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Winn Development Companies to convert former Nelson Aldrich Jr. High into affordable senior housing - by Frank Picozzi

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Frank Picozzi

The city moved another step forward in its ongoing efforts to see the revitalization and redevelopment of former school properties last month with the approval of a \$2 million bid offered by Boston-based Winn Development Companies to purchase and convert the former Nelson Aldrich Junior High School into affordable senior (age 55+) housing units.

The company, founded more than a half-century ago, is one of the largest managers of affordable and rental housing in the nation, managing more than 103,000 units, among them more than 50,000 regulated affordable housing units. Winn's first Rhode Island property acquisition was in Providence more than 20 years ago. Today, they manage in excess of 1,100 units throughout the state in Pawtucket, Providence, Cranston, and Warwick.

Their development proposal has been called a "win-win" by many, in part for Winn's proposal to preserve the school building, which was constructed in 1934 and stands as a beloved and somewhat majestic symbol of the community and the generations of students who attended the school. Winn, which has decades of experience in repurposing old factories, mills and school buildings, has proposed, too, to work in consultation with local and state agencies to secure the building's place on the National Register of Historic Places. Further, under their proposal, a portion of the roughly 11-acre parcel would be utilized for public recreational space. Winn expressed that the company would also be open to exploring the possibility that spaces within the school building, such as the gym and auditorium, be available for public programs in collaboration with the city or a local non-profit organization.

Winn's preliminary concept proposal would be the development of units for seniors with a mix of incomes, spanning those deemed affordable to market rate. The company presently envisions 15 studio apartments, 55 one-bedroom units, and five two-bedroom units. The proposal to allow for a dedication of ground-level commercial space to be operated by an independent partner group would allow Winn to replicate its successful adult day health concept at the Aldrich facility. This provides individuals with a personalized plan meant to help them, for example, manage medications, improve dietary habits, increase opportunities to socialize, address transportation needs, and/or receive medical care, and to help them age in place in their home.

Elsewhere in Warwick, plans are moving forward for the former Randall Holden Elementary School property, which the city sold to Link Commercial Properties for \$1.4 million. Last month, the planning board granted master plan approval for the developer's proposal to construct 22 single-family residences on lots averaging 7,418 s/f in size within the 4.3 acre parcel. A proposed new roadway would allow for access to the development via existing Anscot and Dean Courts. This proposal is in keeping with the general character of the surrounding area, which is a well-established neighborhood of A-7 residential zoning immediately adjacent to the parcel, and general businesses fronting on nearby Warwick Ave.

Last year, the city sold the former John Wickes Elementary School property for \$2.1 million, clearing the way for construction of 39 single-family dwellings and two new streets that will be accessed from

Child Ln. and Buttonwoods Ave. on the roughly 10.67-acre property. The developer has presently completed demolition and removal of the building.

With an increased housing demand, these projects are good news for Warwick, which remains an inviting and affordable place in which to live and do business. If you're interested in development opportunities or learning more about our community, call the economic development department at (401) 738-2014 or email econ.dev@warwickri.gov.

Frank Picozzi is the mayor of the city of Warwick, R.I.

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