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School's 'Historic' designation helps restore building - for senior housing

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The former Fifth District School building has joined the National Register of Historic Places. And that designation is helping a developer restore the Peaselburg neighborhood landmark into subsidized senior housing.

Walnut Hills-based The Model Group plans to create 24 senior housing units with a \$4 million-plus historic renovation to start next month.

The project will be called Academy Flats Senior Housing, because the building will retain the school building's charm, said Robert Maly, Model Group's vice president of development.

"It just is a phenomenal building," Maly said of the Late Victorian Romanesque brick-and-stone structure at 1735 Holman Ave. that served as a neighborhood elementary school until 1972. "We just fell in love with it."

"It's such a great neighborhood, and there's a lot of homeowners surrounding that school," Maly said. "It's kind of an island of blight."

Earlier efforts were made to convert the building into upscale housing, but those failed.

"They couldn't make the numbers work," he said.

His company can make it happen thanks to federal historic tax credits that will be available because of the National Register and rental housing credits.

Covington also is loaning \$370,000 to the project, while the Housing Authority of Covington will lend \$460,000 after construction.

"It's got some great tin-stamped ceilings that we'll preserve, and it's got some chalkboards that we'll actually be leaving in the units," Maly said. "The interior hallways will be retained as-is. They'll be restored, obviously, but that's a requirement from the historic folks. "There are these huge hallways," he said. "There's going to be some cool lighting, and it'll be a really neat space."

"If you go inside, it's so intact," said city Historic Preservation Officer Ashley Tongret. "It still has the tiny little cupboards where the teachers would put their coats away."

The building opened Sept. 3, 1902, and the public was invited to tour it. A local newspaper declared it "one of the finest schools in the Western country," according to Covington's application for the honor.

Developers are using historic photos to show what the building will look like.

"Normally, you don't use the 'before' photos as the 'after' photos," Maly said. But in this case, "We've shown the 'befores' as the existing photos, and then pulled the old original historic photos as our 'after' shots."

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Fifth District School

Text not available

MAP

The Enquirer - Rachel Richardson

CAPTION: Exterior of the old Fifth District School. Developers are using the help of its 'Historic' places CAPTION: addition to restore the building.

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