

NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Former New Haven Red Cross building to be reborn as apartments

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Hendee House at 703 Whitney Ave. as it looked in 1903. It was the Red Cross headquarters for more than 50 years and is being converted to apartments.

Contributed photo

NEW HAVEN — It was like a long pregnancy.

“It takes awhile to get these things properly birthed,” developer Nancy Greenberg said Tuesday, laughing, as she talked about the 42-apartment complex that is being created at 703 Whitney Ave., the longtime headquarters for the Red Cross.

Greenberg’s first appearance before the City Plan Commission was in April 2017.

The pieces have now fallen into place and work is clearly underway for a modernist structure by GLUCK+ Architects on one part of the property that will compliment renovations at the adjoining 1902 home.

Fernando Pastor of SEEDnh took on the task of converting the large single-family home into seven market-rate apartments with two on each floor and a caretaker unit in the basement.

The designer said the hard part was fitting the seven kitchens, 10-12 bathrooms and all the mechanicals into the space.

There will be four two-bedroom selections and two one-bedroom units in addition to the live-in maintenance unit.

Architecturally significant elements, such as the nine fireplaces will be retained, as well as the coffered ceiling in the dining room. The doors will also be saved, although there will be new wainscoating, according to the contractor. A massive curved radiator in the dining room will be retained and repurposed.

“It is definitely a piece of art,” one of the officials observed.

“They are trying to leave as much of the original as they possibly can,” John Kozlowski of A. Secondino, the general contractor, said.

City Economic Development Administrator Matthew Nemerson said at one point the Board of Education had considered buying the land for parking for the Hooker School, but decided against that.

He said Mayor Toni Harp wants to see a variety of housing throughout the city.

He said this adds more apartments in an area dominated by large single-family homes. Nemerson said there are more people who want to downsize, but continue to be in the city and close to downtown.

“By having an architecturally significant and very important project like this come along, it actually gives people the opportunity to take advantage of the shops, of the environment that is East Rock,” Nemerson said.

He said one of the great advantages of a city like New Haven are the different densities and different types of community.”

Greenberg said they will take down a corridor that joins the main house with a carriage house, bringing it back to its original design.

The complex will have 38 parking spaces and some 12 spaces for bicycles. The Yale shuttle passes the house and there is a Connecticut Transit stop out front.

Pastor said the main entrance to the house will be in the back, after the connecting corridor is removed with a new lobby will be installed.

Greenberg, who lives nearby, can watch the development come to life. The building was a private home for half a century before being used by the Red Cross for another 50 years.

The carriage house will be an amenity space and feature such things as a gym with an outdoor space behind it, as well as a library and conference center.

After a widespread search she said they engaged architect, Peter Gluck, a Yale-trained architect, who had never built a home in the hometown of his alma mater.

She said they were impressed with a building in Philadelphia that his firm designed, called the Bridge in Old City.

“It is stunningly beautiful, but very modern and integrated into the urban landscape in an incredibly successful way. We were confirmed in our original judgement, as just last year it won the best new building in Philadelphia by Curbed,” Greenberg said with Cesar Pelli a runner-up.

She said the new building at 703 Whitney Ave. “will be an incredibly elegant, sophisticated” 35 one- and two-bedroom apartments with fireplaces, outdoor spaces and other features.

Construction is expected to take 12 to 15 months.

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