

Shepherd Express Article 4-18-14

Friday, April 18, 2014

Issue of the Week: Will the City Council Support the Bay View Teacher Housing Plan?

By [Shepherd Express Staff](#)



[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Google+](#) [Pinterest](#) [Share](#) [Email](#) [Print](#)

A plan to convert the vacant Dover Street School into reasonably priced apartments designed for teachers will be coming before the Milwaukee Common Council. As we recall, the state Legislature eliminated the residency issue that required all Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) teachers to live in Milwaukee, where the students they teach live. Now the city is trying to be creative to keep young teachers in Milwaukee by developing housing designed for teachers in the trendy Bay View neighborhood.

New teachers spend day and night doing lesson plans and preparing for class along with learning how to be teachers. This housing model provides a support system for teachers and an instant group of friends who are facing the same work challenges. The developers will “target” teachers, especially new ones who don’t earn high salaries, but they cannot restrict the housing to them. Instead, they’ll offer amenities that teachers need, such as copiers and other perks.

MPS is hoping that the city will sign off on a plan to sell the parcel containing the empty Dover Street School for \$350,000, which would be turned into a housing complex for teachers and a playground for students who attend the neighboring St. Lucas Elementary School.

So what is the problem in what appears to be a win-win situation?

“It’s going to change the entire character of that neighborhood for the worse,” says area Alderman Tony Zielinski.

The problem, according to Zielinski, is that the developers plan on adding one new building in addition to rehabbing the Dover Street School. And the addition of the new building on narrow, old-style Milwaukee residential streets is too much for the neighborhood to handle, he says.

In response to the alderman’s concern, the project is adding only one new building and the total will be 90 apartments, 43 in the renovated Dover Street School and 47 in the new building. While some residents might not like having 90 to 150 new residents living in their neighborhood, others argue that when people bought their homes, they knew there was a school there so the question becomes: Would you rather have 90 teachers living there or a few hundred children running around?

The property will be developed by the socially responsible developer Melissa Goins’ Maures Development Group, which developed Heart & Hope Place on Martin Luther King Drive and Teutonia Gardens on Teutonia Avenue and Center Street. The St. Paul, Minn.-based CommonBond Communities, a nonprofit provider of affordable housing that developed Brewery Point for older residents in the former Pabst Brewing complex, and Sewall Development of Baltimore, which has created more than 100 units of housing primarily for teachers will be involved in the development. The project has the backing of MPS and the Greater Milwaukee Committee’s Teachtown MKE.

The developers need the city’s approval for the sale and to change the zoning for the parcel of land. The project will come before the City Plan Commission on April 16 and the Common Council’s zoning committee on April 21. We hope the City Council is open to this creative approach to housing their children’s teachers.

Zielinski also said the developers’ proposal would exacerbate the neighborhood’s parking problems.

“Parking is a big deal for people in the city, but this neighborhood is one of the worst,” Zielinski said.

Not so, says Ellen Higgins, vice president of CommonBond. She told the *Shepherd* the development will include 104 parking spaces, about half of them underground.

“We will be neutral on parking, maybe even beneficial,” Higgins said.

Higgins said a similar project in Baltimore is getting rave reviews, and hopes that the Dover Street School redevelopment will be the first of its kind in the Midwest.

“We have no qualms about how quickly this will lease up,” Higgins said.

If—and that seems to be a big if right now—the city will approve the project.