

Massachusetts Housing Partnership

How local government can support creation of affordable housing

Examples and case study: former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend elementary schools

Athol, Massachusetts

March 11, 2026 –Virtual Presentation



How local government can support creation of affordable housing

Athol Snapshot

Iconic New England mill town with a densely built urban core and agrarian fringe.

- Population ~12,000
- Older housing stock (*49% built before 1939*)
- Last Housing Production Plan completed in 2023
- Roughly 200 properties removed from vacant and abandoned building inventory since 2016
- Current supply of single-family homes (SFH) and rental units is grossly insufficient



Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA



Riverbend

- Constructed 1907
- Expanded 1937
- 30,000 sf

Ellen Bigelow



- Constructed 1912
- Basement renovated 1954
- 16,900 sf



Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA



Ellen Bigelow /
Riverbend Campus

Downtown Athol

**3.25+/- acres
vacant since 2016**

School St. Apartments

Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

Project Highlights

- ❑ Developer: NewVue Communities
- ❑ 53-units of housing affordable to range of income
- ❑ Historically sensitive renovation of former school buildings
- ❑ New connecting structure with twenty 1BR senior units
- ❑ On-site management
- ❑ Estimated \$32 million total project cost
- ❑ Property goes on tax rolls
- ❑ Tot lots and green space for neighborhood
- ❑ Operational by summer 2026

UNIT MIX:

Unit Mix	# of Units
Section 8	
1BR/ 1Bath	2
2BR/1Bath	3
3BR/1.5 Bath	3
60% AMI	
1 BR/1Bath	13
2BR/1Bath	15
3BR/1.5 Bath	4
80-110% AMI	
1 BR/1Bath	5
2BR/1Bath	6
3BR/1.5 Bath	2
Total	
1BR/ 1Bath	20
2BR/1Bath	24
3BR/1.5 Bath	9
	53

Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

Project Affordability

- 20 senior units
 - 16 @ 60% AMI
 - 4 @ 30% AMI
- 4 family units @or< 30% AMI
- 16 family units @or< 60% AMI
- 13 workforce units between 80% and 110% AMI

Project Financing Tools

- HTCs and LIHTCs
- Permanent Financing (loan)
- DHCD private housing
- MassHousing
- Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Housing Stabilization Fund
- CPF (McGovern); ARPA (Athol)

Athol is part of the western Worcester County area.

HUD's FY25 annual median income examples follow:

30% AMI = \$29,800/yr (HH=2)

30% AMI = \$37,250/yr (HH=4)

60% AMI = \$74,460/yr (HH=4)

80% AMI = \$99,300/yr (HH=4)

100% AMI = \$124,700/yr (HH=4)

Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA



Residences at the Park

[intergenerational living at the BIGELOW-RIVERBEND Schools]

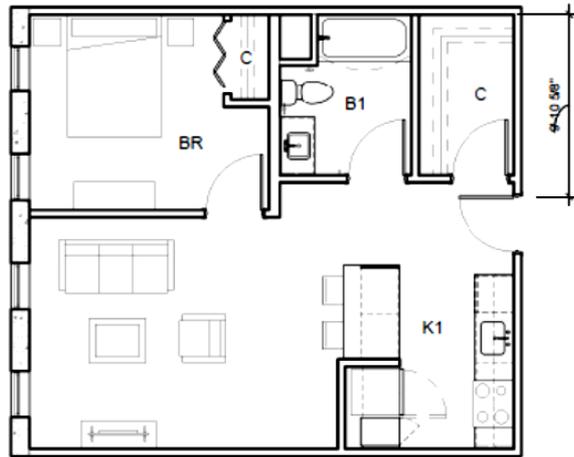
PROPOSED HOUSING

A-201

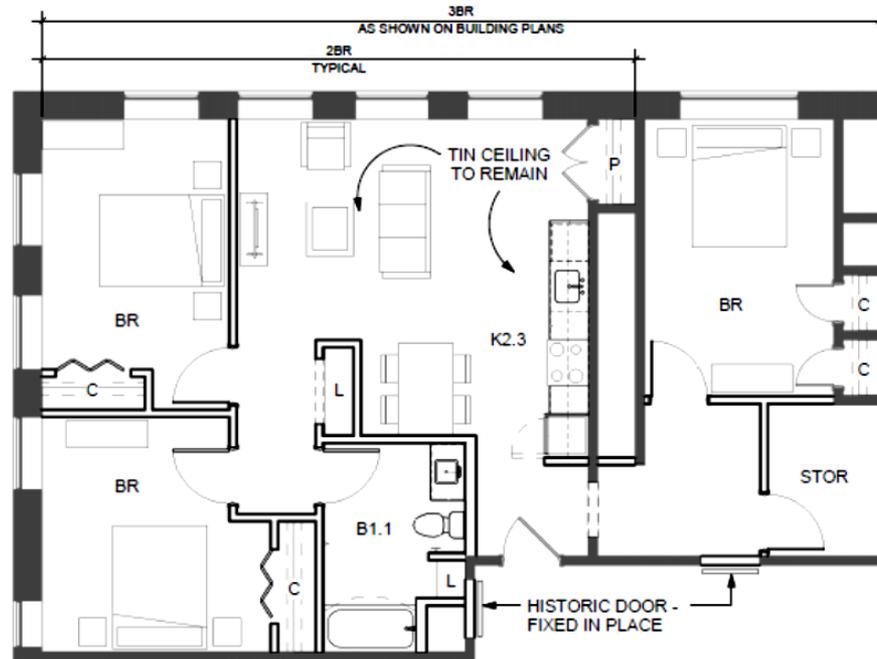
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Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA



1 TYPICAL 1BR NEW CONSTRUCTION IN SENIOR LIVING
3/16" = 1'-0"



2 TYPICAL 2BR (3BR UPPER FLRS) IN BIGELOW SCHOOL
3/16" = 1'-0"

Residences at the Park

[intergenerational living at the BIGELOW-RIVERBEND Schools]

UNIT PLANS

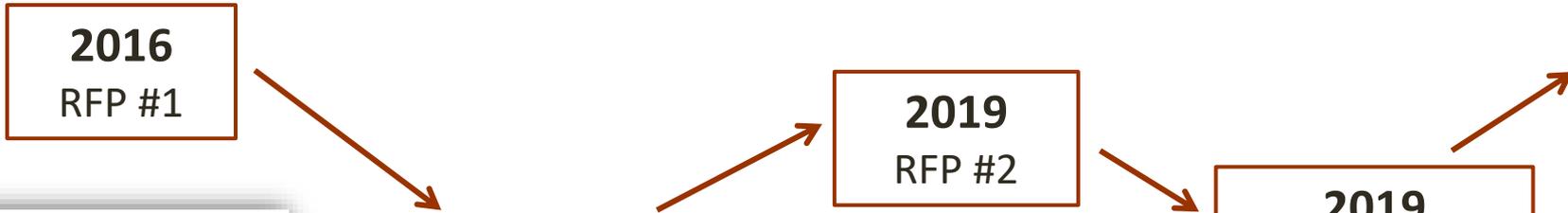
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Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

Project Chronology



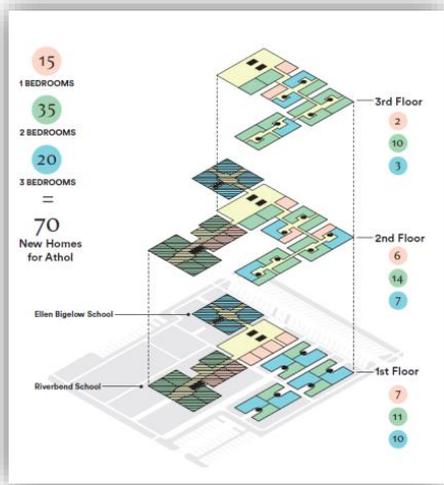
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

FORMER NEIGHBORHOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
ATHOL, MASSACHUSETTS

Proposals due on or before Wednesday, December 7, 2016 at 2:00 p.m. to:

Shawn A. Suboski, Town Manager, CFO
Town Hall, Room 17
586 Main Street
Athol, MA 01331

2018
Design Comp



NewVue communities
Creating Communities Where We Choose to Live, Work & Invest

September 9, 2019
Shawn A. Suboski, Town Manager, CFO
Town Hall, Room 17
586 Main Street
Athol, MA 01331

Re: Former Neighborhood Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

Dear Mr. Suboski:

NewVue Communities and its Development Team are excited to present this proposal to the Town of Athol at the site of the former neighborhood elementary schools.

This proposal is for fifty three mixed income units for Multigenerational Housing which will adapt and preserve two historic schools, the former Ellen Bigelow School and the Riverbend School. In so doing, the project will contribute to the revitalization of Athol and add to the vibrancy of the community in which the site is located.

The development approach will incorporate elements which the Town identified in its RFP as being of high importance to the community:

- Preservation of the existing historic features of both schools;
- Provision of housing which will serve both families and seniors;
- Provision of housing which will be affordable to children as a range of income levels;
- Maintain green spaces which will be accessible to both residents and members of the community;
- On-site professional property management;
- Incorporation of Green Energy Features.

We have prepared a detailed proposal, but it will only be complete with the input and refinement of the Town and its residents. NewVue has specialized in historic adaptive reuse. We have converted office buildings, warehouses and schools.

NewVue understands development in North Central Massachusetts. We have a strong track record of developing affordable housing. Over the past ten years, NewVue has signed the majority of agreements that we enter. As a thirty-year-old local organization, we understand the region and our former, local, owners and maintain the project on site with an existing legacy for the residents of Athol.

NewVue is adequately staffed to meet the project quickly into construction. We recently added a new senior project manager, Annee Williams, who will serve as the project manager for the project. This project fits in nicely with NewVue's strategic plan and with our desire to work more closely with the town, give our own "Livable in Town" program.

NewVue has a great team. Our team is already working together on other projects and we can push the project from construction and completion. We have an excellent relationship with families and have

475 Main Street, Framingham, MA 01901 | Phone: 978-362-9001 | Fax: 978-344-7600
www.newvuecommunities.com

NeighborWorks
HomeOwnership Grants
CERTIFIED HOMEOWNERS



COMPLETED RATINGS
ELLEN BIGELOW / RIVERBEND RFP REVIEW TEAM

PROPOSER: NewVue Communities and Icon Architecture, Inc.

Selection Criteria: Although the Town only received one proposal the committee should consider the following stated factors when determining whether to recommend that the Board of Selectmen should or not award the project:

- Qualifications of the Proposer and Development Team.
- Compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood and district.
- Adequacy of the management plan.
- Financial feasibility.
- Financial burden on the Town.
- Potential financial benefits for the Town.
- Potential non-financial benefits for the Town.
- Adequate work program and project schedule.
- Effect on traffic, parking and other surrounding infrastructure.
- Preservation of the integrity and character of the structure.

With these guiding principles in mind the Committee should rate the proposal against the following four comparative criteria using the following rating system.

Highly Advantageous (5 points) - The proposal excels on the specific criterion.
Advantageous (3 points) - The proposal fully meets the evaluation standard of the specific criterion.
Not Advantageous (1 point) - The proposal does not fully meet the evaluation standard of the specific criterion.
Not Responsive / Unacceptable (0 points) - The proposal fails to meet the criterion.

Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

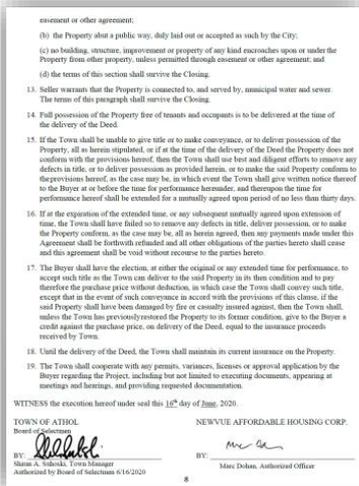
Project Chronology

2020
LDA Signed

2020
Neighborhood
Open House

February 2021
Planning Board
Site Plan Approval

Feb to June 2021
Zoning Board



Residents view former Riverbend School with ICON Architecture



Residences at the Park

[Intergenerational living at the BIGELOW-RIVERBEND Schools]

SITE PLAN
A-100
09/12/19



Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

Project Chronology

June 9, 2021
Zoning Board of Appeals

2025 – 2026
Construction and lease-up!



2021 – 2024
HTCs, LIHTCs,
Financing

Feb. 2025
Deed to NewVue



Former Ellen Bigelow and Riverbend Elementary Schools, Athol, MA

Takeaways

- ❑ There is no “I” in TEAM; engage everyone
- ❑ Be creative and resilient; most projects take years to come to fruition
- ❑ Build enthusiasm and educate naysayers
- ❑ Be sure to provide **governing bodies** with facts about project; they **are ambassadors to the community**
- ❑ Most important: As Commander Peter Quincy Taggart (portrayed by Jason Nesmith who was played by Tim Allen) in the motion picture *Galaxy Quest* said:

“Never give up, never surrender!”



Commander Peter Quincy Taggart - *GalaxyQuest*

THANK YOU

Contact Shaun Suhoski: ssuhoski@townofathol.org