sq. community. The 28,000 s/f building was constructed in 1920 by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston and used as a parochial elementary school until 2005.

Doug Hunter, principal of The Hunter Group, Inc. and a LEED AP-BD+C said, "The extensive renovation of the building provides a perfect opportunity to achieve a USGBC's LEED Gold certification as a Green Building Core and Shell in the category of 'New Construction/Major Renovation.' The Presentation School Foundation and THG look forward to the completion of this successful project. The finished building will provide both much-needed services to the Allston-Brighton neighborhood and the city of Boston, and stand as a model of green, sustainable construction."

Faced with the loss of a significant community anchor in 2004, local citizens formed the Presentation School Foundation (PSF) in 2004 in response to the proposed closing of the school. The group is made up of former parents and students who had once attended the school as well as local political and community leaders.

The Foundation developed plans to acquire the building and transform it into a multi-service community center serving children, families, and recent immigrants. The foundation's vision for the building's future receiving the endorsement of mayor Thomas Menino, secretary of state William Galvin, and many institutions such as WGBH, the YMCA, and Harvard University.

PSF's campaign to acquire the school building as a community anchor reached its emotional peak in June 2005, when the Boston Archdiocese locked children out of their school two days before graduation, igniting a firestorm that was front-page news locally and was even covered by the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Economist, CNN and NPR. Mayor Menino hosted the Presentation School's 2005 graduation ceremony at Boston's historic Faneuil Hall.

After a struggle that lasted over three years, in October 2007, the PSF purchased the building from the Boston Archdiocese for \$1 million. The purchase culminated years of what the Boston Globe called "tireless activism" and represented "a classic piece of neighborhood preservation against all odds," according to the Boston Herald.

THG was retained in 2008 by PSF to coordinate the design and construction of the "core and shell"

portion of the original building. Hunter hired Silverman/Trykowski Architects (STA) to lead a design team which included Fitzmeyer + Tocci (MEP+FP engineering) and Hayes Design for all site and civil components.

PSF wanted the building to be renovated using the most current green and sustainable construction techniques. Hunter reviewed the possibility of pursuing a LEED certification for the building. Sustainable Design & Construction Solutions was retained to coordinate the design and the LEED certification process.

A "design charette" was conducted with the design team, the PSF, LEED consultant, and THG. The process of this team approach of design developed final set of construction documents which brought the building up to and exceed all current building and accessibility codes. The construction plans also were structured to deliver a finished "core and shell" which would be eligible for a LEED Gold certification.

Upon completion of the base building design package, the project was put out to bid. Interest in the unique project was very high and a diverse group of local general contractors participated. After multiple pricing reviews and a formal interview process, the construction contract was awarded to Elaine Construction. The Elaine team worked with THG and STA to "value engineer" several aspects of the design to bring the budget and schedule into sync with PSF's vision for the building. The historic building was designated as a "significant historic structure" and therefore qualified for the Mass. Historic Tax Credit program. The secretary of state's office and the Mass. Historic Commission assisted PSF through the process of applying for and receiving state tax credits, which were used to fund new replacement windows as well as replacement of the original Spanish red clay roof tile roof material.

To ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as full handicapped access to all floors of the building, a new four-stop elevator was planned for the building.

During the permit and design phase of the new lobby, several options were presented as a product for the siding, which the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) required be compatible with the existing structure. Many of the proposed materials were either over the renovation budget or not acceptable to the BRA. STA finally proposed the use of salvaged slate from the old chalk board material which had been removed during initial abatement operations. This innovative adaption of material re-use and the old slate, and the historic significance of this old slate has been a great tool for community outreach and great public relations.

Several areas of note regarding the available LEED points were also identified. All landscaping components will use native perennial plants, which will require minimal watering. The existing hardwood floors are original and in terrific shape. The majority of the flooring has been reused and/or recycled.

The new hydraulic four-stop elevator is a Kone Eco-elevator which requires very minimal power to operate. The entire building will have a new fire protection system and voice evacuation alarm system.

All the existing mechanical systems have been replaced with high-performance variable refrigeration valves, which are air to air heat exchangers. NSTAR is providing significant energy rebates for the use of this new technology. This equipment is monitored with a full building automation system which provides for air quality and maximum efficiency. The electrical systems will be sub metered for each new tenant and high-efficiency lighting and controls will be the tenant standards for the building.

