



# Housing in a Historic Schoolhouse

Renovated school provides much-needed affordable housing for seniors in Cleveland

Vesta Corporation, a housing owner, developer and manager operating in six states, recently brought a new affordable senior housing development to Cleveland, Ohio. The company, whose motto is, “Doing well by doing good,” leveraged both public and private funds to complete the \$23.7 million Longfellow School renovation project, including state historic tax credits.

The Longfellow renovation has taken the historic, defunct Henry W. Longfellow School building and repurposed it into 80 new affordable senior apartments. The housing is divided between 30 units in the original schoolhouse and 50 units in a newly constructed building on the property.

The school, which closed in 2011, received historic landmark status and is approximately 100 years old. The Longfellow redevelopment involved preserving architectural features—such as vintage cabinets and chalkboards—and transforming spaces like the original auditorium into social gathering spots. Vesta Corporation secured financing and broke ground on the property in June 2021. The redevelopment was completed in October 2023.

## NEW LOOK FOR AN OLD SCHOOL

Reimagining school buildings into affordable housing units might not be a new idea, but The Longfellow’s landmark status and thoughtfully designed amenities stand out in the crowd. After 85 years in service as an elementary school, the building was set to be demolished. The Cleveland Restoration Society stepped in to facilitate its designation as a historic landmark.

Soon after, Vesta Corporation, along with design/build contractor Marous Brothers, created a development plan that received widespread support from local lawmakers and the community. It’s a fitting tribute: The original school architect, Walter McCormack, was an early advocate for affordable housing.

“The City and the [Cleveland] Restoration Society had a desire to see the school building have a different life and to continue,” says Joshua Greenblatt, Executive Vice President at Vesta Corporation. “We were able to bring all of these partners together to make that happen.”

“We introduced Vesta Corporation to the Longfellow School opportunity using our contacts with board members of the Cleveland Restoration Society, who led the efforts to spare the school from imminent demolition,” says Jared Freeman, General Manager of Marous Brothers Construction’s Design/Build Group. “Coupled with our company’s extensive historic renovation experience, Vesta utilized its ingenuity and financial expertise to creatively structure the financing around multiple layers of funding sources, including the use of both 4 and 9 percent [tax credits], which was the first successful instance of this combination in the state of Ohio.”

The Longfellow’s 80 new units comprise a mix of one- and two-bedroom apartments. The new and old segments of the property are connected by a covered walkway, allowing residents to access the community’s features without being exposed to the elements and related hazards.

In addition to apartments, The Longfellow offers a fitness area, green spaces, a community center and a wellness room, which provides a space for third-party healthcare providers to offer services to residents. Resident programming has included regular Bingo games, coffee meetings, transportation to health appointments, resource fairs and even a Senior Prom.

“We have an affiliate relationship with a nonprofit that helps coordinate services for our residents. ...” says Greenblatt. “We know how to provide the physical, but oftentimes, residents need help with some supplemental education ... [or] education for their children outside of the normal school hours, with job skills training, with health screening and other things like that. So we, with our affiliated nonprofit, ... will help tailor a program based on whatever the community residents’ needs are—and that changes from month to month, year to year. We may start off with an education package, and then the residents will look for some help in health screening. Our nonprofit will work with local providers to bring in whatever the residents feel they need.”

## THOROUGH USE OF TAX CREDITS

Vesta Corporation has a long history of developing affordable housing. The company’s founders, Steve Erie and Arthur Greenblatt, originally started working in



EVP :: Joshua Greenblatt | Location :: Westogue, Connecticut