

Former Dayton school complex poised for \$35M redevelopment

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The adaptive reuse of a former Dayton school received a boost Tuesday with the award of an Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit.

The \$1.8 million tax credit will go toward the Longfellow School project — a proposed \$35 million redevelopment of 245 Salem Ave. in Dayton's Grafton Hill neighborhood. Constructed in the 1880s and vacant since 2017, the former school complex is planned for rehabilitation as a senior living facility, a performing arts center and an "aquafarm."

The campus, purchased by The G.F. Bailey Company and [Weyland Ventures](#) last year, will be repurposed into a 150-unit community for residents aged 55 and older, and will be intentionally programmed as welcoming for the LGBTQ+ community and allies. United Church Homes Inc. (UCH), the senior living community partner in the project, has a long commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusive



COURTESY OF THE G.F. BAILEY COMPANY

A rendering of the adaptive reuse of the former Longfellow School property at 245 Salem Ave. in Dayton.

initiatives and a focus on providing safe and secure housing for older adults.

"While we have been involved in the consultative process up until now, we look forward to working with the developers and United Church Homes to bring this new community into the city," Dayton City Manager [Shelley Dickstein](#) said. "We are excited to work with this project and to celebrate its success. This is what so often happens when others recognize the tremendous opportunities in Dayton, and I'm thrilled that UCH and the developers are willing to take this courageous step in our city."

New construction will add a 66,000-square-foot building on the 2.75-acre parcel. Included in the complex will be a performing arts partner to activate the 1926 art deco theater in the building. "Dare2Defy," a performing arts organization, will lease the space as their home stage once the renovation and construction phases are complete. A legacy installation honoring Dayton's "Rubi Girls," the local performing troupe that has raised more than \$1 million for local AIDS support, is being planned.

The renovated campus also will include an Aquafarm to grow healthy vegetables and fish for the internal and external community, The G.F. Bailey Company CEO [Tim Forbess](#) said.

"We have a fully developed plan for the Aquafarm and greenhouse and we are eager to execute this part of the project as soon as possible," Forbess said. "It will be a complement to the recently opened Gem City Market."

The campus, which includes the historic Longfellow School buildings and the planned new construction, has been named the "Longfellow Midtown Community." All told, the project is expected to create at least six permanent jobs and 200 construction jobs, and it will encompass nearly 180,000 square feet.

"We were glad to find a community and partners who shared our passion for this unique project and had the experience and resources to make it a reality," said [Terry Spitznagel](#), senior executive vice president and chief growth officer at United Church Homes. "We believe this project will have wide-ranging appeal to older adults in the area and from the Midwest and beyond who

desire to live in an intentionally inclusive, safe and welcoming community.”

The developers initially requested more than \$3.7 million in historic tax credits to help fund the restoration, though the project was not funded during the previous round in spring 2021. But with nearly \$2 million in tax credits now available, as well as a \$1.5 million commitment from the city of Dayton's American Rescue Plan Act funds and other funding sources, the effort is poised to move forward.

“This adaptive reuse of Longfellow has brought together the right people with the right purpose at the right time,” Forbess said.

Forbess responded to a call from Salem Avenue Peace Corridor (SAPC) leadership expressing concern that the Longfellow School, an anchor building in the one of Dayton’s historic neighborhoods, would decay and become an eyesore, or be demolished. SAPC envisioned it as repurposed with a housing and commercial complement.

“Dayton’s ability to be welcoming to diversity has been a significant force in allowing this project to go forward,” said Forbess, who was a nearby resident of Longfellow School for almost 30 years. “It’s an organic fit into a neighborhood that has long celebrated a diverse, inclusive population and spirit of innovation.”

Construction is anticipated to commence on the Longfellow Midtown Campus in the late second or early third quarter of 2022, with occupancy beginning in late 2023.

Longfellow Commons dates back nearly 140 years. The main building was constructed in 1882, with classroom and auditorium additions built in 1910 and 1926, respectively. Additions for a cafeteria, library, shop and more classroom space were built between 1959 and 1965. The complex has been used exclusively for educational purposes since its establishment, having most recently housed an alternative school for Dayton Public Schools students in grades seven through 12.

The original Longfellow School building is also listed as a contributing structure in the National Register nomination forms for the Grafton Hill Historic District.

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