

Spartanburg City Council approves Highland Transformation Plan

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24

Neighborhood plan to be incorporated into larger citywide comprehensive plan



At their meeting on Monday, Spartanburg City Council voted 7-0 to approve the recently completed Highland Transformation Plan and incorporate the neighborhood plan into the City's ongoing citywide comprehensive plan.

The completed plan is the culmination of a years-long process that brought together neighborhood leaders, City officials, and community stakeholders of all sizes with the task of reimagining one of Spartanburg's most challenging areas of concentrated poverty. Neighborhood leaders and the City ultimately settled on APD Urban Planning and Management out of Atlanta to develop the transformation plan, with City Council approving a \$186,006 contract with APD in March 2019.

Heavy on community involvement and engagement, the process examined Highland as a whole, both its assets and its challenges, ultimately creating a blueprint for everything from housing, public spaces, and transportation, to education at all levels and job training programs. You can find the full [Highland Transformation Plan at this link](#). To learn more about Highland and its residents' perspectives leading into the planning process, listen to our two-part conversation with community leaders recorded last year. Part one [can be found here](#). Part two [can be found here](#).

In other action, Council voted 7-0 to give final approval for 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.