

FORMER OHIO DEAF SCHOOL

Historic building may be redeveloped City consultants like Philadelphia group's plans for upscale apartments

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The historic Ohio Deaf School, a grand structure tucked along E. Town Street, is moving toward a luxurious rebirth.

A plan by a Philadelphia developer to turn the building into upscale housing has gained the approval of the city's top real-estate consultant, giving the project the likely momentum it needs to be completed.

Campus Apartments Inc. has offered to pay the city \$2.25 million for the former school for the deaf, at 400 E. Town St., and spend about \$11 million to convert it into apartments. Capitol South Urban Redevelopment Corp., a nonprofit real-estate organization, has recommended to Columbus City Council that the deal be approved.

The acquisition would end the city's 25-year ownership of the building and breathe new life into a structure that was built in the 1800s and stands just west of the city's Topiary Park. Columbus recently scuttled plans to move some of its offices to the building.

"It broke my heart when they wanted to convert it to an office," said David Adelman, president of Campus Apartments. "That park is too beautiful not to be surrounded by apartments."

Adelman said he hopes to begin gutting the school late this year, pending approval from the council.

It was unclear yesterday whether the council plans to introduce legislation authorizing the sale at its next meeting, on Jan. 22.

Efforts to find a buyer who would redevelop the building began last year, after failed efforts by the city to renovate the former school into offices.

During the search process, three developers surfaced, said John Rosenberger, Capitol South's executive director. In addition to Campus Apartments, they were:



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Deaf School history

1827: Ohio General Assembly approves the creation of a school for the deaf.

1829: State pays \$300 for 10 acres at the site of the old Deaf School building and the city's Topiary Park.

1834: The first school building opens.

1864-69: A new, bigger building is constructed.

1898-99: The current building is built, designed by architects Richards, McCarty & Bulford.

1981: The building constructed in 1969 burns down.

1981: Columbus acquires ownership of the remaining building.

- New Horizons Housing, also of Philadelphia, which wanted to develop the building into what it called "workforce" rental housing. New Horizons owns two local residential buildings including Washington Place, a high-rise apartment east of the Topiary Park.

- A trio of local developers — Bret Adams, Bob Hoying and Gary Gitlitz. They wanted to convert the school into condominiums, build a swimming pool and add underground parking.

Gitlitz, who helped to develop the Hampton Inn and Suites near the Greater Columbus Convention Center, said he thought his group had the most experience in central Ohio. Adams has developed the Bar of Modern Art. Hoying, a former Ohio State University quarterback, is a partner in Crawford Hoying Smith, which is creating the tony Tartan West development in Dublin.

"It was a huge commitment to put underground parking in," Gitlitz said. "We're a little surprised. I'm sure it was a tough decision for Capitol South."

Randy Black, who leads the city's historic-preservation office, said the Campus Apartments proposal rose to the top because of its consideration of the entire site.

"The key is that it respects a really important historic Downtown structure," he said. "It gets it back into reuse, respecting the exterior and interior spaces. It looked at all elevations as being important."

Adelman said his plan will cost \$13 million to bring to fruition. It includes creating an entry court on the east side of the building that leads to the Topiary Park. The park, which contains a gardenlike interpretation of Georges Seurat's painting *A Sunday On The Island of La Grande Jatte*, lies just to the east of the school and is the site of the original school building.

Adelman is working with Schooley Caldwell Associates, the Columbus architecture firm known for historic preservation. Schooley Caldwell partner Bob Loversedge said the school is an amalgamation of styles that can be described as Victorian.

The building's arched entrances bear stone carvings that are portraits of children who attended the school.

"The other thing that is very distinctive is the way it addresses the

1981: The building constructed in 1969 burns down.

1981: Columbus acquires ownership of the remaining building and grounds.

1984: City creates a leasehold interest for the remaining building for a developer who renovates it for offices.

1989: Topiary Park is installed at the site of the building that burned down.

1998: Leasehold agreement is conveyed to a new owner.

2004: Capitol South Urban Redevelopment Corp. purchases the leasehold interest from PNL LLC for \$1.8 million.

2007: Capitol South proposes selling the leasehold interest and the land at 400 E. Town St. to Campus Apartments Inc. for \$2.25 million. Campus Apartments plans to renovate the school into 71 apartments and upgrade the grounds around the building.

Sources: Capitol South; *Dispatch* research



A rendering of the entry court planned for the former school for the deaf.

park," Loversedge said.

"Having this residential facility at the edge of the city's premier park is just going to be a fabulous address."

Campus Apartments also is redeveloping the Seneca Hotel at Broad and Grant streets into apartments. Adelman's plan is to build 71 apartments at the former school for the deaf and possibly convert them to condominiums in the future. He plans to secure federal historic tax credits to help renovate the building, which would reduce the development cost by 20 percent.

The caveat is that the units will have to remain as apartments for five years. After that, Adelman said, it's possible they could be converted to condominiums.

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The former Ohio Deaf School building, at 400 E. Town St., could be turned into apartments.