

Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI) Adaptive Reuse of the Newburyport Brown School



Important Dates:

RFI Response Deadline:	10:00 a.m. on Friday, September 8, 2023
Building Walkthrough 1:	1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 15, 2023
Building Walkthrough 2:	1:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 17, 2023
Deadline for Questions:	11:00 a.m. on Friday, August 18, 2023



Former Brown School – Main Building – Partial Window Renovations Completed in 2022

Overview of Solicitation & Opportunity for Adaptive Reuse

The City of Newburyport is preparing to offer the former Brown School at 40 Milk Street for adaptive reuse. To ensure a successful Request for Proposals (RFP) process, the City is seeking input at this time from both non-profits and developers for creative proposals to enable the highest and best use(s) of the property. Through this RFI the City is seeking preliminary concepts, and qualifications of development teams, to assess the feasibility of redevelopment scenarios and inform a future RFP.

The purpose of this RFI is to determine the level of interest in purchase and adaptive reuse of the “surplus” portion of Brown School property, and to consider the range of creative options for such adaptive reuse from potential partners, in accordance with the **Redevelopment Goals** outlined herein.

The City is inviting responses from development teams that can demonstrate their ability to successfully preserve and reuse the former school building for the production of affordable housing. There is also interest in preserving the existing gym/assembly space as a community resource if feasible. However, the extent to which the gym addition (*and/or this portion of the property*) will be included in any subsequent disposition by the City is unclear at this time. Expressions of Interest submitted in response to this RFI may help to inform such decisions, which are necessary for any final disposition of the “surplus” property.

The City of Newburyport, through its Office of Planning and Development, will accept written Expressions of Interest for the **fee interest** purchase of surplus property at the former Brown School property located at 40 Milk Street in Newburyport, MA until **10:00 a.m. on Friday, September 8, 2023**. The Office will subsequently summarize and publicize each proposal for consideration by the Newburyport City Council, Mayor and general public.

Background & Context for the Brown School Building & Property

General Overview

The George Brown School is a three-story brick structure located at the corner of Milk and Lime Streets in a tight and historic residential neighborhood near downtown Newburyport. The building lies on a relatively flat, 1.24 acres site which includes the adjacent playground and a former residential lot on which two small basketball courts are located. A more extensive overview of the existing building and site are available in various prior architectural studies and reports available on the City website at the following URL:

<https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/planning-development/brown-school-adaptive-reuse>



Brown School Property – View from South



Brown School Property – View from North

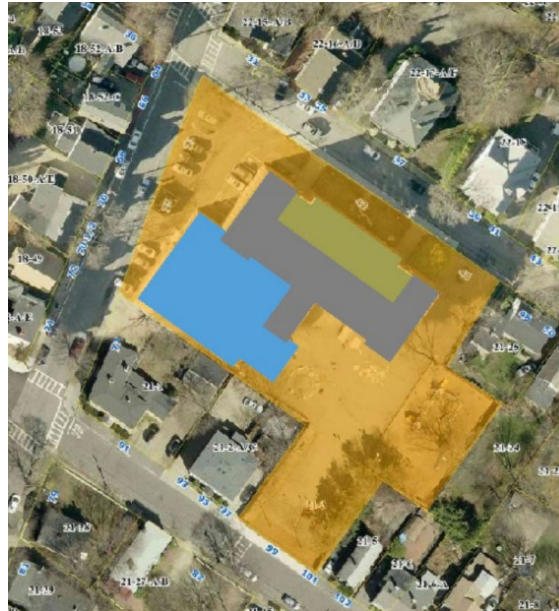


Brown School Property – View from East



Brown School Property – View from West

The site of the former Brown School is located in a dense historic neighborhood. The available area on the site is dominated by asphalt paving and is divided among play yards, dedicated Basketball courts and parking. The original Brown School is a three-story, wood framed structure, constructed on a relatively level 1.24-acre site in 1925 with a Kitchen/ Gymnasium wing added in 1970, and a three-story classroom addition constructed in 1975.



The main three-story structure (*shown in gray*) originally built in 1922-1925 had a U-shaped configuration oriented towards the Northeast with a mechanical leg extending to the Southwest. A single-story wing was added in 1970 (*shown in blue*) followed by a three-story addition in 1975 (*shown in green*). Heights of building vary and the roofs are flat with the exception of the pitched roof over the gymnasium.

As currently configured, the main three-story structure has a central corridor with classrooms on the perimeter and administrative offices on the Northeast portion of the first floor. The main structure is flanked to the Southwest by the 1970 kitchen/gymnasium addition.

Overall building dimensions are 176' northwest to southeast and 142' Northeast to Southwest at its widest points. The gross footprint of the entire building (*including the 756 SF boiler room sub-basement*), is approximately 19,582 SF. The total gross area of the building is 36,701 SF (*excluding the boiler room*) and is distributed as follows:

First Floor	17,875 SF
Second Floor	9,413 SF
<u>Third Floor</u>	<u>9,413 SF</u>
Total Gross	36,701 SF

While prior architectural studies by Winter Street Architects and studioMLA assessed the nature of renovations required for adaptive reuse of the former school building for either housing and/or continued use

by the City's Youth Services Department, no large-scale capital investments have been made in recent years to upgrade building systems, and no substantial modifications were made to the school building when it temporarily housed the City's Youth Services program. The building has been vacant since the heating system – well beyond its anticipated lifespan – failed in fall 2021. In anticipation of potential adaptive reuse of the property City officials have opted to avoid further investment in the building (*other than security and envelope protection*) until the scope and nature of longer-term adaptive reuse can be ascertained, including which portions of the building and property will be available for final disposition.

The property has an FY2023 total assessed value of **\$6,262,200**

Prior Brown School Plans & Reports Available Online:

Posted on the City website, at the following URL, are various plans, studies and reports containing important documentation of existing conditions, and conceptual reuse plans previously developed in relation to the Brown School. These include, but are not limited to the following:

<https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/planning-development/brown-school-adaptive-reuse>

1. Available architectural plans and environmental reports.
2. A 2014 Architectural Feasibility Study for both housing units and renovations for the Newburyport Youth Services (NYS) program.
3. A 2017 Request for Proposals (RFP) and three (3) proposals received in response thereto.
4. A 2020 Architectural Feasibility Study for the Newburyport Youth Services (NYS) program

Current Zoning & Restrictions Applicable to the Brown School Building and/or Property:

The Brown School property consists of two adjacent parcels of land as depicted on the Newburyport Assessors/GIS maps. This land is located within the R2 Residential Zoning District, and the more recently adopted Brown School Overlay District (BSOD), which at the time contemplated adaptive reuse of the property for both housing and continued use by the Newburyport Youth Services (NYS) program. **All respondents should review the existing BSOD zoning to determine whether a redevelopment concept would be consistent therewith, or if further changes to the BSOD would be necessary to facilitate the proposed project. In such instances an Expressions of Interest should identify the nature of these potential changes within the written response.**

While RFI respondents may suggest changes necessary to advance a desirable project, please note:

- (a) the established purposes of the existing BSOD;
- (b) the few specific adaptive reuse scenarios contemplated at the time of its adoption (*summarized within the table included in the ordinance*);
- (c) the size of the schoolyard area (*which is reconfigurable but otherwise subject to Article 97 protections*);
- (d) the requirements for off-street parking and for any affordable housing units within the project;
- (e) the process for Special Permit approval from the Planning Board; and

- (f) the requirement for a deeded Preservation Restriction (PR) on the entire exterior of the original 1920s schoolhouse structure.

Several direct links to key sections of the Newburyport Zoning Ordinance are included here for convenience:

[Newburyport City Code](#) (*initial landing page – for zoning scroll down left menu to “Appendix A”*)

https://library.municode.com/ma/newburyport/codes/code_of_ordinances

[Newburyport Zoning Ordinance](#) (*initial landing page*)

https://library.municode.com/ma/newburyport/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=APXAZOORNE

[Brown School Overlay District \(BSOD\)](#)

https://library.municode.com/ma/newburyport/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=APXAZOORNE_SXXXIIBRSC_OVDIBS

Redevelopment Goals

There has been considerable local debate regarding appropriate future uses, and disposition, of the former Brown School building and property since it was turned back to the Mayor and City Council from the School Department. However, a recently formed Ad Hoc Committee on Adaptive Reuse of the Brown School focused specifically on this question, and developed the following key **Redevelopment Goals** for inclusion within this RFI:

- A. Production of affordable housing with a preference for older adults aged 62 and above. All affordable units must meet the requirements for inclusion in the Department of Housing and Community Development’s (DHCD) Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI).
- B. Preservation of the existing gym as a community space.
- C. A financially feasible project, where the non-profit or developer can demonstrate that the adaptive reuse program can be well cared for and maintained moving forward in a self-sufficient manner, and without continued financial assistance from the City.
- D. A project that comports with the character of the neighborhood, respecting the narrow streets and constrained access.

All Expressions of Interest in response to this RFI should address the above Redevelopment Goals to the maximum extent feasible. Respondents should provide as much detail and clarity regarding alignment of the proposed adaptive reuse project/program with these Redevelopment Goals.

Project Contact & Requests for Clarification

The City's designated contact for this RFI is:

Andrew R. Port, Director of Planning & Development
Office of Planning & Development
Newburyport City Hall
60 Pleasant Street
Newburyport, MA, 01950

Email (*preferred/recommended*): aport@cityofnewburyport.com

Phone: (978) 465-4400 x 5

Questions regarding this RFI may be submitted to the Director of Planning & Development in writing via email. All such questions, or requests for clarification, must be received no later than 11:00 a.m. on Friday, August 18, 2023 to ensure adequate time for responses to be given in advance of the RFI response deadline (*10:00 a.m. on Friday, September 8, 2023*). Anyone requesting a copy of this RFI (*via the above email address*) should anticipate a consolidated response to any applicable questions, or requests for clarification, via email the week of August 21, 2023.

Building Walk-Throughs Available

The Brown School site is generally open and accessible to the public during daytime hours. However, the Brown School building and gym are currently unoccupied and closed to the public. All interested respondents are welcome to attend one of two scheduled walkthroughs of the Brown School building on the dates and times noted below.

Building Walkthrough 1: 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 15, 2023

Building Walkthrough 2: 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 17, 2023

It is strongly suggested that you attend one of the designated walkthroughs, as we may not be able to accommodate your request for an alternative time.

Submission Requirements for Expressions of Interest

Specific submission requirements for all RFI responses (Expressions of Interest) are detailed below. Each proponent is invited to submit any additional information, which may assist in the City's review and ranking of proposed adaptive reuse concepts, or understanding of the development team and prior experience comparable with the scope of this project.

All RFI responses (Expressions of Interest) must be received no later than:

10:00 a.m. on Friday, September 8, 2023

All submissions should be submitted via email only to:

Andrew R. Port, Director of Planning & Development

Email: aport@cityofnewburyport.com

Subject Line: "Expressions of Interest – Brown School RFI"

Required Components of the Written Submission:

All RFI responses (Expressions of Interest) must contain the elements listed below. There is no minimum or maximum page limit, and respondents are expected to balance the completeness of their response with succinctness and brevity.

1. **Letter of Interest:** A signed cover letter of interest which briefly describes the proponent's interest in the property and the general intentions concerning the future use(s) of the site. This letter shall also contain:
 - a. The name, telephone, physical address and email address of the representative authorized to act and speak for the proponent.
 - b. The nature and status of the organization acting as the proponent (*e.g. a non-profit or charitable institution, a corporation, a business association, or a joint venture*).

2. **Experience & Qualifications:**

Development team members: Demonstrate that the team has qualified professionals to accomplish the project successfully.

Development team experience: Provide a narrative illustrating the team/organization's mission and areas of expertise. Describe the team's experience in similar projects within the past 5 years. Include information on team's relevant experience on permitting and financial capacity to successfully complete the project.

3. **Development Concept(s):** All proposals should include a narrative that describes the proposed project (or projects where more than one adaptive reuse concept is proposed). Proposed projects shall be in accordance with the following parameters established by the City Council:

A. Adaptive Reuse Concepts under Existing Zoning:

Prepare one or more development concepts for the property and building, based on the Redevelopment Goals listed within the RFI. Each such concept shall be based on existing zoning and must be accompanied by a narrative including assumptions relative to permits required for the project, and the proposed timelines to secure such approvals.

B. Adaptive Reuse Concepts Requiring Alternative Zoning and/or Removal of Gym

Prepare one or more alternative development concepts for the property and building, based on the Redevelopment Goals listed within the RFI. Each such concept shall be accompanied by a narrative including assumptions relative to permits and/or zoning changes which may be required to support the applicable adaptive reuse concept, and the proposed timelines to secure such approvals. Where an adaptive reuse concept cannot adhere to, or be permitted under, the existing Brown School Overlay District (BSOD) zoning or does not involve preservation of the existing gym as a community space, respondents shall provide a written explanation as to why modification of the BSOD zoning, or removal of the gym, would be necessary to facilitate the proposed project, for the purposes of financing or as otherwise required for overall feasibility.

C. Details Regarding Proposed Housing Units

All adaptive reuse concepts shall be accompanied by a summary of the following:

1. The number of market rate units proposed
2. The number of affordable units proposed, the proposed level or depth of affordability for such units.
3. The number of bedrooms associated with both affordable and market rate units.

D. Proposed or Anticipated Financing

For each adaptive reuse concept:

1. Provide a preliminary pro forma, including sources and uses of funds
2. Provide a brief narrative on how the development team plans to utilize proposed financing sources, including permanent loans, DHCD subsidies, tax credits, local funding sources, and other grant programs.
3. Provide an estimated timeline for the project including any major milestones (e.g. property acquisition, design, permitting, construction start, final occupancy, etc.)

Respondents may also provide schematic plans or renderings to better illustrate specific elements of the proposed project. If more than one redevelopment concept is being offered, the details of each should be clear and distinct for comparison purposes, and to avoid any confusion.

3. **Transparency:** If the respondent has been directly contacted or invited, either verbally or in writing, to submit a response to this RFI by any City staff, elected official, or appointed member of a board or commission such direct invitation or outreach shall be disclosed along with the nature of said invite.
4. **Other Documents & Information:** Include any other pertinent information about the proposer/developer or proposal that would aid the City in understanding the nature and benefits of the proposed adaptive reuse program.

The City reserves the right to request clarification and/or further material for ambiguous submissions.

Review Authority

Expressions of Interest in response to this RFI will be reviewed by the Mayor and City Council, and any subsequent formal disposition of surplus property will require the approval of both. Once Expressions of Interest are received all responses will be reviewed thoroughly. The Director of Planning & Development may reach out to one or more respondents for additional information or clarification regarding written Expressions of Interest, or may request attendance at a meeting where the proposed adaptive reuse concept can be presented in person, or where prior qualifications and background to advance the project can be further discussed with City officials.

Proposal Review & Selection Process

The City will review responses based on, but not limited to, the following criteria:

1. Completeness of proposal and inclusion of all submission requirements
2. **Responsiveness to Redevelopment Goals as outlined in the RFI**
3. Demonstration of ability to successfully execute similar projects
4. Qualifications of development team

The Mayor, City Council and/or Director of Planning & Development may hold interviews with proposers if/as deemed necessary.

Conditions of this Solicitation

RFI vs. RFP: The City is using this RFI solicitation to gather information on the potential viability of various redevelopment scenarios. Since the City is not disposing of its interest in the property by way of this solicitation, it is therefore not subject to the Uniform Procurement Act (Ch. 30B). The City may or may not move forward with issuance of a formal RFP following a review of Expressions of Interest hereunder. The City reserves the right to withdraw the RFI, to reject any and all responses thereto, or to engage in further discussion with any RFI respondent regarding a proposed adaptive reuse concept or program deemed to be in the best interest of the City of Newburyport. The City may choose to invite respondents for informational interviews following a review of written responses.

Proposals Become Public Records: All Expressions of Interest in response to this RFI will become a matter of public record, subject to the provisions of the Massachusetts public records law (M.G.L. Chapter 66, Section 10) and the corresponding regulations and exemptions.