

The Architectural Team converts Livingston School into 103 units; senior housing in partnership with WinnDevelopment

cre.nyrej.com/the-architectural-team-converts-livingston-school-into-103-units-senior-housing-in-partnership-with-winndevelopment/

John Picard

Albany, NY In New York State's Capital Region, the classic Livingston Middle School has been saved – and adapted into 103 units of housing for active over-55 adults with 16 units for the visually and hearing impaired, according to The Architectural Team, a leading planning, architecture and interiors firm. The iconic building's restoration and conversion into mixed-income senior housing was carried out in partnership with WinnDevelopment, and included \$4 million worth of investment in the project by the state of New York, in addition to federal historic tax credits.



“We focused our efforts on being sensitive to the original character of the building,” said Bob Verrier, FAIA, NCARB, vice president and managing principal at The Architectural Team. “This new use and program benefits residents who require an affordable yet highly functional and stimulating residential community, and preserves the legacy of New York’s early 20th Century architecture.” Verrier points out that the school building is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, an indicator of his team’s success in adapting and preserving it.

The residence is now fully occupied, only a few months after opening its doors.

In converting the building to affordable senior housing, The Architectural Team has preserved a local landmark for decades and generations to come. Originally opened in 1932, the iconic four-story 230,000 s/f Philip Livingston Junior High building was the first large-scale school in Albany, and served as a school building until 2010. Constructed as part of a Depression-era program to develop a skilled workforce in the building trades, Livingston Junior High is a masterpiece of colonial revival design. The school’s interior features a variety of patterns, reflecting the variety of masonry techniques taught to the builders.

The Architectural Team preserved a number of the building’s interior and exterior features in order for it to

gain status as a national landmark. Interior walls, original blackboards, crown moldings, plaster walls, two-story library, clock tower and a wrought-iron circular stair and mezzanine were all preserved and adapted for resident use by The Architectural Team's interior design staff. The entrance lobby features original terrazzo tile flooring, plastered walls, decorative plaster columns, and original ceilings with crown molding. Jim Podesky, a project manager for The Architectural Team who specializes in historic adaptive reuse and age-restricted multifamily buildings, stresses the importance of Verrier's point: "Our goal was to maintain as many historic details as possible, while updating it to the standards of today's best senior living environments. Giving new life to old buildings is our team's passion."

Located at 315 Northern Blvd in Albany, N.Y., the former middle school has access to the bucolic, 82-acre Tivoli Preserve, where teachers once took students for field study. Now the residents moving into the generously scaled, accessible living units will be inspired to stay active and enjoy the sylvan grounds, according to Podesky.

The adaptability and longevity of the building's original design, combined with the sensitive renovation and updating work, contributes to an environment where residents age 55 and over can enjoy Albany's architectural heritage daily while being assured of accessible, universally-designed surroundings. The "age-in-place" homes serve residents' needs even as their mobility or sensory capacity changes over time. Because the units are designed to be adaptable, grab bars and other accessibility enhancing features — like lowered kitchen cabinets — can be added later, as needed.

Thanks to The Architectural Team's significant expertise, the new housing retains the school's historic exterior and grand patio entry with granite capping stones. Many of the building's distinctive features have also been incorporated as functional or design elements in new resident spaces. Inside, for example, a tenant lounge has been created in the former school library, reusing an original mezzanine. The soaring, 25-foot-high space has tall windows that flood the room with daylight, as well as an original wrought-iron spiral stair, kept not for use but rather as part of historical fabric.

Elsewhere, intricate crown moldings and plaster walls were restored and exposed, including plasterwork fashioned as columns or floral patterns in the main lobby areas and common rooms. Trophy cases and plaques were retained in the lobby as a way of highlighting the building's past. Original 6-foot-long chalkboards and most classroom wall locations were also kept, says Podesky, and replicas of the original picture rails were added to the living units.

The exterior of the school, an iconic and highly recognizable landmark in Albany, was completely restored in a process that included the installation of new shingles for the gambrel-style roof and the addition of some facsimile metal grilles to replace the lost original copper versions. In the rear, a one-story non-historic addition was removed, and windows were added to increase interior daylighting and ventilation. A gazebo was constructed for tenant enjoyment on the open, park-like grounds.

Livingston School is one of four recently completed historic adaptive reuse projects by The Architectural Team, including Counting House Lofts (Lowell, MA.), Loft Five50 Phase II (Lawrence, MA.), BGCB Mattapan Teen Center (Mattapan, MA.), and Lovejoy Wharf (Boston, MA.).