

Historic Wilkesboro NC School Serving A Different

Population Than Those Who Once Filled Its Hallways



The former Wilkesboro Elementary School, a 1937 Works Progress Administration project located in Wilkesboro, NC, reopened its doors in July 2012 to serve an entirely different population than those who once filled its hallways. Historic Wilkesboro School, as the site is now known, has become a vibrant affordable housing community for seniors as a result of the restoration of the original school building and the construction of a new addition. The fully occupied complex consists of 41 one-and-two-bedroom units for low-income seniors and common spaces for resident and community use including a community meeting room, craft room, small library, and office space. Site improvements enhance the historic downtown district of which the development is an integral part. The project meets National Park Service standards for historic preservation, including the design of the new addition, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

New outdoor lighting and a security system provide a safer environment for residents and new sidewalks surrounding the building help connect downtown with a nearby greenway and park. Exterior seating areas with wrought iron benches, chairs and tables are available to residents and community members, and the attractive landscaping can be enjoyed from the surrounding streets. The close proximity of the project to the downtown area and the services it offers is an added benefit for the residents who can walk to the post office, restaurants, and other downtown businesses. Laundry facilities are provided in the historic building as well as space for tenant-supplied washers and driers within each dwelling unit.

The site was reconfigured to provide a new parking lot for residents and visitors with a covered drop-off at the main entrance. A new retaining wall was added, allowing for the installation of a landscaped courtyard. Lower level units in the new addition have direct access to porches within the courtyard. New stairs and an elevator were installed to provide more efficient circulation, enhance life safety, and make the building fully



accessible to all residents.

The project was designed with sustainability in mind and built to meet Energy Star Version 2 standards. A key sustainable component of the project is the repurposing of the existing structure to give it new life. Sustainable building products include metal roofing with reflective finishes to minimize solar gain, Energy Star-rated light fixtures, and Energy Star-rated appliances. New energy- and water-efficient plumbing, mechanical, and electrical systems were installed throughout the existing building and addition. Low-emitting paints and finishes were used to provide healthy air quality in the building.

Northwestern Regional Housing Authority (NRHA) provides property management for Historic Wilkesboro School, utilizing Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers for each dwelling unit, which ensures that residents pay no more than 30% of their adjusted family income in rental costs. In addition, NRHA coordinates with local agencies to offer supportive services promoting active living, healthy lifestyles and financial literacy for all residents.

The project development team was headed by Boone's Northwestern Housing Enterprises, Incorporated (NHE) as sponsor and developer, property owner Blue Ridge Housing of Wilkesboro, Tise-Kiester Architects of Chapel Hill, Weaver Cooke Construction, LCC of Greensboro, MBI Builders, LCC of North Wilkesboro, and Blue Ridge Engineering of North Wilkesboro. Historic Wilkesboro School received official endorsement of the Wilkes County Commission, the Wilkesboro Town Council, the Board of Trustees of NRHA, and the Board of Directors of NHE.

Construction lending was provided by Branch Banking & Trust Company (BB&T) and The Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta (FHLB) and permanent

financing at advantaged rates and terms by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA). Private equity investment by Community Affordable Housing Equity Corporation (CAHEC) rounded out the project financing. Financial support in the amount of \$350,000, or more than \$8,500 per dwelling unit, was provided by NRHA. The final cost of development was \$7.24 million.

"We are grateful to the Town of Wilkesboro, the County of Wilkes, and to the professional partners on our development team for helping us through a highly competitive process in gathering together the public and private resources required to move this project from vision to reality. We're very excited to see this happen in Wilkesboro," says E.G. "Ned" Fowler, Vice President of NHE. Both NHE and NRHA are Equal Housing Opportunity providers. Inquiries may be directed to Fowler at (828) 264-6683.

"From the beginning, it was envisioned that this project would provide a safe and affordable living environment for seniors, repurpose a landmark that had fallen into disrepair, and integrate the residents and site into the surrounding community. Instead of lying in a state of disuse and disrepair, as it previously had, the building has now been upgraded and revived to serve the Wilkesboro community and has become a new destination for residents and townspeople alike."