

Family and senior apartments planned for Portland's West End

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By Rob Wolfe

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Community Housing of Maine is proposing to build 93 new units of senior and family housing on the Mercy Hospital campus in Portland's West End.

The Portland nonprofit, which supports housing for older and lower-income Mainers, is asking the city's approval for a new building, called The Equinox, running along Winter Street, at the back of the State Street-facing Mercy property. The building would have 41 affordable family apartments and four stories facing Winter Street, for a height of 44 feet, the developers say in documents submitted to the city.

Along with The Equinox comes Winter Landing, with 52 units of senior housing in a separate building next door on Winter Street. Both developments require approval from the Historic Preservation Board, but the family apartment building is up first, with a workshop scheduled for Wednesday.



STAFF GRAPHIC | MICHAEL FISHER

“These projects will bring 93 units of much-needed affordable housing for families and older Mainers in a location that is walkable to everything in downtown Portland,” Cullen Ryan, executive director of CHOM, said in an email Sunday.

Ryan added that the projects “will be part of a broadly diverse mixed-income community within a wonderful neighborhood. It is a rare opportunity to build an entire community and everyone is excited to see so much good come from this development.”

The Portland Housing Authority is partnering with CHOM on the development.

Both buildings will be reserved for residents with incomes at or below 50 percent or 60 percent of the area median income, depending on the unit. In 2020, the AMI was \$70,630 for a household of one.

Mercy Hospital is scaling back operations at the State Street campus, which dates to the 1940s, as it transitions to a new \$84 million complex on the Fore River. The new campus could be ready as early as the end of this year.

In August 2020, developers NewHeight Redfern unveiled a plan for the State Street site that, beyond CHOM’s proposal, calls for a mixed-use combination of a medical clinic, health club and grocery store, as well as office and retail space.

Projects in the West End, a historic district, must be approved by Portland’s Historic Preservation Board. The West End Historic District has a jagged boundary line that stretches as far east as High Street, north to Bramhall, south to Danforth and encompasses the picturesque Western Promenade.

CHOM’s architect says he devoted a significant amount of time to exploring the neighborhood in hopes of matching its eclectic style. As imagined in conceptual drawings, the family apartment building stretches down Winter Street from the Spring Street intersection in a series of row houses, its composite clapboard siding similar to many surrounding structures.

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The senior housing building continues where the family building leaves off, spaced just north on Winter Street.

“Prior to developing the building concept we spent much time walking the streets of the West End, analyzing existing streetscapes, building massing, forms, materials and textures,” the architect, Ryan Senatore, said in a letter to the Historic Preservation Board. “This approach allowed us to develop a design concept that is grounded by the existing neighborhood context but reflects our contemporary time.”

Greg Payne, director of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition, said he wasn’t familiar with the project yet, but applauded the impulse to address the long-running affordable housing drought in Portland and throughout Maine.

“We have a severe lack of homes that people can afford here in Portland and around the state, and if they can add 93 units of affordable housing in the West End, that’s something to celebrate,” Payne said in an interview Sunday.

The Historic Preservation Board will hold a virtual workshop on the family apartment Equinox building on Wednesday. Those wishing to attend online may find more information [here](#).



Community Housing of Maine is proposing a four-story building with 41 family apartments on Winter Street in Portland’s West End. *Rendering provided by ACETO Landscape Architects in Collaboration with Ryan Senatore Architecture*

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