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Affordable Housing Will Transform a Closed School in Detroit

Catholic Charities, Ascension Michigan, and St. Matthew Parish join to improve lives

DETROIT, MI - A former Catholic school on the city's east side that has been vacant for more than a decade will get new life as an affordable housing complex, thanks to a unique collaboration among church, state, and a host of allies.

The Residences at St. Matthews is a \$17-million, two-year project to repurpose the former St. Matthew School, 5970 Audubon Road, and its activity center into a 46-unit housing complex. It is being led by a collaboration between Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan (CCSEM), St. Matthew Parish and Ascension Michigan. The affordable housing complex will serve individuals facing housing instability.

The project received a boost on June 15, 2022, with the [award](#) of over \$1 million in low-income housing tax credits from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. This will result in over \$10 million in equity financing for the project.

"Being able to provide affordable housing not only helps us align with our national mission, more importantly, it helps to address a significant need in the MorningSide community," explained Paul Propson, executive director of CCSEM. "We are proud to lead this effort and to have partners who will help provide other means of support."

The announcement comes on the heels of a University of Michigan [study](#) detailing that affordable housing continues to be a challenge for many Detroiters. Before the pandemic, almost half of renters and nearly one in five homeowners spent more than 30 percent of their salary on housing, according to MSHDA.

Beyond housing, the school's repurposing will have additional benefits for the east side. Ascension Michigan will provide on-site health care. The former gym will be converted into a community center.

"It's critical that we have on-site access to care because we know there is a strong correlation between housing instability, health and the social determinants of health," says Dr. Stacy Garrett-Ray, Ascension senior vice president and chief community impact officer. "This model is all about providing housing stability as well as access to quality care so that we can create healthier outcomes."

St. Matthew Parish has maintained the building since closing the school more than 10 years ago. The church is proud to find a new way to revitalize the site, explained Father Duane Novelly.

“The parishioners of St. Matthew are delighted to partner with CCSEM/Ascension, having our former school buildings repurposed for affordable healthy housing,” said Father Novelty. “The long history we have on the east side of Detroit will continue in a renewed fashion as we develop our ministry, helping to meet the needs of those seeking affordable housing in order to bring a greater dignity to their lives.”

CCSEM has done community outreach and fundraising over the last three years to turn the housing vision into a reality. In addition to the MSHDA tax credits, the project has received \$3 million in HOME funds from the City of Detroit as well as funding support from private grants.

“The MorningSide community is excited to welcome these new residences, which will add to the wide range of quality affordable housing in our diverse neighborhood,” said Eric Dueweke, president of the MorningSide Community Organization.

Other partners in the development include Ethos Development Partners and Cinnaire Solutions, who will provide project management, logistics, and technical support. Construction is to be completed within the next 18 months.

For more information, go to <https://ccsem.org/residences/>