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WinnCompanies to transform mill into carbon-free development

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Lawrence, MA WinnCompanies unveiled plans to transform Stone Mill, the iconic 19th century mill that gave birth to the city, into a 21st century model of energy efficiency, thanks to the Merrimack Valley Renewal Fund established from a Columbia Gas settlement agreement led by the Baker-Polito Administration and attorney general Maura Healey.

Healey, Department of Energy Resources (DOER) commissioner Patrick Woodcock and numerous state and city officials gathered at the Stone Mill redevelopment site to showcase efforts to convert the 177-year-old structure into fossil-fuel-free, mixed-income housing that uses electricity instead of natural gas to produce heat and hot water.

WinnDevelopment was awarded a nearly \$2.9 million grant from the Renewal Fund's Building Excellence Grant Program to support its ambitious environmental goals for the redevelopment. The Renewal Fund was created by a 2020 settlement agreement negotiated by the attorney general's office and the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources following the natural gas explosions that devastated thousands of homeowners and businesses in Lawrence, Andover and North

Andover in 2018. The Building Excellence Grant Program provides funding for projects that maximize energy efficiency, electrification and clean energy, and demonstrate a long-term commitment to provide affordable housing to low- and moderate-income households.

“Energy performance goals are the most difficult to accomplish in historic adaptive reuse projects because you’re working simultaneously to both preserve and modernize a building from another era,” said Christina McPike, WinnDevelopment’s director of energy and sustainability. “We are committed to pushing the envelope at Stone Mill to demonstrate that decarbonizing assets like this is possible with the right expertise, without jeopardizing the building’s historic fabric.”

Following its renovation, the building will use approximately 40% less energy and emit approximately 30% less greenhouse gases than a new construction, energy code compliant gas-heated building. In addition, the all-electric design will create a healthier and more sustainable community for Stone Mill residents and visitors by avoiding gas emissions and combustion.

“Our first-of-its-kind settlement with Columbia Gas invests millions of dollars in the Merrimack Valley and will bring clean and efficient energy benefits to this community,” said Healey. “We are pleased to award WinnDevelopment with grant funds to fully electrify the Stone Mill building, reduce harmful emissions for local residents, and serve as a demonstration project for the construction of other historic buildings around the state.”

Embracing the goal of eliminating fossil fuels, the project will incorporate numerous techniques to ensure a thermally robust and airtight structure. Continuous insulation will be installed inside the walls, roof and a new elevated slab. Windows will be replaced with triple-glazed historically compliant windows. A high-efficiency heat pump for heating, cooling and hot water will serve as the HVAC system and will be enhanced with a high-efficiency energy recovery ventilation system. The building will be inspected and tested to make sure insulation depths are satisfied and air infiltration is verified, ensuring the newly transformed Stone Mill achieves long-term durability, comfort, and low-carbon performance.

“The Lawrence community experienced an unfathomable tragedy in 2018 and the Baker-Polito Administration has focused on reinvesting in the people and community directly affected by the Columbia Gas natural gas explosions and aftermath,” said Woodcock. “The Department of Energy Resources is pleased to support the investment to electrify the Stone Mill building that will reduce the cost of energy for its residents, help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the community and invest in the local economy. We look forward to partnering with the community to continue to utilize the Renewal Fund to deploy energy efficiency and clean energy to the people and businesses of Lawrence.”

When completed in early 2024, the 86 mixed-income apartments at the 2.3-acre site will be located within walking distance of a commuter rail station, several dozen businesses, a hospital, city offices, schools and recreation areas. There will be 58 apartments set aside for households making less than 60% of Area Median Income (AMI), 11 reserved for households making less than 30% of AMI, and 17 available to market-rate households.

“For generations, the Lawrence community has suffered from an acute shortage of affordable, high-quality housing. We face an urgent need to uplift our vast stock of non-code-compliant buildings to energy-efficient living spaces comparable to Stone Mill,” said mayor Brian DePena. “We thank WinnDevelopment for their contribution to our community. The Stone Mill renovation project beautifully demonstrates how an old, shuttered mill can be converted to modern, energy-efficient dwellings.”

In addition to the project’s extraordinary environmental commitments, Stone Mill’s redevelopment will support local workforce development, with the goal of at least 30% of all construction work performed by minority and women-owned businesses as well as skilled labor from the local area. With several other new construction efforts underway nearby, the project is expected to serve as a key driver for economic development at the eastern end of the hub-and-spoke design of downtown Lawrence.

“The Columbia Gas explosions shed light on the need to invest in sustainable housing and clean energy initiatives. I’m grateful to the WinnCompanies, Baker-Polito administration, and attorney general Maura Healey for working together to utilize part of the settlement funds to bring more affordable, equitable, and reliable housing to our city. I’m looking forward to seeing the completed project come 2024,” said state senator Barry Finegold.

Financing sources for the \$37.5 million construction effort include the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the U.S. National Park Service, MassHousing, City of Lawrence HOME funds via the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Blue Hub Capital and Bank of America.

“Attorney general Maura Healey fought tirelessly to hold those responsible for the horrific tragedy of the Merrimack Valley gas explosions accountable, and to establish the Merrimack Valley Relief Fund to provide financial relief to the communities impacted by this tragedy,” said state representative Frank Moran. “Projects such as this are a testament to the success of this relief fund and represent another milestone in our state’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions and promote energy efficiency.”

“The 2018 Columbia Gas crisis brought to light the need for safe, sustainable infrastructure. As the result of AG Maura Healey’s tenacity, she and her team fought Columbia Gas and won, bringing critical utility resilience dollars to our communities through the Merrimack Valley Renewal Fund. Renovation projects such as this one at the Stone Mill are a first step towards a full transition to clean energy alternatives, and a future away from natural gas,” said state representative Christina Minicucci.

There have been numerous failed attempts to redevelop the 149,220 s/f textile mill, which was built along the banks of the Merrimack River in 1845 by Abbot Lawrence, the city’s namesake, and served as the launching pad for the city’s explosive growth as a manufacturing hub in early industrial America.

“This is a project that merges 21st century energy technology into a 19th century industrial complex. When the Stone Mill was built, it used state-of-the-art technology. That tradition continues today,” said Lawrence city council president Marc Laplante. “While we have not forgotten the Merrimack Valley Gas Crisis and the pain that it caused, utilizing some settlement money on this initiative helps provide some good from that awful event.”

Led by the project director Angela Gile, this will be WinnDevelopment’s third adaptive reuse development to revive a historic mill in Lawrence, following the successful transformation of two former Malden Mills buildings to create the award-winning, 137-unit LoftFive50 complex, which now has a waiting list of more than 865 households.

Keith Construction, Inc. is the general contractor for the project, with The Architectural Team serving as architect; the Public Archaeology Laboratory acting as the historic consultant, and New Ecology serving as sustainability consultant. Other members of the Development Team include R.W. Sullivan Engineering, VHB, Odeh Engineers, McPhail Associates, LLC, Loureiro Engineering Associates, Inc., and Axiom Partners, Inc. The project’s legal counsel is Robinson + Cole LLP.

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