

Old meets new in school renovated to apartments

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SHARON — Serving as the town's state senator from 1972 to 1984, Joe Timilty admired the architecture of the Wilber School.

When the school closed, Timilty watched as the historic building deteriorated.

In 2004 the Canton resident teamed up with Steven Sousa, an historic rehab architect, and submitted a request for proposal to the town.

Timilty said he knew from experience that Sharon was a town "progressive enough" to recognize the need to renovate the building while preserving its architectural integrity.

Partnered with real estate developer, Beacon Communities, Timilty and his company, Frontier Enterprises, won Town Meeting approval and took on a 75-year lease of the building with the town.

The process was long, but worth the wait.

The 89-year-old ornate brick building was completely renovated and reopened officially Jan. 15.

"The building speaks for itself," Timilty said.

He added that the project is a big step in the revitalization of Post Office Square.

"We promised the community that when we finished it would add to the value of the town --- and that absolutely will happen," Timilty said.

Pam Goodman, President of Beacon Communities Development Boston, said the property was redeveloped under the guidelines of the National Park Service, the federal agency that oversees the preservation of historic structures.

"As a company, we believe that beautiful buildings should be preserved," Goodman said.

The interior of the building was in bad shape when the construction process started in January 2009, according to Josh Cohen, development director for Beacon Communities.

Due to years of neglect and at least one water leak, some of the interior wood framing was rotted and there were multiple holes through the floors. The plaster and paint was peeling and crumbling, Cohen said.

"It became a little scarier as we saw some of the damage behind the walls," he said.

After substantial carpentry work, the building was made structurally sound again, he said.

Fortunately, the exterior of the building was in much better shape than the interior.

The most important exterior job was matching the original masonry from the school building to the addition, he said. The developer searched for weeks before finding The Stiles and Hart Brick Company in Bridgewater. The company manufactured the bricks for the original Wilber School, which was built in 1921 and had an addition put on in 1928.

"It is amazing that they were still able to match the blend they used nearly 90 years ago," Cohen said.

The original building, which now holds 31 apartments, is completely renovated.

An addition, which extends off the back of the school towards South Pleasant Street, is in the final stages of construction and is expected to be completed very soon, Cohen said. The four-story addition holds 44 apartments.

The apartment complex has a number of amenities for tenants including a small fitness center, a clubroom with kitchen and widescreen television, a library/ reading room, an out-of-apartment storage unit, a 137 parking space lot and usage of a small, private dog park.

There is no age restriction on any of the apartments. A lottery was held for the 20 percent of apartments which will be rented by tenants at or below 50 percent of the town average income. Those units are in the process of being rented, Goodman said. There is also a tier of units that are available to people at or below 100 percent of Sharon's medium income.

"We are providing a great housing resource that services a broad range of incomes," Goodman said.

As of Monday, February 1st, three apartments were occupied and six more are under agreement with the tenants expecting to move in shortly, according Cohen.