

THE GARDNER NEWS

NEWS

Tour of former Templeton school a trip down memory lane for retired teacher

Baldwinville School Apartments project scheduled to open in 2025.



Stephen Landry

The Gardner News



It was a tour through the past for Fran Yackowski on Wednesday.

She was among the members of the public who attended an open house at the former Baldwinville School, which included a guided tour inside the 2.6-acre former elementary school that will be converted into a mixed-income, multi-family housing development with 54 units of housing, 49 of which will be affordable.

The building, however, holds a special place in Yackowski's memories because she taught at the school for nearly 30 years, starting in 1977. As she walked through the dilapidated building's abandoned hallways and classrooms, Yackowski took plenty of photos to share with her former coworkers at the school.



“It was a fun time, we really jelled, and our colleagues became our friends,” she said as she took another picture with her phone. “The person I’m taking a picture for now, she taught here for 30-some-odd years in this classroom and she’s one of my best friends still to this day. We have lots of memories here.”

Yackowski, who lives in Baldwinville and spends the winter in Florida, was joined by other former staff members and a few former students on the tour, which was hosted by MPZ Development and Capstone Communities to give community members a chance to take a final look inside the building, which closed four years ago, before it is converted into The Baldwinville School Apartments, scheduled to open in 2025.

“The town needs affordable housing, and I hate to see a building just decay into nothing,” said Yackowski, who retired from teaching 17 years ago.

More: Templeton soon will break ground on its first affordable housing complex

How the housing units will be set up



The three-story school was originally built in 1923 after the original school at the location burned down a few years earlier.

The tour included a look at renderings and floor plans of the variety of loft, studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments that will be available at the Baldwinville School Apartments, many of which will contain refurbished flooring, hallways and stairwells that have been preserved from the original elementary school building as well as replicated historic windows.

Among those touring the building was Rep. Jonathan Zlotnik, D-Gardner, who said projects like the Baldwinville School Apartments are important because the region is facing a significant housing shortage.

“Especially when you can repurpose an older structure that otherwise would just sit and continue to decay and be vandalized, so projects like this are very important to address a few needs that we have,” Zlotnik said.

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First multi-family building in Templeton in 25 years

Designed by ICON Architecture, the project, which will be composed of two buildings – the former elementary school and a new LEED-certified addition – will be the first multi-family building to be permitted and constructed in Templeton in the last 25 years, according to officials. The exterior of the existing historic home at 12 School St. will be restored and the building will be used for property maintenance.

More: Residents can weigh in on Baldwinville Elementary School apartments project

“This is an amazing project for the town of Templeton which will contribute to the ongoing revitalization of Baldwinville,” said Templeton Town Administrator Adam Lamontagne.

The open house event included a chance for attendees to view the renderings and plans of the numerous proposed onsite amenities at the Baldwinville School Apartments, including an outdoor courtyard and community green space, children’s playroom, fitness room, electric-vehicle charging stations, in-building laundry, and a community walking trail leading to an overlook of the Otter River.



The preservation of many historic elements of the project will be made possible by the Templeton Community Preservation Committee's commitment of \$1.174 million in Community Preservation Act funding, as well as funding from the town's first state and federal historic tax credit deal. The project team has also applied for additional funding from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

“This partnership between Templeton and MPZ Development with Capstone Communities is already generating excitement and hope in our small community,” said Michael Currie, chair of the Templeton Select Board.

“Templeton has already proven to be successful in revitalization of our municipal structures for reuse; this affordable housing project strengthens our pursuit of wisely using taxpayer resources for maximum effort.”