

Boston selects developer for region's first LGBTQ-friendly senior housing complex

By [Robert Weisman](#) Globe Staff, November 13, 2019, 4:01 p.m.



Commissioners selected Pennrose LLC, a multifamily housing developer based in Philadelphia, to oversee the adaptive reuse of the William Barton Rogers School on 15 Everett St., which closed in 2015. MIKYOUNG KIM DESIGN/DIMELLA SHAFFER

Boston city officials Wednesday designated a developer to turn a former Hyde Park middle school into the first LGBTQ-friendly senior housing complex in New England.

The unanimous vote by the city's Public Facilities Commission was a victory for members of the city's LGBTQ community, who have been pushing for such a project for more than five years. The state's LGBT Aging Commission estimates that 65,000 older LGBTQ adults live in Massachusetts, many of whom can't depend on family members as caregivers.

While the new apartments will be open to all residents over 62, there will be special "cultural competency" training for staff and residents to assure that LGBTQ seniors can feel comfortable there.

“There’s a pent-up demand for senior housing that’s affordable but also safe and welcoming for LGBT seniors,” said Aileen Montour, president of LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc., a nonprofit that will be a co-owner and work in partnership with the developer on programs and services for the development. “This is a first for Boston, for Massachusetts, and for New England.”

Commissioners selected Pennrose LLC, a multifamily housing developer based in Philadelphia, to oversee the adaptive reuse of the William Barton Rogers School at 15 Everett St., which closed in 2015. Pennrose, chosen over two competing bidders, had strong backing from community activists because of its track record in LGBTQ-friendly housing developments.



A rendering of the landscaping at the site. MIKYOUNG KIM DESIGN/DIMELLA SHAFFER

The plan calls for a \$32 million renovation, financed through a mix of federal, state, and local tax credits and loans as well as private borrowing. It will create 74 affordable and market-rate apartments that will be ready in the next few years.

Bob Linscott, a board member of the nonprofit and assistant director of the LGBT Aging Project at Fenway Health, said the hope is to forge a culture that can serve as a model for tolerance and acceptance at other senior housing in the region.

“The No. 1 issue for LGBT seniors is housing,” Linscott said. “There’s a huge panic about where we’re going to go when we can’t take care of ourselves. There’s a big fear of going to a place where people will be bullied and harassed by the same people who bullied and harassed them decades ago.”



The Rogers School closed in 2015. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Adaptive reuse of the Rogers School is part of a larger campaign in Boston to make former schools and other public facilities available for housing and community gardens, said Sheila Dillon, the city's chief of housing and director of neighborhood development. Over the past five years, the city has turned over 3 million square feet of surplus property, she said.

Several other former city schools have been converted to affordable housing in the past, including Girls Latin Academy in Dorchester and the Michelangelo School in the North End. But the Rogers School development in Hyde Park will be “the first project where we’re creating housing that’s very intentionally friendly and open to LGBTQ residents,” Dillon said.



A rendering of the courtyard at the site. MIKYOUNG KIM DESIGN/DIMELLA SHAFFER

There are about 30 senior housing complexes that are open or being planned nationally that are designated as LGBTQ-friendly. Pennrose is currently operating one, John C. Anderson Apartments in Philadelphia, and is in the process of developing another, Haven Green in New York’s Little Italy. Under federal anti-discrimination law, developers can’t set aside units for gay and lesbian seniors, but such developments are typically marketed to LGBTQ seniors.

“We feel like we know how to do it,” said Charlie Adams, the Boston-based regional vice president of Pennrose, which develops and manages multifamily housing in 15 states and the District of Columbia. “We feel like we’re sensitive to some of the issues. A lot of times people feel, when they move into senior housing, that they have to go back into the closet. We want to have a place where they don’t have to do that.”

Adams said the 98,000-square-foot project will preserve the historic school, while adding an outdoor courtyard. It will also feature 10,000 square feet of community space that includes artwork, a community meeting room, and memorabilia from the Hyde Park-based 54th Infantry Regiment, a volunteer regiment of African-American soldiers who fought for the Union Army in the Civil War.

“This is a school that served the community of Hyde Park for over 100 years, and we want to keep it part of the community,” Adams said.



A rendering of the plan to adapt the former Barton Rogers School into LGBTQ-friendly affordable senior housing. PENNROSE LLC

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