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Beacon and Harborlight host groundbreaking for Beverly Village

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Beverly, MA Beacon Communities and Harborlight Homes have broken ground on the Beverly Village for Living and the Arts, at the historic former home of the Briscoe School. Upon completion, the development will be a mixed-use community centered around affordable housing for seniors.

The groundbreaking event included a speaking program featuring Massachusetts lieutenant governor Kim Driscoll, Department of Housing and Community Development undersecretary Jennifer Maddox, mayor Michael Cahill, state senator Joan Lovely, state representative Jerry Parisella, and MassHousing VP of multifamily housing, Mark Teden.

The adaptive reuse plan will creatively transform the school's existing footprint into a vibrant, liveable space that is service-enriched and offers a multitude of resident amenities. Former classrooms will be turned into 85 units of affordable housing for low-income seniors, and former locker rooms will become six live/work studios with an artist occupancy preference. The former

auditorium will be preserved for future use as a community performing arts space, maintaining the building's historic connection to its community. The former gymnasium will house resident amenities including a community room, computer learning center, wellness and fitness spaces, library and reading room, as well as a workshop. Outdoor amenity spaces will include a terrace and patio.

“Beacon Communities is thrilled to be able to work with all of our partners to create affordable housing for seniors at this historic location,” said Dara Kovel, CEO of Beacon Communities. “Being able to preserve the history of the Briscoe School while sustainably transforming it into a place for seniors and the arts to thrive is an exciting next step for Beacon, its partners and the city of Beverly.”

“We’re excited this milestone has taken place, and Harborlight and Beacon are now building the new homes for Beverly seniors that have been long sought at Briscoe,” said mayor Cahill. “The ability for seniors to remain in Beverly, or to come to Beverly, and live in comfort and high quality affordable homes is something we work hard on and prioritize every day in this city. Thank you to our partners at Harborlight, Beacon, the Commonwealth, and local housing advocates for all the work you have done to make this possible.”

At the heart of the development plans are sustainability, historical preservation, and resident engagement. The existing three-story building will be completely rehabilitated while still preserving important historical features including the windows and facade. The building will feature numerous sustainable design features, including: energy-efficient lighting and heating/cooling systems, a new stormwater mitigation system, high-efficiency water fixtures, electric vehicle charging station, bike storage, and gardens with composting education.

“This is a great day for the city and region to honor this historic building and how it will now serve Beverly,” said Andrew DeFranza, executive director for Harborlight Homes. “For the first 100 years, it was a place of education. For the next 100, it will be home, a thriving senior affordable community. Harborlight Homes is grateful to be part of this important project and respectful renovation.”

The adaptation of Beverly Village for Living and the Arts continues the legacies of Beacon and Harborlight Home of producing affordable homes with high-quality wraparound services which not only impacts the quality of life for all residents, but also supports seniors aging in place. It ensures that residents can remain actively involved in the community. The property is a short walk from the closest commuter rail station, and it's accessible to the local bus system. It is also next door to the vibrant Beverly Council on Aging, and has walking paths to the city's pedestrian network. The project will ensure the building remains a community asset not just through the creation of much-needed affordable housing, but also by bringing together community members of all ages through the arts.

“Our team at SV Design is proud to have a hand in preserving Beverly's treasured Briscoe Middle School as a home for seniors and artists that will bring another level of vibrancy to the city,” said Thad Siemasko, founding Principal of the architecture and interior design firm. “The restored building will create a truly unique experience for residents and the community at large. All members of the project team collaborated exceptionally well on this project proving it takes a village to create

a village!”

“Beverly Village for Living and the Arts is an incredibly unique combination of rental homes for residents with a range of incomes, live and workspaces for artists, and the preservation of the historic Briscoe School theater that will continue as a performance venue for future generations,” said MassHousing Executive Director Chrystal Kornegay. “MassHousing is pleased to be part of this truly transformative project with Beacon Communities, Harborlight Homes, DHCD, the City of Beverly, and all the partners involved in recreating this former school campus.”

Funding for the Beverly Village for Living and the Arts came together through a combination of federal and state LIHTC and historic tax credit equity, MassHousing, as well as state and local subsidy. Additionally, the project is partially financed with funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), the first time a Massachusetts affordable housing deal has utilized ARPA funding. A team from law firm Nixon Peabody LLP with deep experience in tax credit finance transactions worked with Beacon Communities to navigate and close the complex financing for the project.

Built in 1923, the Briscoe School served as a high school, junior high school, and middle school until it closed in 2018 after the City of Beverly built a new school. Beacon Communities and Harborlight Homes were chosen by the City to redevelop the site in 2019, and purchased the building in 2022. Exactly one hundred years after being built, the school will now prepare for its next hundred years as a community asset.

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