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Project of the Month: Fulcrum Associates constructing 197-bed Orion Student Housing project in downtown Durham

November 06, 2014 - Northern New England

Fulcrum Associates, Inc. of Amherst, N.H. is progressing with construction of a private student housing project designed by DeStefano Architects for Orion Student Housing in downtown Durham that is slated to open in the fall of 2015.

Fulcrum was chosen by the owner, Orion Student Housing, to construct the 197-bed, 86,000 s/f project located at 25-35 Main St. in May with construction beginning in June. The project consists of the redevelopment of three lots into a mixed-use student housing development in the heart of downtown. The urban setting redevelopment project involves rehabilitating two existing historic houses at 25 and 35 Main St., demolishing the existing houses at 27 and 29 Main St., demolishing a barn in the rear of the site, constructing two new "house scale" buildings fronting on Main St. and constructing two new student housing buildings, one fronting on Main St. and one to the rear of the site. The orientation of the buildings on the site will provide for a new classically themed streetscape, while creating a landscaped courtyard, servicing access to all the buildings. The buildings fronting Main St. will have a mix of commercial and student housing occupancies.

Real estate surveys had revealed there was a need for more student housing in downtown Durham as students not living in dorms are often forced to live in surrounding towns and commute to classes due to the lack of available off-campus housing.

The planning process in Durham took approximately two years, receiving unanimous approval from all the local land-use boards. DeStefano Architects and Allen & Major Engineers spearheaded the approval process and were supported by a very enthusiastic owner in Orion. The construction of a project of this nature on a congested urban site, adjacent to a very active college campus has required immense coordination and collaboration by the design team, local officials, stakeholders and sub-contractors. The Fulcrum team headed by Matt Manseau, project manager and Christopher King, onsite superintendent, are working to assure the projects high standards and aggressive schedule are being met. The Dolben Company is contributing their expertise as the owner's onsite representative.

"The greatest challenge of this project was incorporating the amenities that today's students are looking for within a historic New England village," said Adam Wagner, director of operations for DeStefano. "The result is a project that complements traditional architectural style, yet offers the latest in student housing trends and advanced technology integration."

Orion has recognized that privatized student housing is a growing trend as parents and students want well-managed, clean and secure living quarters. Observers say one factor is the growing percentage of college students who are female. According to Pew Research Center, there are 13% more women than men enrolled in college. Orion said its leasing company began hearing from students interested in renting the units before construction started and they pre-leased the entire

facility for the fall 2015 semester in less than 36 hours.

The units at Orion Student Housing at Durham are more akin to apartments than dorm rooms, with each bedroom containing a private bath. The units are fully furnished and share a living room, kitchen and laundry room. The units will include granite counters and stainless appliances. There is also 24-hour security and controlled building access.

Orion Student Housing is a growing player in the student housing market with holdings in N.H., Maine, Mass., Texas and Indiana. They currently have more than 3,000 student beds in their portfolio or under development.

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