
THE Beacon-News

Aurora panel endorses workforce housing in two old school buildings

By **STEVE LORD**
AURORA BEACON-NEWS |
OCT 14, 2021 AT 3:10 PM



The vacant Todd School building at 100 Oak Ave. in Aurora, seen here during the end of the time it served as the Todd Early Childhood Center, may become home to a workforce housing development. (Steve Lord / The Beacon-News)

Plans to convert two historic Aurora schools into buildings featuring apartments have moved to the full City Council.

Aldermen on the Building, Zoning and Economic Development Committee this week unanimously recommended what is called “workforce housing” for the former Lincoln School, 631 and 641 S. Lake St., and the former Todd School, 100 Oak Ave.

The two schools would be remodeled into a total of 47 apartment units of what is called workforce housing - housing below market rate, but above federally subsidized housing levels.

“It’s for people who don’t make enough money for market rate housing, but make too much for federally subsidized housing,” said Shelly Tucciarelli, of Itasca-based Visionary Ventures NFP Corporation, a company that develops in under-served and low-income communities nationwide.

Tucciarelli stressed that the housing is for working people, who must pass background checks and income-eligibility requirements, as authorized by the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

She added that her company would hire a national management and leasing company to handle the application process and manage the buildings with full-time managers.

The development at Lincoln School would be renovation of the historic school building into 14 apartment units, plus a computer center and gymnasium. It also would be building a brand new building next door with 22 apartment units.

The redevelopment of the old school would include use of historic preservation tax credits.

The redevelopment of Todd School would include 11 apartment units in the two-story main building, and renovation of the one-story, 1965 addition into a space for social service groups, most likely a VNA Health facility for West Aurora School District students.

The Todd School development portion also would be eligible for historic preservation tax credits.

Some of the funding details still are up in the air because the city and developers are working on a redevelopment agreement that would include some private investment, the tax credits and likely some Community Development Block Grant and HOME program money.

City officials said this week they will bring forward the redevelopment agreement to the City Council soon.

The city of Aurora owns both school buildings after the West Aurora School District arranged for the city to take them over. Lincoln School was closed as a school in 2009, and Todd School closed as a school a while back, but was used by West Aurora for classroom purposes until 2019.

Lincoln School opened in 1891 as South Lake Street School. It was remodeled in the late 1920s with a gym, auditorium and more classrooms. It was renamed Abraham Lincoln School at that point.

Todd School was built in 1934 as an elementary school, replacing the original Oak Street School that stood on the same spot. It was named after Mary A. Todd, a former Oak Street School principal.

City officials have said both schools appear to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Because the developers would use historic preservation tax credits,

some elements of the buildings, such as chalkboards, lockers and the gyms, would be maintained.

Both buildings also have some artwork - murals and statues - that were created in the 1930s as part of the Works Progress Administration artist program. The art will be preserved as part of the redevelopment of both school buildings, removed and displayed somewhere else.

Because they were created as part of a federal program, they are required to be displayed in a public place.

While no one spoke at this week's committee meeting, there was some debate about putting workforce housing in the buildings before the Planning and Zoning Commission. Some feared the workforce housing would affect nearby property values.

Tucciarelli said both developments would have full-time management and maintenance on site. The developments have been recommended by the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

Developers said workplace housing is seen as transitional for people who ultimately will make too much money to stay there, and move. They said people usually stay at least a year, sometime several years and even more.

"It's supposed to be transitional," Ald. Carl Franco, 5th Ward, said. "It's just a matter of how soon you can transition."

slord@tribpub.com

[Aurora panel endorses workforce housing in two old school buildings - Chicago Tribune](#)