



CITY OF NEWBURYPORT
OFFICE OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Newburyport City Council

FROM: Andrew R. Port, Director of Planning & Development

**CC: Sean R. Reardon, Mayor
Andrew Levine, Chief of Staff**

RE: Brown School Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI) & Expressions of Interest (EOIs) Received

DATE: September 18, 2023

Background & Summary of Expressions of Interest (EOIs) Received

As you know, the Council finalized an outline and substantive parameters for issuance of a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI) earlier this year, which was focused on Adaptive Reuse of the [former] Newburyport Brown School. As requested, a formal RFI based thereon was subsequently finalized, posted, advertised and distributed by the Office of Planning & Development. On September 8, 2023 the City received four (4) responses to the RFI in the form of Expressions of Interest (EOIs). We have posted both the initial RFI and the EOIs on the City website [here](#) for convenient viewing by members of the Council and general public. Earlier documents, studies and reports related to the Brown School remain posted in a cross-referenced archive page.

<https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/planning-development/brown-school-adaptive-reuse-rfi-and-expressions-of-interest>

Following is a brief summary of the adaptive reuse programs included within the four (4) EOIs received. We anticipate that the Council will receive this communication and the related EOIs for referral to Committee in the coming days for consideration and discussion. Since the EOIs may generate further questions for the respondents, it would be helpful to compile a list of any such questions so that they can be routed to the respondents for any desired follow-up. The RFI also contemplates potential in-person meetings/interviews with the respondents, pending a review of the written submittals. As you know, the RFI here is not as involved as the process or documentation required for a full Request for Proposals (RFP), and was intended to obtain further insight from outside adaptive reuse “partners” as to what would be feasible, prior to the issuance of a formal RFP with terms for a more definitive disposition. The Council’s RFI includes specific Redevelopment Goals for the property, and each individual EOI may be more or less “responsive” to these goals, which may necessitate further discussion, revision and/or prioritization in order to establish terms for an RFP.

Expression of Interest (EOI) – Atlantis Investments:

Concept 1: 30 studio/one bedroom single-resident occupancy units for residents with developmental disabilities; gym and locker rooms to be demolished – future use of this area TBD.

Expression of Interest (EOI) – Dillon Edward Thompson / BioFex Laboratories Inc.

Concept 1: “technology hub,” specialized research laboratories; gym retained as “innovative facility” to showcase technologies.

Expression of Interest (EOI) – Parent & Diamond LLC & Urban Spaces, LLC

Concept 1: over-62 affordable housing units, with gym retained, but with project timeline/financing/feasibility still unclear.

Concept 2: 32 over-62 affordable housing units within main school building for those making 30-80% of the area median income; demolition of gym to allow for construction of a “contextually compatible” building with an additional 32 units, 3 of which would be affordable, and 29 of which would be market-rate units to subsidize the creation of affordable units within the overall project.

Expression of Interest (EOI) – YWCA Greater Newburyport

Concept 1: 29 senior housing units within main school building for those making 30-60% of the area median income; City separately retains existing gym space.

Concept 2: 44 senior housing units within main school building and a new building addition; with demolition of existing gym space)

Advertisement/Outreach & Those Requesting A Copy of the RFI

Councilors also requested a listing of those requesting/receiving a copy of the RFI. These listings are attached hereto for your reference. The first list indicates those who directly expressed interest in the RFI by visiting our website and downloading a copy. The second list includes those entities which received direct notice of the RFI’s availability. This listing includes: (a) those entities or individuals who previously expressed interest in the Brown School (via an earlier 2017 RFP); and (b) entities or individuals recommended by either members of the Newburyport Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) or facilitator Christine Madore of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), based on prior experience with similar affordable housing and/or adaptive reuse projects. Although the RFI is not a true RFP solicitation requiring advertisement under state procurement regulations, we did utilize the same process and platforms to ensure the widest possible dissemination of the RFI’s availability. This includes advertisement in the local paper (Daily News), posting on the Commonwealth’s “COMMBUYs” website, and posting on the Commonwealth’s “Central Register.”

Mayor’s Comment

I want to thank the Council for facilitating this RFI process, and the Planning Department for developing this RFI and for the Planning Department for facilitating the process and then reviewing the documents we received. Overall, this process was meant to give us more information about what may be possible at the site and what creative ideas developers may have. It should not be viewed as a comprehensive or conclusive statement about what the site can or cannot support, and should only be seen as more information at this moment in time. I

appreciate all who took time to send in responses, and look forward to continuing to work with these individuals as we move on to next steps.

There are a few particular takeaways from me from this process, which I will summarize below.

- 1. The 20-unit limit in the current zoning may be a challenge if we intend to build anything other than market rate units.
 - a. All of the responsive proposals recommended unit counts above 20, with a minimum of 29 and a maximum of 62. I do not believe the site supports come of the counts that were brought forward in these development proposals, nor do I believe they would be welcomed by the surrounding community. Still, to allow us to reach a proposal that would meet the stated goals and the needs of the community, it may be best to entertain proposals that are above 20 units. I believe something in the range of 20-30 units should be considered, and would recommend this range in an RFP document.**
- 2. A mix of affordable and market rate units may open up additional possibilities for the site.
 - a. The YWCA returned a proposal that I believe is the closest to meeting the stated goals of the Council Ad Hoc and the goals that I have laid out for development of this site. They articulated two visions, one with 29 units and one with 45. The 29-unit proposal also aimed to preserve the gym. This proposal would provide new affordable housing for the community all while staying closest to the unit count that current zoning would allow for and looking for a pathway to keeping the gym on site. Still, the proposal was dubious of the feasibility of this proposal because of the reliance on affordable housing tax credits and the number of units needed to make a project like this work financially. The Parent & Diamond proposal showed a path toward meeting additional project goals if market rate housing is also included in the mix. This could be considered to arrive at a number of units that is more in line with the current zoning and a potential community use for the gym space.**
- 3. There may still be a path forward to using the current gym space for a community gym in the future.
 - a. This has mostly been addressed by the points above, but the proposals did consider the gym's potential reuse and outlined options. We plan to move forward with a process that would prioritize proposals that can find a way to keep the gym. This may require investment from the City or grant funds in order to carry out, and we will need to continue this conversation together to find the best path forward. There are some details that will need to be provided to potential bidders in the future that impact their proposed designs, and we will need to be clear about what we want this space to look like.**

Given all this, I am planning to direct the Office of Planning and Development to draft and release a Request for Proposals that will have much of the same structure of the RFI that was released. We will plan to ask for proposals to prioritize preservation of the gym and to include as many affordable units as possible with a unit count that does not exceed 30. While any vote to approve disposition of the property will need to be approved by Council, the RFP itself can originate with the Mayor's Office, and we will plan to do that now.

Brown School Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI) - Requests / Downloads

First Name	Last Name	Email	Business Name	Business Phone	Address Line 1	Address Line 2	City	State / Province	Zip Code
Ethan	Manning	emanning@cityofnewburyport.com		9784654404	60 Pleasant St		Newburyport	Massachusetts	1950
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Andrew	Port	aport@cityofnewburyport.com	City of Newburyport	9784654400	Office of Planning & Development	City of Newburyport	Newburyport	Massachusetts	1950
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Kurt	Pitzer	gbs@bidnet.com							
Jennifer	Krein	jkrein@jcyj.com	JCJ Architecture	18609167405	120 Huyshope Avenue		Hartford	Connecticut	6106
Kurt	Pitzer	gbs@bidnet.com							
Tara	Mizrahi	tmizrahi@affirmativeinvestments.com	Affirmative Investments	6173674300	33 Union Street	2nd Floor	Boston	Massachusetts	2108
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Jonathan	Cody	jcody@atlantis-invest.com	Atlantis Investmrnts, LLC	9787670081	P.O. Box 31		Haverhill	Massachusetts	1831
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Dillon	Thompson	dethompson423@gmail.com	BioFex Laboratory Inc	9782709146	25 Temple Street	Apt.510	Newburyport	Massachusetts	1950
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Judy	Avery	jujya@msn.com							
John	Pear	johnpear@comcast.net	Pear + Partners	9788725312	50 Milk Street		Newburyport	Massachusetts	1950
MERRILL	DIAMOND	MDIAMOND@PARENTDIAMOND.COM	PARENT + DIAMOND, LLC	617-512-1027	MERRILL H. DIAMOND	90 MARION STREET, SUITE ONE	BROOKLINE	Massachusetts	2446
Katie	Gething	kgettingh@dhkinc.com	DHK Architects		54 Canal Street, Suite 200		Boston	Massachusetts	2114
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Mary	Miller	bids@pwxpress.com	PWXPress	4086768941	1900 Coffeepport Rd		Jacksonville	Florida	32208
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Tom	Watkins	twatkins@cityofnewburyport.com							
David	Webster	davidwebsternbpt@gmail.com							
Suzanne	Decavele	sdecavele@thecalebgroup.org	The Caleb Grou[270 Broadway		Lynn	Massachusetts	1904
MERRILL	DIAMOND	MDIAMOND@PARENTDIAMOND.COM	PARENT + DIAMOND, LLC	617-512-1027 (MHD)	90 MARION STREET	SUITE 1	BROOKLINE	Massachusetts	2446
Bruce	Vogel	bvogel@cityofnewburyport.com							
David	Webster	David@bbhousing.org		9782708594					
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Phil	Giffie	pgiffie@noahcdc.org	NOAH	6174188240	143 Border St.		East Boston	Massachusetts	2128
Christine	Madore	cmadore@mhp.net	Massachusetts Housing Partnership	8573178538	160 Federal St		Boston	Massachusetts	2111
Isaac	Smith	ismith@bergmeyer.com	Bergmeyer	6175421025	51 Sleeper St	6th Floor	Boston	Massachusetts	2210
John	Feehan	jfeehan@ywcanewburyport.org	YWCA Greater Newburyport	978-465-9922	13 Market Street		Newburyport	Massachusetts	1950
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Jonathan	Lashley	jlashley@iconarch.com							
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JONathan	Cody	jcody@atlantis-invest.com	Atlantis Investments, LLC	9787670081					
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Brown School Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI) - Direct Outreach Listing from AHT & MHP

(Provided by: Newburyport Affordable Housing Trust & Massachusetts Housing Partnership)

Contact	Company	Email
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