

Athol Selectboard approves sale of schools for NewVue

by [Greg Vine](#) For the Athol Daily News January 26, 2025



The Selectboard has approved the sale of the Bigelow-Riverbend schools to NewVue Communities. The buildings will be renovated into affordable and senior housing. Credit: FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

ATHOL – The Selectboard has made progress with the transfer of the former Riverbend and Bigelow schools to new ownership for redevelopment.

At its meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 21, the board voted to approve the sale of the schools to NewVue Communities. While there are still steps to be taken before work can begin, Town Manager Shaun Suhoski said he anticipates NewVue to officially take ownership within the next several weeks.

The Fitchburg-based NewVue has been working with the town since 2019 to make the transformation of the former schools into 53 units of affordable and senior housing a reality.

“The vote was very important,” said Suhoski. “It will allow the board, once the deed document is put together, and NewVue’s attorney looks at it, and the title is clear....once that document is done, the board can just sign administratively in the office, and we’ll close the transaction. So, if that’s done before the next meeting, they can come in and sign it and everything is legal.”

Suhoski said NewVue actually has multiple closings they have to go through.

“I think we’re going to see a lot of progress between now and the end of February,” Suhoski said Thursday morning. “Just yesterday, I was advised by NewVue that the general contractor is ready to get out there and work, but the paperwork needs to be done first.”

Suhoski said the sale of the two buildings is a good deal for the town.

“A lot of people say, ‘Wow, these buildings are worth a lot of money.’ That’s why we still have two other vacant school buildings – Silver Lake and Lyman Ward. But no, they’re not, they’re not worth a lot. In this case the value the Selectboard achieved was the redevelopment value. The \$25,000 payment (from

NewVue) is consideration for the deed, but the deal – the land disposition agreement – requires the redevelopment, and that makes it a tax-paying property.

“So, that’s the benefit for the town. Historic properties are redeveloped, providing housing and providing tax-based growth – plus the \$25,000. It’s really a legacy project the town can be proud of once it’s done. It’ll be like the old middle school at the top of School Street. It’s still in good repair, people live there, the neighborhood is thriving, and the town looks at it as a well-maintained piece of the town’s history; and that will happen here as well.”

Although NewVue is a non-profit, Suhoski said that taxes paid on the redeveloped property will be based on its assessed value.

“NewVue is a non-profit, this and every other project that ever gets done on these kinds of buildings – they create a separate entity that will manage that real estate, and that is the tax-paying entity,” he said. In early December, NewVue Executive Director Marc Dohan and Project Manager James Linfield told the Selectboard that, with financing for the project now together, construction should get underway early this year. Dohan also told the board the development will consist of 53 units: 20 one-bedroom, 24 two-bedroom, and three nine-bedroom units. Around 20 of those apartments will be for seniors, 33 will be for families. The approximate rental range will be from about \$1,065 to around \$1,888.

A new building linking together the Riverbend and Bigelow schools will accommodate the senior housing units and community space.

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