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From the Philadelphia Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/philadelphia/news/2018/12/10/anthony-wayne-senior-housing-grays-ferry-cre.html>

Anthony Wayne Senior Housing project finally completed

Dec 10, 2018, 11:48am EST

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The development of Anthony Wayne Senior Housing, a \$40 million affordable residential project off South 28th Street in Philadelphia saw its first phase started in 2003 and its last just recently completed.

The project, nearly 20 years in the making, has become one of several transformative projects for the Grays Ferry neighborhood that had long been dragged down by racial tensions, gang violence, vacant houses and a general instability that pocks communities on the decline.



NATALIE KOSTELNI

Anthony Wayne Senior Housing

The vacant Anthony Wayne School, a historic public school built in 1909, had closed and stood abandoned as a symbol of decline for the city section, which sits between the Schuylkill River and Point Breeze neighborhood. Its playgrounds were the scenes of some crimes and had become a demarcation for the some of the factions in the neighborhood. The neighborhood was also home to Tasker Homes, a dense public housing project.

Then in 2004, change started to happen. The Philadelphia Housing Authority razed Tasker, spent \$165 million to build 540 new affordable though mixed-income houses and renamed it [Grays Ferry Estates](#).

While the redevelopment of Tasker Homes was positive for the neighborhood, other investments in recent years also have started to lift Grays Ferry.

The University of Pennsylvania's Pennovation Works and its early success has inspired the school to do more in the neighborhood. To that end, Penn has begun to look at what it can do to enhance the Grays Ferry neighborhood, which is in line with the city's economic development officials' continued focus on the redevelopment of the Lower Schuylkill. Part of the area closest to Pennovation Works and University City has been targeted as an innovation district.

The university has also extended its Home Ownership Services program to Grays Ferry and offers employees help with closing costs, down payments and home improvements. And the Schuylkill River Park keeps expanding through the neighborhood.

The Philadelphia chapter of Urban Land Institute and PennPraxis also completed a Grays Ferry Healthy Corridor project, which evaluated the area and sought ways to improve its sense of community and social cohesion, promote healthy eating and active living, and provide economic, housing and educational opportunities. Last month, ULI-Philadelphia and the Southwest Community Development Corp. received a \$7,500 grant to expand a so-called Jumpstart program. It is a housing assistance program that provides training, mentoring and money to homeowners

who want to make improvements to their properties or to those who want to explore a career in development within the community.

A team consisting of Altman Group, its affiliated Elon Development and JKRP Architects have been working on the Anthony Wayne Senior Housing project since November 2002 when Altman bought the property.

"I knew we could do something with the property," [Brett Altman](#) said. "It was a development opportunity.

But it was also challenged. "This was an urban playground and a tough neighborhood," said Francis Vargas, first vice president at Elon.

The first phase consisted of converting the three-story, 15,000-square-foot school and its classrooms into 39 apartments. The building was designated historical, so tax credits were used to financially support the project.

Corridors, expansive at 13-feet wide, were restored, monumental windows replaced, and the basement raised to provide handicap access to the first floor. Gargoyles that adorned the top of a door were restored as well.

It was completed in 2005. It wouldn't be until 2013 that the developer would begin the second phase.

"We were becoming an oasis in a DMZ here," Altman said.

The second phase involved constructing 46 units. Bigger windows, brick, different colored siding and other design elements were used to blend the new structure into the neighborhood, said Glenn Warner, an architect with JKRP. It was important to make it feel like its own community and part of the surrounding neighborhood, and avoid an institutional feel, Vargas said.

The last phase involved constructing a 45-unit complex using passive building principles, which makes a structure air-tight and energy efficient. There's no shortage of need for this type of affordable property and demand has been robust. Residents moved over the summer and this fall, and the property is fully-occupied.

Natalie Kostelni

Reporter

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