

City Council approves development agreement for former Mary H. Wright Elementary

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

Historic school to be converted into apartment development



After a lengthy public hearing at their meeting on Monday, Spartanburg City Council voted 6-0 in favor of a property rezoning and development agreement that will allow the former Mary H. Wright Elementary School located at 261 Caulder Ave. to be converted into 53 apartment units. Council member Jamie Fulmer was absent from the meeting. Under terms of the agreement, 11 of the apartments will be workforce housing units and will be rented to households at 80 percent or less of area median income with rent and utilities for the tenants amounting to no more than 30 percent of their income.

The \$11 million redevelopment would represent the largest private investment on the city's Southside in well over a decade and developer John Montgomery also has agreed to provide \$50,000 to a public-private partnership or nonprofit in order to improve pedestrian and trail infrastructure in the area aimed at connecting Caulder Ave. to the Mary H. Wright Greenway. Montgomery has also pledged his best efforts to ensure that a minimum of 20 percent of the redevelopment work will go to minority contractors, with five percent of those living on the Southside.

Long an important part of the city's Southside community, the former school was named for Mary Honor Farrow Wright, who was a pioneering educator and important figure in Spartanburg's history, founding the city's second school for Black students on the Southside where she taught until 1936. In 1951, the then-new Mary H. Wright elementary school on Caulder Ave. was named in her honor. The name was carried over to the current campus on Church St. when the school was closed. The building was later used as office space for Spartanburg Housing Authority and the City but has been vacant for the past five years.

Some Southside residents and others expressed concern during the public hearing that the new apartments would be an example of gentrification, citing market-rate rents that would be higher than much of the area. Others were supportive of the redevelopment, citing the need for new investment in the community and new housing to attract young professionals to the Southside.